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Carleton
UNIVERSITY

WHOLE LIFE CHALLENGE x CARLETON UNIVERSITY

CASE STUDY

Carleton University credits Whole Life Challenge
for making a significant positive effect on their
employees' health and productivity.

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A year later and I am still down twenty pounds from where I was a year ago, and still to this day I maintain many of the healthy changes brought upon by this Challenge. Now I maintain a balance of healthy eating, working out, and the occasional treat, because life is all about balance!

-Kim McWaters, Alumni and Donor Relations Officer

The Numbers

Market/Industry: University

Year Founded: 1942

City/Location: Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Total Employees participating in the Whole Life Challenge: 65 in 2019

Number of times played the Challenge: 6

Dates of Challenges: Every January for 6 years (2013 - 2019)



Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, is a research and teaching institution with more than 30,000 students and over 3,000 faculty and staff. Named one of the top employers in the National Capital Region in 2017, the university is serious about employee wellness.

In 2009, Carleton began running their own wellness program, called the CU Healthier Challenge. But, over the years, the university struggled with the amount of time it took to manage their own in-house wellness efforts.

“We had a points system, but we tracked everything manually,” said Samantha Munro, who oversees health and wellness initiatives for faculty and staff. “[I]t became too administratively demanding.”

Carleton also had to cap enrollment at 25 people, which significantly limited the reach and impact of their initiative.

Then, in 2014, Carleton switched to the Whole Life Challenge.

Once Samantha and her team were freed from manually tracking points and performance, they could open the Challenge to more faculty and staff and almost quadrupled the number of players—one year close to 100 people participated.

But the cost for the university is minimal, because employees pay a portion of the Whole Life Challenge registration fee with the university covering the rest. In addition to cutting costs, Samantha feels the small investment on the part of the employees gives them a personal stake while keeping the Challenge accessible and affordable.

Carleton has participated in the Whole Life Challenge every January since 2014.



Dr. Linda Duxbury is a professor of management and strategy who specializes in work-life balance and employee well-being. She's the coauthor of *Something's Got to Give: Balancing Work, Childcare and Eldercare* and she's Canada's most accomplished researcher, writer, and speaker on work-life balance.

Linda has played the Whole Life Challenge at Carleton three times and said she comes away with a new healthy habit each time.

Linda teaches motivation and goal-setting theory, and she feels the Whole Life Challenge succeeds because it uses many of the strategies proven to help people stay motivated, including making goals public and being accountable to other people.

For Linda, participating in the Challenge helps her refine her lifestyle. Linda has a well-established year-round exercise routine and her nutrition is mostly healthy. But during each Challenge, she gives up cheese and drinks alcohol once a week, instead of her typical glass or two of wine twice a week.

For Linda, the yearly Challenges are like a wellness spring cleaning. It's a chance for her to review her health and nutrition and consider what habits can be added or discarded. It was during her first Challenge that Linda discovered she wasn't allowed to have aspartame.

"I used to drink a lot of Diet Coke. I love Diet Coke, but I haven't had a Diet Coke now for three years. I have had any diet pop for three years. I just cut it," she said.

In her second year, Linda increased her water intake, a habit she's maintained ever since. "Every year I'm trying to do something new and keep one of the habits," Linda said.

She also appreciates sharing the experience with her colleagues, and thinks that helps her stay motivated.

"I like publically checking in and trying to be supportive to everyone else. I enjoy the public discipline of it, and sharing with people I like. It's good for me to follow this regime. I like the discipline," Linda said.



Chantal Hayes, a contract administrator in purchasing services, paid little attention to her health before discovering the Whole Life Challenge.

"I never thought about how much or what I was eating. I didn't really exercise, I wasn't familiar with how to use gym equipment. I was pretty much your epitome of a not-healthy person," Chantal said.

Then, in 2014, she saw the advertisements around campus for the Whole Life Challenge, and she and a colleague decided to sign up.

"My experience with the first Challenge was absolutely amazing," Chantal said. "I couldn't believe the transformation between how I felt pre-Challenge to how I felt during the Challenge and throughout. My energy levels were better, my focus was better—it was positive, focused energy as opposed to excited energy."

Chantal said she started the Challenge thinking it would be a traditional diet and was shocked to find it improved every aspect of her life. Chantal signed up for the subsequent spring Challenge on her own and has played the Challenge at Carleton every January since that first year.

"The Whole Life Challenge introduced me to a whole world of new ingredients that I wasn't really aware of and I found I really like that style of cooking," Chantal said, "it's very simple, clean eating."

Once she discovered how to incorporate healthy habits into her life, Chantal has kept them going even when she's not participating in a Challenge. Before going to work every morning, she gets up and follows an online exercise video, often from the Whole Life Challenge's online library. She's learned how to cook, stretches while watching TV every night, and chooses water, hot lemon water, or herbal tea instead of reaching for juice or soda.

"The Whole Life Challenge has been a great influence in my life, and it's helped me make a lot of positive changes," Chantal said. "It's introduced me to a way of living that I enjoy more—I wouldn't have had that experience if it wasn't for the Whole Life Challenge."



Samantha, who oversees health and wellness at the university as well as Carleton's participation in the Whole Life Challenge, adds weekly incentives throughout the Challenge to keep employees motivated and engaged.

Each participant in the Challenge receives a Carleton Raven-branded long-sleeved t-shirt with the university's challenge logo, "The CU Healthier Challenge," on the back, as well as glass water bottles and other Carleton merchandise.

Samantha also holds prize drawings for everyone who scores perfectly on nutrition for an entire week, with prizes like a slow cooker or Carleton University merchandise.

Throughout the Challenge, Carleton also hosts "lunch 'n' learn" sessions, covering topics such as goal setting, revisiting goals, decluttering and organizing, easy swaps for a healthier diet, and myths and facts about clean eating.

Many university-sponsored events include catered lunches, and Chantal said that during the Challenge those lunches are much healthier. The focus on healthy living and good nutrition permeates Carleton's culture during the Challenge—shared office snacks shift to carrots and hummus instead of cookies and chips.

At the end of the Challenge, Samantha determines points-based winners in each of the three nutrition categories: Kickstart, Lifestyle, and Performance. Each winner gets a prize at the post-Challenge luncheon, where Samantha also gives awards for people who have been supportive or enthusiastic on the university's forums or the people who attended the most events during the Challenge.



After administering the Whole Life Challenge for six years, Samantha said she's observed a significant positive effect on the health and productivity of the university employees.

"People seem really motivated and engaged, and it's exciting to see that kind of enthusiasm," Samantha said.

She's also observed another benefit—improved workplace camaraderie.

During the Challenge Samantha organizes weekly "meet-up" events where players can get together to complete one of their daily habits—like stretching or exercise—over their lunch hour.

"This helped build community and get people away from their desks at lunch," Samantha said.

"We have such a big campus and so many employees, and people meet colleagues through the Challenge that they wouldn't have met otherwise, which I think is a really great fringe benefit," she said.

Carleton University has found that the Whole Life Challenge is a workplace wellness program that doesn't require hours of administrative work and hassle, and it's flexible enough to be appealing to people who are knowledgeable about health and wellness and want to refine their healthy habits as well as employees just starting out on their wellness journey.



Interested in Bringing the Challenge to your Company?

We'd love to help – and we'll start with a one-on-one conversation, geared toward helping you understand if the Challenge is right for you and your team. To begin, just contact Jenna Gruttadauria (our highly-responsive Director of Partnerships) by [scheduling a meeting using her online portal](#), emailing jenna@wholelifechallenge.com, or calling (323) 432-0930.

For more information...

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