

At Work Workout: No Sweat; Rick Bradley Gets Federal Workers Into the Gym and Out in 15 Minutes -- And They Don't Even Have to Change Their Clothes.

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It's 10 a.m. in the lobby of the U.S. Department of Transportation's vast headquarters in L'Enfant Plaza and Rick Bradley has just spotted his day's first mark. The man -- harried, 40-ish, with a thick waist, tired eyes and a slightly stunned expression -- gets on the elevator, and Bradley follows. "Hey," he greets the unsuspecting man as the doors slide shut. There's no time to waste. Bradley has one minute, maybe two, to do what he means to do.

By the time the doors open, Bradley's won one more convert to the cause. Proof comes the next morning, as it usually does, when the man appears at the DOT Fitness Center on the 10th floor, ready for his initial workup.

Springing along the office corridors and vertically traversing the building by elevator, Bradley, the DOT fitness director, is ever alert for targets of opportunity. In tennis shorts and bright white Nikes, marbled calves and 8 percent body fat, he intentionally presents a roaming billboard for the benefits of getting in shape. "Every day I wear my 'uniform' so people will immediately recognize me and ask me about the fitness center," he explains.

But Bradley, 49, is no preening paid muscle man or jaded health club retainer. To DOT workers, he is a prophet, a magician, a man who can work miracles on a sedentary physique in -- really -- just 15 minutes a day.

For evidence of the commitment he inspires, look no further than gym sign-ups: The DOT Fitness Center boasts a spectacular employee participation rate, about three times the average for most workplace fitness centers, says Linda Rhoads, who heads the DOT's work life wellness program. Of approximately 4,000 DOT employees at the L'Enfant Plaza location, about 1,500 are members -- and Bradley estimates that 90 percent are regulars at the center.

One reason may be the low fees: \$6 every other week.

Another may be Bradley's stalking.

"If you don't show up for a while for workouts, I come hunting," says the man soon to begin his 24th year as director of the DOT Fitness Center, a feat of loyalty almost unheard of in the fickle universe of corporate fitness. "I know where you work and I'll get you coming back again."

It's no joke, and workers know and respect him for it.

"Rick has a personal goal of reaching out to every single federal employee in this building," says Rhoads. She calls Bradley's combination of attitude, visibility and personality a potent advertisement for the fitness center and the results people can achieve there. "He has the highest energy of anyone I've ever seen, and his upbeat attitude really keeps people coming back."

It's only been about 15 years since employers widely began creating on-site gyms and exercise programs, driven by rising health care costs that sent human resources departments scrambling for ways to cultivate healthier workers.

"I am a dinosaur in this business," admits Bradley, who has a bachelor's degree in exercise physiology from the University of Maryland. "In college we used to call it 'industrial fitness.' It was a theory then, but it's proven now: Companies with on-site fitness programs have lower absenteeism and fewer health claims."

The DOT doesn't collect data on how fitness center membership affects the agency's absenteeism and productivity rates, in part because of the federal government's employee privacy protections. But Rhoads has plenty of testimonials from individual employees: "They tell me they feel better, look forward to coming to work and perform faster and better because of their workouts," she says.

The DOT program, a prototype when it launched in 1978, remains the longest-running federal government fitness program of its kind. Bradley was hired to coax office workers into better health, and he says he's never looked back.

"This is the best job in the world," he raves. "On a daily basis I get to see dramatic results and be a part of people changing their lives. Instead of working with 45 conditioned athletes for a season, I get to help thousands of people of all different physical types."

His secret, he says, is convincing government desk jockeys challenged by time, wardrobe and perspiration issues that they can do less than they think they have to do to get in shape. Bradley's "Quick Fit" program, which he created three years ago, promises employees a productive workout in just a quarter of their lunch hour - - and here's the good part -- fully clothed and without sweating.

At any time of day, you'll see rows of men in shirts, ties and dress shoes alongside women in skirts -- sometimes heels -- marching resolutely on the treadmills at the center. No one looks even slightly damp. Workout finished, every one will bypass the locker rooms on their way back to their offices, not even stopping for an antiperspirant refresher.

"Quick Fit is designed that way," says Bradley. "Walking at the pace we set -- three miles an hour -- for 10 minutes won't induce perspiration in the vast majority of participants."

The sweat-less workout sounds too good to be true, until you hear the testimonials of Bradley recruits. Jenny Donohue, 44, a program assistant in the Office of Pipeline Safety, says she lost 51 pounds in four months on what she calls "Rick's Regime," going from a size 18 to a size 6.

"I've been battling my weight for years, and this is the only thing that has worked for me," she says. "I am definitely not an exercise nut, but this I can handle. Rick has made me more enthusiastic about exercise than I ever thought possible."

Admittedly, Donohue's results are exceptional -- Bradley calls Donohue his "Quick Fit poster child." Plus, he confides, she actually spent 20 minutes a day on the program. Now she works out for 20 minutes just a few days a week, and has maintained her weight loss and fitness level for the past year.

Quick Fit works, Bradley says, because it enables busy people to exercise effectively and consistently.

"I asked myself, what is it that causes people not to exercise, to remain in sedentary habits? Essentially it's the inconvenience. When they are in working mode, people don't like to change clothes or get sweaty. They don't like to take time away from their desks. But I know that little moments of activity are better than none at all, so I came up with Quick Fit -- tiny bits of exercise."

Recent health research backs Bradley's technique: Researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health reported in the journal *Circulation* last summer that shorter workouts are just as good for the heart as a single, longer workout. Exercise physiologist Glenn A. Gaesser at the University of Virginia has found through his work with sedentary adults that you can cut exercise sessions down to as little as 10 minutes and still reap gains.

Quick Fit sessions comprise four components, Bradley explains: cardiovascular, abdominal strength, upper body strength and total body flexibility. It's accomplished through 10 minutes of brisk walking on the treadmill, then five minutes devoted to the following: 50 bent-knee half-sit-ups, one minute of stretching and 10 repetitions each of pull-ups, chin-ups and dips on a machine that can be adjusted to each person's fitness level. Beginners start with fewer repetitions but quickly advance to the full Quick Fit regime.

Kirsten Oldenburg, 59, who works on energy and environmental impact issues for the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, is one of Bradley's newest converts. After three weeks on Quick Fit, she has surprised herself, first by losing a couple of pounds, and then by getting hooked on daily workouts. Every morning at 9:30 she heads to the 10th floor for her 15 minutes of fitness, then grabs her habitual skim latte and is back at her desk by 10, energized.

"I have avoided gyms my whole life," she says. "I'm not really a joiner, and the idea of taking regular classes was not for me." But Bradley's persistent urging -- she likens him to an engaging used car salesman -- overcame her objections.

"For me, a reluctant 'program person,' Rick had just the right approach and qualities to get me over that last small hurdle of resistance," Oldenburg says. "Every day he is there, encouraging me and cheering my consistency. Now I feel like I have to let him know when I'm traveling, so he won't be disappointed when I don't show up."

Ironically, for some recruits Bradley has to lobby against overcommitment, which inevitably leads to burnout. "The most important aspect of an exercise session is completing it," he says. "A lot of very motivated people get put on programs to exercise for 45 minutes a day, but soon they find they can't break away for that long, that often. If they can work out for shorter periods more consistently, people get a great sense of accomplishment, and the next thing you know, they are watching their diets more carefully and picking up even more physical activity."

Bradley has witnessed some stunning and gratifying results. "I have a file full of letters from DOT employees -- they are my little victories. We've helped people uncover medical situations like cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure during their initial evaluations. We've helped people get off diabetes medications and stay well simply through exercise."

On his slate of bigger victories, Bradley tells of the employee in his sixties who couldn't touch his knees; now in his mid-seventies, he attends DOT aerobic dance classes every day. A woman, 49, totally sedentary before joining Quick Fit, lost 81 pounds, and three years later continues to work out daily for 40 minutes. "The largest person I've worked with was 430 pounds. In the year and a half we worked together before he relocated, he lost 100 pounds."

Bradley mans the Fitness Center from 6:15 a.m. to 2:45 p.m., while his partner Hy Levasseur takes the later shift until 8 p.m. closing. They overlap during the hectic lunchtime period, when all the machines are running and lines form.

In addition to his administrative and personal training duties, Bradley teaches exercise classes and conducts employee seminars on stress management and nutrition. Most often he can be found walking around the gym gently offering the Rick-isms for which he's famous: "Consistency is the name of the game," and "Do a little more, eat a little less," and, of course, "No hanging around the gym -- get fit and get out."

That is, when he's not when he's not canvassing soft-bellied government workers in offices and elevators.

"Wherever I am -- in the hallways, the cafeteria, the plaza -- I am always spreading the gospel. Although if it's an elevator encounter, I have to talk very fast."

Martha Frase-Blunt regularly contributes to Health on workplace matters.

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