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Lauve Metcalfe looks back
on her career in worksite
health promotion

Inside this Issue

Interview: Lauve Metcalfe

**Practitioner's Corner:
The 4E's of Engagement**

**Remember, There Are
Multiple Bottom Lines!**

**Research Briefs, Return
on Investment**



Lauve Metcalfe, MS

WH: Lauve, you were one of the first women to manage a major company health promotion program beginning in 1980 at Pratt-Whitney. What made you get involved in worksite health promotion and what are some of your early memories from the start of your career?

After graduating from the University of Miami with a Health and Physical Education degree, I worked as a senate aide for the Florida legislature. In my interactions with the senators, I found that it was difficult for most of them to make healthy choices because of their hectic schedules. I decided that if I wanted to be taken seriously giving wellness advice, I would need to have a graduate degree. I chose Florida State University because of their science/sport psychology master's program. I also created an internship with the Governor's Council on Fitness and Sports. My thesis project was to develop a state employee fitness program and present the psychological benefits of physical activity. I presented the research at AAFDBI's conference in 1979, where I met you and this incredibly positive group of professionals, and quickly discovered the value of a professional affiliation. Networking has been a valuable skill that I have used throughout my career. A key partner in my state fitness program was the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, and through that contact, I was introduced to the opportunity at Pratt & Whitney Aircraft.

My position at Pratt & Whitney was Health and Fitness Director for 7,000 employees (plus any interested retirees), in an 85% male population. I was young, full of energy, and had a strong belief in what I could accomplish. I believe those three attributes, along with a supportive boss (medical director) opened a lot of doors and created the supportive network that made it possible for me to be successful. I ran into some resistance, but I had enough leadership support to keep the program moving forward, including the President of our group, Frank McAbee and both Harry Gray, Chairman of the

An Interview with Lauve Metcalfe

Education Chairperson, IAWHP

Board and Al Haig, COO of United Technologies. They not only supported me, but also promoted me and our program throughout the subsidiaries.

Here is an example of a challenging situation I experienced. A group of predominantly male marathon runners were highly skeptical that a woman could perform well in my position, and they told me so early in my tenure. In response, I joined them for their training runs, and started a training club for runners. Shortly afterward, we competed in four marathons (including Boston), the Corporate Invitational run, and many other events as a Pratt team, and the skeptics became my strongest advocates.

The program was a bottom up and top down approach. The employees were looking for a way to have a sense of community and team pride, and the leadership wanted to create an innovative worksite that emphasized corporate commitment to employees. Our program was a win/win for everyone.

WH: You were one of the founders of the former Campbell's Institute that, in the mid 80s, was an influential voice for regular physical activity for all Americans. What was its mission and did you feel it made any impact?

Campbell's was a wonderful opportunity to impact so many dimensions of health and fitness. The CEO of Campbell's Soup had a strong commitment to creating a company of "well-being," for employees and retirees. Campbell's developed one of the first in-house day care facilities, and provided funding for national, state, and local opportunities so that individuals and organizations could move the fitness and nutrition agenda forward. We impacted our employees with in-house wellness facilities and programs that continue to be active today. We funded White House Conferences focused on Youth Fitness, Women's Health, Sports Medicine, Nutrition, and Employee Health. We sponsored the initial research and rollout of the Fitnessgram, physical activity reporting system that is used throughout the nation and internationally. We worked with grass roots organizations to develop and build community programming and join forces with state and national associations to share expertise and success stories. It was an incredible experience working with such a great, talented team, and I can also say: BEST JOB EVER!

WH: In the earlier years, employer programs were primarily fitness-focused, specifically through the corporate fitness center. It's my observation that the pendulum had swung from fitness to risk reduction in the late 70s, integrating a

number of interventions besides physical activity, including nutrition, tobacco control, and stress management. Today, a broader population health strategy includes disease management. It appears from my perspective that the pendulum may be swinging back towards physical activity first because of the broader benefits that regular physical activity provides, based on current research. What's your opinion?

I have always believed that physical activity is a core value/habit that generates positive momentum for a healthier outlook, greater physical stamina, and an overall more positive attitude towards life. My personal experience with participating in daily outdoor activity reinforces this. My professional experience with employee populations, and youth and adults continues to support fitness as the most undervalued “secret” to dealing with destructive lifestyle behaviors and negative mindsets. Early in my career, I learned that one of the keys to having fitness work was to make it fun and enjoyable. I have never had a participant drop out of a program because they were having too much fun! Building on the social enjoyment and positive psychological benefits of physical activity is a fundamental first step I emphasize for any lifestyle challenge.

WH: You have done much work on studying body image especially among women. What have been some of your key observations and how can worksite health practitioners apply your findings when designing programs?

I find a large percentage of the individuals I work with are uncomfortable with their bodies due to the enormous pressure our society puts on looking a certain way: thinner, fitter, more attractive, sexier, younger, lighter, darker, taller, shorter, etc. We spend an inordinate amount of time worrying about our bodies because of this social stigma, and as we age, we have even more rigid societal standards for how we “should” look. Focusing on the whole person, shifts the attention away from the body and creates a richer dialogue with what we mean by wellness. My coaching work at the University of Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine exposes individuals to seven core areas of health that include: sleep, movement, nutrition, relationships, resiliency, spirituality, and environment. We discuss one's current satisfaction with each of these areas and work together on how to improve daily choices using self-care practices. This broader perspective takes the weight off how your body looks and deepens the conversation and meaning of personal health and well-being.

WH: You are past president of an earlier iteration of IAWHP—Association for Fitness in Business (AFB). Today you serve as IAWHP's Education Co-Chairperson. How has educational preparation and continuing education changed over the past four decades and what advice would you give to young professionals?

I believe that education is a life-long process, and that investing in your professional associations is a great way to keep sharp and feel connected. We are bombarded with information 24/7. It's overwhelming and creates unneeded professional stress. Networking with your peers in IAWHP can clear the clutter of information overload and provide key resources and contacts to keep you current. The value of creating a “reach out and touch” relationship with leaders in the field is essential to maintaining and sustaining a career in today's work environment.

WH: You have been actively involved in health coaching and in developing standards for credentialing. What progress has been made in this area?

Health and wellness coaching has been a popular part of worksite health promotion programs for many years now, but without any standard description of what coaching includes or what credentials are needed for delivery. Several years ago, a National Consortium for Credentialing of Health and Wellness Coaches was created to develop a national standard and certification examination that is projected to launch in the Fall of 2017. This certification should provide guidance to worksites for selecting coaches that have the education and experience to provide health coaching at the worksite.

As a practitioner, who is a certified wellness coach and serves on the advisory board for the Institute of Coaching (a Harvard School affiliate), I feel coaching is an excellent skill for a practitioner's tool box, but it's not the “total package” in WHP programming. Coaching can offer a deeper understanding of thoughts, behaviors, and habits that can get in the way of practicing a healthier lifestyle/work style. The “dose” of coaching sessions depends on the issues/behaviors that need to be addressed. The National Consortium and Institute of Coaching are compiling research on best practices to assist coaches and organizations determine their best practices.

WH: I have known you for almost 40 years and as long as I have known you, “you have walked the talk” not only in how you take care of yourself, but also—more importantly—your positive attitude toward living. Do you have any parting words of advice for our readers?

Thanks George! I am so appreciative of the high quality professionals I have met throughout my career, whom I respect and care about deeply. Their individual strengths make each of them so effective in the health promotion field. You!, Charlie Estey, Bob Karch, Richard Keelor, Reed Engel, Steve Cherniak, and Nico Pronk have given me unconditional support, helped me keep my attitude positive and to have fun and a unique perspective on the profession. Interestingly, these are also our leaders in IAWHP. It has been a great ride, and I have enjoyed every aspect it!