

Recreational Music Making (RMM): *a human resources perspective*

An accessible, affordable and sustainable strategy with targeted objectives that extend into realms apart from performance and mastery, RMM has been shown to serve as an effective and engaging team-building strategy within the workplace. A summary of recently published findings is presented to document potential considerations for introducing RMM as an empowering human resources initiative.

According to Karl T. Bruhn, father of the music-making and wellness movement, “RMM encompasses “enjoyable, accessible and fulfilling group music-based activities that unite people of all ages regardless of their challenges, backgrounds, ethnicity, ability or prior experience. From exercise, nurturing, social support, bonding and spirituality, to intellectual stimulation, heightened understanding and enhanced capacity to cope with life’s challenges, the benefits of RMM extend far beyond just music.”

Three primary objectives characterize the decision to introduce RMM as a team building strategy in the workplace. These include: wellness promotion (stress reduction/mood improvement), burnout reduction and retention enhancement.

The following research-based insights document the inherent value of RMM as a human resources initiative.

- According to an article that appeared in the September 27th 2004 issue of *Newsweek*, “experts claim that 60-90 percent of doctor visits involve stress-related complaints.” On September 5th 2004, *The New York Times* reported that, “workplace stress costs the nation more than \$300 billion each year.” **For the first time in the history of medicine, the successful reversal of key elements of the human stress response has been documented on the DNA level utilizing a RMM strategy.**
- According to *Braun Consulting News*, “Depression in the US population affects about 19 million people. Of the 19 million Americans diagnosed with depression, about 70% are in the work force.” The economic impact of depression in the workplace includes direct costs of approximately \$11 billion annually for treatment, indirect costs totaling \$12 billion for absenteeism, and \$11 billion from decreased productivity while on the job. **Recent research performed in the highly stressed long-term care industry revealed reduced depression (21.8%) 6 weeks after the completion of a 6-week (1 hour/week) RMM program.**
- Multiple factors influence an employee’s likelihood to remain productive and contribute meaningfully to the job. These include 6 extensively studied mood factors that include tension/anxiety, depression/dejection, anger/hostility, vigor/activity, fatigue/inertia and confusion/bewilderment. Total Mood Disturbance (TMD) is a mathematical aggregate of these factors. **In long-term care workers, TMD was reduced by 62.3% 6 weeks after the completion of a 6-week (1 hour/week) RMM program.**
- Burnout is one of the most highly threatening and pervasive factors that severely limits employee effectiveness, team building and ability to remain on the job. It is characterized by 3 key factors that include: depersonalization, emotional exhaustion and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. **Burnout reduction in a stressed long-term care workforce revealed reductions of emotional exhaustion (19%), depersonalization (16%) and improvements in sense of personal accomplishment (5.1%) 6 weeks after the completion of a 6-week (1 hour/week) RMM program.**

- Two important variables (identified by Trip Umbach Healthcare Consulting, Inc.) account for 81.7% of an employee's likelihood to remain loyal to their employer and remain on the job for more than 3 years. These include: satisfaction with non-pay factors and a *Connectivity Variable Cluster* (12 key factors). The most important variables include: ease of communications between the employee and the supervisor, respect shown to employees by their supervisors, respect shown to employees by co-workers and supervisors caring about employees as persons. It should be noted that turnover rates for long-term healthcare workers range between 40 and 100% annually. **An independent economic analysis of a stressed long-term care workforce suggested an 18.3% overall reduction of employee turnover through the implementation of a RMM program, resulting in 11 positions saved out of every 60 positions predicted to be lost each year. Actual findings (savings of \$396,000 attributable to 49 more retained employees) associated with the study cohort exceeded projections. Total annual savings (based upon potential industry-wide adoption) was projected at \$1.46 billion.**
- In order to ensure long-term success, a human resources initiative has to be accessible, affordable and sustainable. RMM clearly meets this criteria. In contrast to expensive team building expedition programs for executives, **RMM does not preclude inclusion based upon physical limitations— every worker can participate. RMM is also highly cost effective and sustainable.** In one RMM study, initial instrument purchases coupled with facilitator training yielded an initial first year ROI of \$60.57 saved for every dollar invested. It should be noted that in terms of sustainability, offering the program in subsequent years does not require additional funding for instruments or training.

In summary, RMM research has demonstrated a host of key benefits that precisely match ongoing workplace needs. From stress reduction and improvement of mood states to burnout and attrition reduction, RMM programs serve as **accessible, affordable and sustainable** human resources initiatives. An empowering strategy for unlocking innate potential through verbal and non-verbal expression, RMM opens doors for meaningful dialogues while fostering interpersonal respect and team-building. In this challenging era of rapidly escalating stress-related healthcare costs coupled with excessive employee burnout and turnover, RMM serves as a rational affordable empowering strategy for improving quality of life.

References

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