

# Working conditions

[Business](#)



Obesity at the Workplace The problem of obesity became one of the most serious. More and more obese people are met in the street. According to recent official data 35.7% of American citizens are obese. Unhealthy food and sedentary life affect people's life negatively. Last time much attention was paid to the issue what problems obesity can cause at the workplace. The research showed that it really causes many problems for employers as obese people miss work frequently because of poor health, their productivity is much lower than the productivity of people with normal weight. One way to struggle with obesity is workplace health promotion that can be defined as "the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve their health" (World Health Organization. Health Promotion Glossary). The program appeared to be very helpful as, according to the last data, it managed to decrease the level of obesity and improve people's health. "They have an incentive to get healthy. If they join in the company-wide weight-loss contest this month and succeed in reaching their goals, they could win cash prizes or a luxury vacation (How Far Should Employers Go to Reduce Workplace Obesity). However, employers face the problem: not all overweight employees agree to participate in the program. Thus, there are companies, which decide to apply penalties for those who do not want to take part in workplace welfare program. The question is if this approach that seems effective contradicts moral and ethical principles. At least two aspects of the problem should be considered to answer the question. Many experts argue that when deciding to apply penalties to people who do not want to change anything in their life. According to professor of ethics Janice Bellace, "any company moving into this area has to consider what employees think is unreasonable or an invasion of privacy. It's a ticklish issue, particularly

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when so many Americans are overweight" (cited in From Incentives to Penalties: How Far Should Employers Go to Reduce Workplace Obesity). Really, such measures are real invading in employee's private life that is the violation of ethical principles. According to deontological ethics, if a person does not violate the commonly accepted principles, he or she can live the way that makes him/her happy (Fried, 1975). Thus if a person feels comfortable and do not want to change anything, why should he/she be forced to do that by the employer? We should not forget that some people simply are not able to lose the weight as diets and physical training are not helpful in their case. So, should employers refuse to give a job to these people or place any conditions? Of course, they shouldn't. According to James Zervios, skills and not sizes of a potential employee should be evaluated by an employer: " We have heard from hundreds of employees how once they lost weight, they received promotions or other recognition. The fact is, they were just as smart when they were bigger. There is a lot of bias out there" (cited in From Incentives to Penalties: How Far Should Employers Go to Reduce Workplace Obesity) However, we should not forget about another aspect: employers suffer from employees' obesity, they lose profit and have extra expenses, thus the outcome is evident: they simply will not hire obese people and will try to fire them and to replace them with people with normal weight. This will increase their profits that is very essential in the capitalist society. " If someone wants to smoke, that is their choice, but when their choices impact their employer and fellow employees, then, frankly, we're not going to take it"(cited in How Far Should Employers Go to Reduce Workplace Obesity). The conclusion can be made that employers can't and should not use penalties to make people lose weight.

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Such approach is completely unethical. Employers should evaluate the skills, not sizes of potential employee. However, the employers are still able to make people lose weight. If obese people are not useful for companies, they will not simply be accepted and this is inevitable. In the modern world making money is essential and people will prefer not to lose profit by hiring an employee, who will cause extra expenses. This will have an involuntary effect and make people change their habits. People should realize their problem themselves and find a solution. Nobody can make you change anything in your life if you simply do not want to do that. Nobody can make you happy, only you can do that. References Fried, Charles. (1978). Right and Wrong. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. From Incentives to Penalties: How Far Should Employers Go to Reduce Workplace Obesity? (2008). Retrieved March 26, 2013 from <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=1876> (World Health Organization. Health Promotion Glossary. (n. d.). Retrieved March 26, 2013 from [http://www.who.int/hpr/NPH/docs/hp\\_glossary\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/hpr/NPH/docs/hp_glossary_en.pdf))