



Spotlight on Equity Residential

Engaging remote employees for national residential firm proves to be effective

Equity Residential is an S&P 500 company focused on acquisition, development and management of high-quality apartment properties. With 3,800 employees throughout the United States — mostly remote and working at the apartment buildings — the company was in a unique position when it came to implementing a wellness program that could actually work. With the Vitality program, Equity Residential has made tremendous strides toward changing their health culture.

Vitality spoke with Catherine Carraway, First Vice President, Human Resources about their Vitality program and how it's motivated employees to focus more on themselves.

What made you pursue a wellness program?

In 2006, in the face of skyrocketing healthcare costs and double-digit increases, Equity Residential made a critical decision to rethink our healthcare strategy. People were telling us that there was no silver bullet to address the issues of rising healthcare costs, so we decided to implement a strategy centered around preventive care and wellness.

What was your health culture before?

We were dealing with a culture of employees who were not taking good care of themselves and not getting in front of issues before they became serious or catastrophic. A large number of claims were coming through indicating people were using emergency rooms instead of seeing primary care physicians. We were seeing cancers that could have been mitigated had employees received preventive screenings.

Why did you choose Vitality?

We wanted a platform that showed our employees at a glance what their overall health was. That was a key component of what made us choose Vitality. We love the Health Results dashboard that shows key health measures — our employees are really adapting to that. The Vitality Age is really “eye-opening.” We have people react and begin to change their behavior when they learn that they are older than their actual age!

What results are you most proud of?

Our first year with Vitality has been a tremendous year of change. It was challenging to roll out a new program to our employees because they do not sit at desks — they're out and about at our



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properties serving our residents. In spite of that, we have had a tremendous amount of engagement. Almost 70% of our employees have completed their Vitality Health Review. Almost 40% of our employees completed the Vitality Check this year.

Any member stories that stand out?

We had one employee who went in for his preventive exam and found out that he had to go to the hospital immediately for heart surgery. He knew that he had a history of heart problems in his family, but he thought it would never touch him. I’m so glad it was caught before it was catastrophic.

Tell us what’s next.

We are really excited! We are recruiting for Vitality Champs and there has been an overwhelming number of applications. Our champs will be flown to Chicago to meet our CEO and our diversity council and to participate in a training program. They will go home and be spokespersons for Vitality in their markets. One thing I can say about Equity’s culture is we are all in. Our regional leadership is already setting an example of well-being each and every day. They are the ones sponsoring on-site activities. They are really great at engaging our people at a grass-roots level.

As a Vitality member yourself, what’s your favorite part of the program?

I used to take the bus to work every day and I decided I was going to get off the bus and walk the mile each way to and from work. I am really aware of fitness now and how important it is to my overall well-being. And, I get Vitality Points for all these activities! When I am working out, I am happy. I feel better and I have more energy.

