



Copyright ©2022 Fitness Business Podcast. All rights reserved. This text may not be published online or distributed without written permission. Transcripts are generated using a combination of speech recognition software and human transcribers and may contain errors. Please check the corresponding audio before quoting in print.

Episode 475: The Value Proposition for Pledging Physical Activity

Air Date: December 23, 2022

Sarah Pellegrino: Welcome to the Value Proposition by the Fitness Business Podcast. I'm your host, Sarah Pellegrino. The Value Proposition is a monthly show on The Fitness Business Podcast, created specifically for industry suppliers to showcase their value that they bring to health club owners and operators beyond their product and service. For our December 2022 show. We'll be speaking with Graham Melstrand, executive vice president for community health and wellness at American Council on Exercise, or Ace, as we lovingly refer to it.

Sarah Pellegrino: Graham also serves as the Physical Activity Alliance President, and today we are going to learn all about the PAA's efforts to embrace and increase physical exercise with clear support from leaders. So let's jump right in. Graham. Welcome to the value proposition.

Graham Melstrand: Sarah, so glad to be here and great to see you.

Sarah Pellegrino: You too, my friend. Let's start off with what the Physical Activity Alliance is and when it was created.

Graham Melstrand: Sure. So, the Physical Activity Alliance was founded in 2020, and it was the merger of three health advocacy organizations around physical activity the National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity, the National Physical Activity Society, and the National Physical Activity Plan. So it's a Washington DC based not for profit. It's a 501. And our mission is to create, support and advocate for policy and system change that enables all Americans to enjoy physically active lives.

Graham Melstrand: So we're the largest and most inclusive community of physical activity advocates, researchers, academics, and practitioners. And we also have representation from

trade organizations and the fitness industry as well. Our work really falls into three areas the advocacy with the government, educating policymakers and other key stakeholders about the importance of physical activity as a key driver of individual and population health.

Graham Melstrand: We provide support for the Physical Activity Caucus in Congress, and we work to develop some legislative champions that work on our behalf. And then one of the fun things that we do is we have a congressional physical activity challenge that involves the members of Congress, both House and Senate, and their staff, in a competitive challenge that allows us to get them moving and also educate them not just about benefits of physical activity and how much, but about who we are and what we do as well.

Sarah Pellegrino: Very important work, to say the least. That is awesome, Graham. Now, who are some of the board members and organizations that make up the Physical Activity Alliance?

Graham Melstrand: Well, we have a big cross section of that, as I mentioned. We've got health advocacy organizations that are inclusive of organizations like the American Heart Association, American Institute of Cancer Research. We have trade organizations, nursing with college, recreation and Ursa. On the club side, we have representatives from the insurer side of things with Tivity Health. And then we have some professional organizations as well.

Graham Melstrand: American College of Lifestyle Medicine, ACSM, of course. Ace Nata for the athletic trainers, the American Physical Therapy Association and others. NASM is part of the group as well.

Sarah Pellegrino: That's incredible. That's really awesome. Now, there has been a lot of buzz around the PAA and a certain pledge. So tell us what the CEO pledge for physical activity is.

Graham Melstrand: Sure. The CEO pledge for physical activity is an activity, or an initiative, if you will. It's a social movement that the Physical Activity Alliance launched to make physical activity and movement to cultural norm and workplace environments. And it's a voluntary pledge that a CEO or other organization leader can make. And our goal is to keep it top of mind. People follow the examples that are set by the leadership within the organization.

Graham Melstrand: And so the opportunity to promote some work life balance, to create an environment and a set of work policies and activities that support an active employee in an active workplace are important.

Sarah Pellegrino: That's really cool. I know there's just a lot of trends with these office buildings, right. People are trying to get their employees back to work, and you can really see that they're making an investment in a fitness base at the office. Right. And what a difference does that make?

Graham Melstrand: Sure well, you can also think of workplaces being well beyond just an office that people go to. We have an awful lot of people that are working from home. You have healthcare environments, academic environments, even military and public safety ones where it's inclusive of all of those things. And what we're trying to do with PAA is kind of really shift the cultural norms around reengaging with physical activity and promoting health.

Graham Melstrand: And we're doing that in conjunction with the federal government by championing and supporting the CDC's Active People Healthy Nation initiative. We're talking about the pledge today, but we're also trying to drive some of these things in through the healthcare environment, looking at creating some standardized measures for physical activity. So physical activity is a vital sign within the electronic health record.

Graham Melstrand: So think of it, almost everybody, at least in our space, is familiar with the physical activity guidelines for Americans. And so for the physician to be able to have that conversation with their patient about are they adequately physically active, inadequately, or not active at all, and that helps drive that referral and then the coverage determinations ultimately around that. So one of the other big initiatives that we're involved in kind of concurrently with the pledge is a group of initiatives called It's Time to Move.

Graham Melstrand: And at the core of that is the development of what's called an HL Seven standard, which is how the physical activity would actually be reported within those EMR records. And then from asus perspective and wearing my other hat at C rep with us reps after, you know whether somebody is that adequately inadequately or inactive, then who do you refer those individuals to in a way that allows for kind of the highest and best use of their credentials.

Graham Melstrand: So through our work at the PAA, we're looking at a national exercise referral framework that's based on the health status of the individual as a patient or as an athlete or just somebody that's interested in exercise for health, fitness or sports performance. And so we'll be taking those to CMS and to private insurers to kind of shop that whole package of here's how this will work. And like I said, it's an area that we're particularly interested in because it gives us an opportunity to put exercise professionals to work.

Graham Melstrand: And of course, we believe that the employers in the space will benefit from that as well.

Sarah Pellegrino: Wow. And we've been in the fitness industry forever, right. And so there's always been this push. Yes, you need to be physically active. We all know that. Graham, in your opinion, what is the urgency behind the push now? Is it what we've all been through the past few years? Is it behavioral health? Is it everything? Why now? What's that push?

Graham Melstrand: Sure. Well, I think there's a couple of different reasons for that, and these are kind of other initiatives of the Physical Activity Alliance as well. One of the things that I mentioned earlier is that one of our sectors is the National Physical Activity Plan. And

there's one for business and industry, which is where the fitness lives. There's one for built environment. There's a military sector, there's a healthcare sector.

Graham Melstrand: But the past couple of years, we've had a shift in the way people think about being healthy. Prior to the pandemic, many people that had inactivity related chronic disease, diabetes, hypertension, other conditions, those were slow moving in terms of their impact on their health or mortality. Right. And then all of a sudden we have COVID. And if you have diabetes, all of a sudden, if you contracted COVID, your end could come quickly.

Graham Melstrand: And so for a lot of people, they really started to focus on their health, not for vanity reasons, but they realized that if the healthier I am, the lower the impact or the severity of COVID might be for me. But there's other drivers that are longer term ones as well. So there was a recently released report card on children and youth around physical activity, and the US. Is D minus. I mean, these are global initiatives.

Graham Melstrand: We're a D minus. And that has consequences down the road in terms of future rates of obesity. But one of the other areas that's really a concern right now, and there's a new military sector of the National Physical Activity Plan is that the number of individuals in the target age range eligible for military service based on their health status is extraordinarily low. And of course, this is the first year that we're going to have where the military doesn't meet its recruiting goals.

Graham Melstrand: And you also have to realize that the military competes with other public safety professions for candidates for employment, police and fire and EMS. So we do have an inactivity related crisis that we need to address.

Sarah Pellegrino: That all makes sense, but it's shocking to hear D minus. I'm like, I know all this, but when you say it out loud, it's horrifying.

Graham Melstrand: Sure. And when you see the reports and things like that, it goes, wow, are we really there? And we are. And of course, it disproportionately affects people that are low income, rural, and in minority communities and under resourced communities. And we can do better.

Sarah Pellegrino: We sure can. Graham what is the overall goal of this deo pledge? Is it awareness? Is there a percentage of physical activity attached to it? What's the goal here?

Graham Melstrand: Sure. Our goal for this is to impact at least 10 million workers in the United States, and that's from large and small organizations. And our goal is to have the CEO or other leader in their organization sign the pledge and then choose from a broad cross section of either environmental, staff, policy or systems related options that they can implement within their organizations that will drive employee engagement and fiscal activity.

Sarah Pellegrino: Is there a deadline to this goal, or is it open ended? And where are we with the goal?

Graham Melstrand: Well, I believe I saw yesterday that we just passed 75 CEOs that have signed the pledge, and I don't have from our staff at the PAA, where that puts us on the thermometer of how many employees are impacted yet. But I just saw that on social media last night was kind of one of the first milestones. We'd like to be there before the end of 2023.

Sarah Pellegrino: Love it. We can do it. Awesome. Graham for our listeners that may be wondering, why should I sign this pledge? What would you tell them?

Graham Melstrand: Sure. Well, it provides some tangible benefits that are highly relevant and attractive to today's remote and sedentary workforce. And of course, right now we know that acquiring and retaining employees is very much a challenge, regardless of what sector you're in. And we want those individuals to be healthy and happy. So we know when you're physically active, you have improved mental health, you have improved physical health, your productivity improves, and you can look at that from two sides, absenteeism and presenteeism.

Graham Melstrand: I wasn't healthy enough or I didn't feel well enough to come to work, or I'm at work, and I can't perform at my best because of my health. People are more creative and reduce sedentary behavior, and of course, resilience and rest are all part of this as well. So we believe that the pledge benefits not only the employees, but the organizations, their employees, families, and communities where the employees live.

Sarah Pellegrino: Absolutely. That's awesome. Would you mind reading the pledge for us so our listeners get a sneak peek at what the sign is?

Graham Melstrand: The text of the pledge that we're asking people to sign reads in support of our organization, our employees, our families and our communities, I pledge to adopt strategies that will provide equitable opportunities for physical activity and healthy movement before, during and after the work day and to enhance my own health and wellness by engaging in regular physical activity. So we've tried to build some flexibility into the pledge.

Graham Melstrand: We hope that anybody that's an interested leader can find a way to make it work for the organization.

Sarah Pellegrino: So what I love about the pledge is that there's a really great video on your website. It's less than four minutes.

Graham Melstrand: Jack Raffle?

Sarah Pellegrino: Yes. And what they were explaining was it's not just activity before your work day that you're really the most healthy, you when you're working out or moving. I'll say moving throughout the day. And I love that the pledge incorporates that because that's really helpful. Right.

Graham Melstrand: Well, I don't know about you, but I know that since we've been working remote and working from home, my commute to the office is very, very short, and I have very few opportunities during the day to get up and move. I'm not going to different offices or different meeting rooms to talk with people. The meeting comes right to me. So I have to be intentional in getting up and adding that movement back during the day.

Sarah Pellegrino: Great point. So, Graham, I'm assuming that the pledge is not just for CEOs. So tell us more about who can sign and who's eligible to participate.

Graham Melstrand: So we welcome any type of recognized organizational leader. So we expect it to be not just CEOs, but the individuals that are responsible for HR, any passionate champion within the organization that is in a position of authority where people look up to them. And it can be leaders from any size organization, from two people to 2 million plus. If you're if you're the CEO of yourself and you're an entrepreneur, and we know that there are so many in our space, you can sign the pledge and you can encourage your clients that are in positions of authority or your customers or your patients that are eligible signers to do it as well.

Sarah Pellegrino: So tell us a bit about what comes next. What happens after they're signing the pledge?

Graham Melstrand: Sure. So they sign the pledge online and they answer a couple of quick questions. Number of employees, industry type. There'll be some assets that are emailed to you after you sign the pledge. You get the downloadable pledge certificate that has the signer's name and company. You have an online badge that you can place on your website and a social media toolkit. And of course, you're going to be added to the online registry of CEO, pledge, signers.

Sarah Pellegrino: And lastly, Graham, how is a leader, I'll say, ultimately fulfilling this pledge? Are they submitting that? Yes. I implemented XYZ in the workplace. How do we know it's come to we've tied a bow on the pledge.

Graham Melstrand: Yeah. And what we do kind of first is we ask that the signers adopt at least three strategies to create a culture that supports physical activity. And those are on the website. There's about 30 strategies that are there. It's not an exhaustive list. If somebody has a great idea, we want to know about it so that we can add it. But they fall into an environmental staff policy and a systems subset. So one of the easy one is provide employees the ability to have flexible meetings. Can you do a standing meeting, can you do a walking meeting, those type of things. Can you change out the vending machines?

Graham Melstrand: To have healthy Snacks would be a good one so people can choose what works for them in their environment. And we do believe that there's opportunities in the future to understand how people are implementing their strategies and making their decisions about how they conform to the CEO pledge. Ask and second is we'd ask them to be physically active as well. If you have a physically active CEO, it gives your employees permission to and it models the behavior that you're looking for.

Graham Melstrand: It doesn't have to be any kind of specific type of activity. There's no specific requirement around the length or how vigorous it is. We just want some type of commitment around that. And then we also want them to sign up to receive updates from the CDC's, Active People, Healthy Nation. They send out great ideas around how to create a culture of physical activity within their workplace or community.

Graham Melstrand: And lastly, if you're like Jack Grapple that did the video for us, it's great to encourage their customers and corporate colleagues to sign the pledge as well. And if you're in a fitness facility environment where you have corporate clients that serve their employees, that should be a natural for those facilities to ask their corporate partners to say, hey, have you signed the CEO pledge?

Sarah Pellegrino: That's so cool. Graham now, I'm sure there's a few people wondering, is there any financial commitment associated with signing the CEO pledge?

Graham Melstrand: No, we get that question too. It's entirely free. What we're trying to create is a social movement here, and we're not asking for anybody's money on this.

Sarah Pellegrino: I love it. Other than any updates your physical office space may need, right. Healthy snacks.

Graham Melstrand: However, for the Shameless plug if they wanted to get involved in it's. Time to move campaign. That HL Seven initiative we are funding, and we have funders that are helping support that. That's a five year effort. And so particularly in our space where we'll benefit, if anybody wants to contribute to support that work, we'd love to talk with them about that.

Sarah Pellegrino: That's awesome. Graham now, while we have you, I know you have your PAA hat, you have your Ace hat. What are some things that you would recommend to fitness leaders, owners, operators, vendors? Anyone listening today? What are some things going into 2023 that leaders need to be really mindful of in the fitness space?

Graham Melstrand: Well, there's a couple of them that come to mind, and I guess we can start building close to the CEO pledge and talking about that area of workplace wellness is our workplace has shifted dramatically. We know, for instance, that according to McKinsey and company, people's prioritization of wellness has gone up significantly. It's about 50% 2022 compared to 2020. That's still low, but there's a lot of stuff that occupies people's minds. So the fact that you've got that many people prioritizing it is important.

Graham Melstrand: But not everybody has a traditional workplace to go to. So when we're thinking about, and I know that there's a lot of your audience is within kind of the traditional fitness space, we need to reimagine how fitness facilities, whether they're for profit or not for profit, like a Y or a JCC or a community center, think about supporting their communities. One of the things that's been challenging through the pandemic and now post pandemic, is that fitness facilities need to reconsider their model. **END OF TRANSCRIPT.**