

Her loss was her gain



Amanda Day lost 65 pounds and gained a new career focus.

What started out as an after-work walking habit has taken Amanda Day on a journey of loss -- and surprising gain.

This journey began shortly after Amanda joined Madison-based Aprilaire as a human resources specialist in 2006. She soon joined the company's wellness committee and helped organize health education lunches, health risk assessments, wellness challenges and even employee kickball, soccer and volleyball teams. She loved finding fun ways to help co-workers become healthier.

But there was one disconnect.

"I was encouraging the people I worked with to improve their health, but I weighed nearly 200 pounds," she says. "Being on the wellness committee made me walk the talk."

She started packing a bag and walking after work.

That was 65 pounds ago.

"It took me two years to lose the weight and I've kept it off, thanks to the support of my boss and co-workers," Amanda says. "I succeeded because of where I work. The encouragement and the focus on health gave me the motivation I needed."

In the process of losing weight, Amanda gained a healthy new lifestyle -- and a new career goal. She's now earning an online [Bachelor of Science degree in Health and Wellness Management](#) [1] (HWM). Launched by the University of Wisconsin-Extension in 2011, the degree completion program prepares graduates to design, implement and maintain health and wellness initiatives in the workplace.

Demand for these skills is increasing as employers, insurance companies and governments seek ways to curb escalating healthcare costs. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment opportunities in the health and wellness field are expected to grow between 18 and 22 percent in the next five years. Amanda's employer, Aprilaire, a division of Research Products Corp., has hired a health and wellness manager to help expand and improve wellness programs for the company's staff of 300.

HWM is unique in its focus on management, as well as its emphasis on the seven dimensions of wellness, encompassing the social, physical, emotional, career, intellectual, environmental and

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spiritual. HWM draws on the strengths of four University of Wisconsin campuses (UW-La Crosse, UW-River Falls, UW-Stevens Point and UW-Superior), and—a critical factor for Day —can be completed entirely online.

“The flexibility is essential for me. I find that I often work past my scheduled hours, so it would be difficult to leave to go to a campus course,” explained Amanda, who has a bachelor’s in general management and technology from UW-La Crosse. “Logging in is a lot less stressful.”

She even managed to slip away on vacation with a friend without missing class. “I bought a power adapter for my car, so I could work on assignments during the five-hour ride,” she said. “Then I’d stop in a coffee shop, log on and post to the discussion board to earn my credits for the assignment.”

Amanda expects to complete her HWM degree in 2016 and to put her new knowledge to work on behalf of her colleagues at Aprilaire.

“The skills I’m learning will give me the ability to help people take the initiative, to get involved with health programs, and gain control of their own well-being,” she said. “My co-workers helped me get healthy. Now I’m helping them.”

For information please contact us at:

Toll-free phone: 1-877-UW-LEARN (895-3276)

E-mail: hwm@uwex.edu [2]

Links:

[1] <http://hwm.wisconsin.edu/>

[2] <mailto:hwm@uwex.edu>