

**EXECUTIVE
INBOX**

Anne Fisher

Want healthier employees? Offer prizes

WITH THE EVER-MOUNTING COST of health care a national obsession, it's no surprise that companies are looking for ways to encourage their employees to stay well. A major (and growing) stumbling block: an epidemic of obesity, which can lead to other long-term health problems.

So most big companies have **formal wellness programs** to inspire employees to drop excess pounds. But how can a small company afford a wellness program? Enter HealthyWage, a Manhattan startup that runs contests whose winners get cash prizes for meeting weight-loss goals.

In October, HealthyWage announced the victors in its local competition, dubbed the New York City Matchup: A team of five co-workers at hospital group Continuum Health Partners **shared \$10,000 in first-place prize money.** The second- and third-place teams won \$5,000 and \$3,000, respectively. Altogether, the winners lost more than 400 pounds over three months.

It didn't cost their employers a dime. HealthyWage collected a \$60 registration fee from each team member. That, plus funding from sponsors and advertisers on the firm's website, covered the whole \$18,000 tab.

David Roddenberry, who

holds a bachelor's degree in neuroscience from Harvard and a master's from the London School of Economics, started HealthyWage in 2008.

"Lots of academic research shows that **even a small cash reward can triple the effect of weight-loss programs**, and that people are more motivated when their own money is at stake," Mr. Roddenberry noted.

The trend toward wellness incentives at big companies gave him the idea to create schemes that small employers could use.

Employers agree: About 200 of them have signed up so far.

HAS YOUR COMPANY taken steps to help employees get healthier? Tell us at www.crainnewyork.com/execinbox.

