

FORTUNE 500 TUNES INTO BANG-THE-DRUM THERAPY

Paul Tharp. *New York Post*. New York, N.Y.: Dec 5, 2003. pg. 039

Corporations are boosting employee productivity and reducing sick days by getting workers to march to the same drummer – literally.

A novel program underway at several big firms – including Toyota, Unilever, Raytheon and Oracle – hauls in drums to the office so that workers can take an hour a week to beat on them alongside their bosses and co-workers.

Also included in the musical free-for-all are hand bells, maracas and keyboards.

“The musical experience causes the boundaries to disappear between managers and employees,” said the program’s inventor, Dr. Barry Bittman, a neurologist and head of the Mind-Body Wellness Center, Meadville, Pa.

“It becomes a level playing field, so to speak – and it’s a safe experience for building trust at the most basic levels.”

The workplace musical workout has produced startling results, he says. Absenteeism drops sharply because the musical experience relieves stress and boosts the body’s immune system, says Bittman.

Burn-out was virtually eliminated and job turnover was drastically reduced at several of the locations where the program has been underway.

He says Toyota’s drumming has had enough success at keeping workers happy and punching the clock on time, it has installed its own dedicated “drum room” at California locations.

What makes the program work is that employees are compelled to participate in the once-a-week hourly events for six weeks.

“Many employees are very negative about doing it and resist. But after they are cajoled into participating, they show remarkable changes.

“In almost every case, the obstinate, the troublemakers and withdrawn employees were brought into the fold and solidified the whole group.”

Bittman said the rise of consolidations and mergers in corporate America have added stress to workers, and hampered work skills.

The \$11,000 program brings in all the musical instruments and a trainer to conduct the workplace ensembles, and leaves behind the drums and a trained in-house person to keep running the show.

He cited new studies saying that 85 percent of employees want to change jobs when the economy improves.

“That’s going to be a huge cost of as much as \$30,000 to \$60,000 to find a replacement employee,” he said.