

## HEALTH

IMMUNITY BOOSTERS | STOMACH SCIENCE | DIET FIXES | SLEEP SOLUTIONS

## Work It!

DID YOU KNOW YOU SPEND A THIRD OF YOUR LIFE AT WORK? DON'T LET YOUR DESK GET YOU DOWN. MEET THREE TEAMS OF OFFICEMATES WHO GOT MOVING TOGETHER. BY KATE DALEY

**M**otorists passing by the World Vision Canada head office in Mississauga, Ont., may catch sight of a group of people doing burpees in the parking lot. This is thanks to Leo Tang.

The 47-year-old started the brief high-intensity classes at lunchtime after running into a senior manager who mentioned he wanted to try CrossFit because his son was doing it. Leo sent a group email to see if there was any interest.

“Back when Leo announced the CrossFit workouts, my first question to myself was, What have I got to lose?” says Leo’s coworker Michelle Cole-Henderson. “I’ve struggled for years to fit exercise into my lifestyle – and not just any exercises, but ones I like. So far I’ve been incredibly motivated.”

With around 18 staff members attending each week, word of his free class is spreading. “Other employees see the group working out, and it’s motivating. I don’t have to do any promotion,” says Leo, who is a certified instructor in the sport. ◻

PHOTOGRAPHY BY GENEVIÈVE CARON

"I had tried CrossFit previously, but it was simply too expensive to justify a membership," says Kimberly Rupnarain, another coworker of Leo's. "I was really excited when, a few weeks later, Leo announced he'd be willing to run a CrossFit program for us at work! The sessions have pushed me and left me aching in places I didn't know could hurt, but at the end of the day I'm happy I get the opportunity to keep in shape and do the workouts for free. It has also been an awesome opportunity for us to spend time with each other as colleagues away from our work, in an environment where we're supportive and encouraging of one another."

Leo tailors his workouts to people of all abilities; only three participants had any prior experience with the sport, he says. He spends the first part of each class demonstrating the basic moves and providing movement variations so participants can work out at their own fitness levels. The average class includes pushups, sit-ups, high-knees and squats performed in a series of intervals.

"I worked in the telecommunications industry for the past 20 years," he says, describing a work environment where he spent a lot of time at a desk. "But staying fit is something I know is lifesaving." This passion led Leo to a newly created role of Team World Vision coordinator, in which he helps community groups train for runs in support of the nonprofit. He's also created a lot of buzz with the Cubicle to 5K or 10K program. Every Tuesday after work, a group of employees meet to run, go over techniques and hear motivational fitness speakers. Of the 35 people in the program, 30 consider themselves nonrunners, so it's really for any ability. "Plus, there's a level of accountability when the activity has a social element to it," Leo says. "Colleagues will ask you why you didn't make it to a workout that day. That's motivation to actually come out and commit."

But he knows it can be hard to take a break from your desk to fit in a workout. "There's this idea that, 'Oh, this person's working through lunch so they must be working really hard,'" he says. Leo believes the higher-ups at companies need to support the health initiatives by taking action themselves. "Our

executive vice-president comes to our CrossFit workouts. He's fully supportive. He is leading by example."

### IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM, JOIN 'EM

"I was never a person who worked out," says 44-year-old Michele McAdoo, a manager in the kitchen at Kraft headquarters in Toronto. "But 18 years ago, when I started working at Kraft, I was encouraged to join their on-site gym and I started attending classes." After noticing her great energy in the class, one of the teachers suggested she become an aerobics instructor herself. Eventually, with encouragement, Michele signed up for her CanFitPro certification, which her employer agreed to pay for. She went on to become a volunteer group fitness instructor at the office gym.

Fifteen years later, Michele is still teaching weekly hi-lo muscle-conditioning classes for staff, in addition to attending three or four other classes a week. She is a big advocate of lunch workouts, and she's encouraging to those around her.

Lynn Bellinger, a coworker of Michele's, decided to attend one of her fitness classes a year and a half ago. "By coming in just 15 minutes earlier in the morning, I'm able to take a little longer at lunchtime to attend one of the classes offered," says Lynn. "Working out at noon frees up my evenings."

Being a single parent, I'm not able to work out before or after hours, and this allows me to carve out a bit of me time," she says. "I have no excuse not to go."

### AN INSPIRATIONAL OFFICE

Erica Govan, a 35-year-old project architect for RAW Design, a midsize architecture firm in Toronto, often clocks 12-hour days on the job. But it's not all work and no play for Erica and her coworkers. "The office sponsored team entries to local runs, and we set up training sessions for first-timers," Erica says. After runs, the team goes out for brunch. There are also scheduled play days that cater to everyone on the team: Doing everything from curling and skiing to bocce and sailing, they go out of their way to support one another in their fitness pursuits.

Take 24-year-old Kim Flynn, RAW's graphic designer and administrative assistant, who credits her company for getting her involved in running. "My office covers the registration fees on select runs, and because it's a group experience, it's easy to stay on track with training," she says. "As a result, I've gone from not running at all to doing a 5K this past April. We also did the Oasis ZooRun 10K Run in September."

"The office definitely encourages staff to be active and healthy," agrees Elmira Yousefi. The 28-year-old intern architect took up biking to join her team in the 50K route of the Becel Heart &

Stroke Ride for Heart. This past spring was the second year she participated. "I also ran the Harry Rosen 8K in spring with my team, and I can say I had never run or had the desire to do so before, but I've already signed up for another group race."

In addition to a bike room equipped with tools where employees can store and tune up their bikes (or borrow the two on-site ones), the RAW staff is encouraged to bike to meetings around the city, and everyone was given company-branded biking gear.

And Erica has an exceptional boss. Not only did he support her training for her first Ironman triathlon by giving her more flexible hours, but he also trained with Erica for her second full-distance race and then did the triathlon himself. ●



*"Planning ahead helps you stay on track during a busy workweek. And don't underestimate the value of mini workouts during the day to help you achieve those long-term fitness goals."*

—KATE DALEY, HEALTH EDITOR

### DO IT AT YOUR DESK

**THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT:** Download Workrave or Ergonomics, suggests Sabrina Arvanitis, an operations manager from High Point Wellness Centre in Toronto. These online tools set reminders to get up from your desk and take a break, provide tips on ergonomic stretches and track your progress.

**BALANCE DISK:** Wearing heels atop a balance ball is a surefire way to break your arm. A balance disk is a more subtle solution for your seat and helps you work on your abs. For more stability, try sitting on a Ballast Ball, which is weighted, says Katarina Simons, a personal trainer for High Point Wellness Centre. *Balance Training Disc*, \$23, [amazon.ca](http://amazon.ca).

**PEDOMETER:** While it may seem old-school, setting a pedometer goal is a good way to know if you're on track. Create an office chart and compete against one another for a prize, suggests Simons. *Timex Pedometer*, \$35, [timex.ca](http://timex.ca).

**COOLING TOWEL:** If you hit the gym at lunch or take the stairs, it can be hard to cool down. Made out of PVA, these cooling towels require no refrigeration; place one on your neck to turn down the heat. *Chill Skinz Towel*, \$13, [chillskinz.com](http://chillskinz.com).

**WALKING OR STANDING DESK:** If your office is looking to raise the bar, ask for a walking desk. If that's not possible, suggest a standing desk, so you can alternate sitting and being on your feet. *TrekDesk Treadmill Desk*, \$479, [trekdesk.com](http://trekdesk.com).

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### MAKE IT WORK FOR YOU

Play a yoga, Pilates or tai chi DVD in a boardroom for a low-impact (and minimally sweaty) lunch-hour workout.