



Investment in people

Body & Mind initiative – for physical and mental wellbeing

Sonova has a sustainable preventive healthcare program for its staff called the Body & Mind initiative: sport and activity, yoga and relaxation, a healthy, balanced diet and regular medical check-ups are all part of a healthy work environment and ensure high levels of satisfaction within the company.

It's a little after nine in the morning, and 32-year-old Corporate Sustainability Manager Mevina Caviezel is in good spirits as she stands at the breakfast buffet in the Bistromax, Sonova's staff restaurant in Stäfa. The wide selection of fruit and muesli on offer (with every imaginable kind of cereal, all of which can be freshly ground) means that she is spoilt for choice. Caviezel eventually plumps for dried blueberries with almond milk, freshly ground buckwheat, and chia pudding. "I love the choice here," she says, "it's much better than at home." She sets great store by a healthy diet. "I'm glad I can get such a wide variety of things to eat at work."

The Bistromax is already bustling at around 9am – the cozy staff restaurant is popular with the many staff members who like to combine a healthy mid-morning snack with their first meetings of the day. "A balanced diet is the key to a happy and healthy workforce," says Caviezel. As Corporate Sustainability Manager, the Body & Mind initiative, which promotes sustainable preventive healthcare and wellbeing for Sonova employees around the world, falls within her remit. The initiative is based on several guiding principles: a balanced diet for every member of staff, opportunities for sport and relaxation at the workplace, and regular medical check-ups for employees. "We want our employees to be healthy and happy, so they stay motivated over the long term. The Body & Mind initiative is a strategic priority for Sonova," explains Caviezel.

There is already a hive of activity in the kitchen as lunch is prepared, and commis chef Yousif Diler is getting warm falafel, vegetable parcels and hummus ready for the salad buffet. Chef Kumar Subramaniam is frying off 40 kg of mince for the spaghetti Bolognese while Amely Schmitt, a budding cook in the third year of her apprenticeship, stands beside him flipping 240 veal hamburgers, one after another, in a giant frying pan.

650 to 700 lunches are prepared here every day but there is no sign of the stress and commotion to be seen in other commercial kitchens. "The whole operation runs like a well-oiled machine," explains Thomas Leu, the 49-year-old chef and staff restaurant manager, who has given up his place in the kitchen to concentrate on strategy, purchasing and planning.

“It’s like on a cruise ship,” he continues, with a grin. “Good food creates a good atmosphere.” He prefers to buy local and sustainable produce – organic and low-fat if possible – and he is more concerned with providing a balanced spread than an embarrassment of choice. “We understand our clientele, which means we try to offer an eclectic range of food with plenty of colors on the plate, so there’s something for everyone.” For their midday meal, diners can choose between some 30 salads, a generous buffet of vegetable dishes and three set menus.

In addition to a healthy diet, sport and relaxation are two key priorities for the Body & Mind initiative. “This means that we integrate athletic activities and relaxation (such as yoga and Pilates) into the working day,” says Caviezel – Sonova staff are free to spend their lunch breaks attending one of the many athletics clubs to play any number of sports from volleyball to squash. There is even a swimming pool and a sauna on the roof of the main building. “There’s a real need to get people moving regularly, not least because a lot of our staff work at desks – and it’s important for me personally as well,” emphasizes Caviezel, who frequently joins her team colleagues for a lunchtime jog in the woods nearby.

Thomas Bernhardsgrütter, Director Investor Relations, has also joined an eight-strong running group, and members take to the streets two to three times a week to jog 7 or sometimes even 11 km. “I find it an important counterbalance to desk work and a good opportunity to clear my head. I feel fitter and more productive in the afternoons,” says 46-year-old Bernhardsgrütter. He goes on to explain that, as he often has to work late in the evenings, it is practically his only opportunity to do sports and stay active. It means his lunch break may be a little shorter, but that’s a trade-off he says he is happy to make. “I’m extremely glad that Sonova has got behind sporting activities. It’s a big plus.” He is also a fan of the way his running group share tips and compare notes. “As we all work in different departments, it’s interesting to find out what’s currently going on elsewhere in the company,” he says.

“Badminton at lunchtime is one of the few moments when I’m not thinking about business,” says 39-year-old Sascha Stocker, who works as an Associate General Counsel in the legal department. He and a few colleagues from his unit joined the badminton group about four years ago and they get to use the nearby indoor gym hall for matches twice a week. Sonova has organized a special minibus shuttle for all the athletes. “Sport is an important extra shot of energy for me – I get sluggish if I don’t play badminton regularly,” says Stocker. He is also highly appreciative of how Sonova allows him to configure his work flexibly and encourages staff to play sport during their lunch breaks: “The benefits are tangible.”

His eyes lighting up at the mere thought of soccer, Systems Manager Corporate HR Oliver Appelshäuser heads to the gym every Wednesday lunchtime for kick-off. “It’s a sacrosanct time slot for us all,” says the 39-year-old and laughs. The “all” to which he is referring are a group of between 10 and 16 soccer fans that includes members of the Management Board. “But work hierarchies are left on the touchline, of course.” Appelshäuser no longer has enough time to commit to turning out for a club side, so he is doubly delighted to be able to play his favorite sport at work.

At the same time Appelshäuser is chasing the ball in the gym, the yoga enthusiasts are gathering in Audimax 1 for their weekly session. The leader of the group Philipp Schneider, Director eSolutions Development, guides 20 employees through a demanding program – in English, no less, so that even those who speak little or no German can take part. The “Crow”, a difficult pose in which the hands are placed on the mat a span apart and the hips and knees are extended to one side, pushes the yoga devotees to their limits. The weight of the torso is taken on the arms while the legs are stretched out sideways in the air. There is laughter as a couple of participants come tumbling down onto their mats. “No problem,” says 49-year-old Schneider. “It’s important to laugh.” He has been doing yoga for 14 years. “I make an effort to teach in such a way that everyone can follow what I’m doing, however long they have been doing yoga,” he says, adding that it doesn’t matter how an exercise looks – what is important is how it feels.

The yoga lesson ends with “savasana” – lying calmly on the mat – which is intended to bring about deep relaxation, and tranquil faces are indeed to be seen everywhere. For Fabia Müller, a Product Manager for Sonova’s Phonak brand, the yoga lesson is the highlight of the week: “It’s a valuable time-out for body, mind and spirit.” 33-year-old Müller has been practicing yoga since she was young, but only started at Sonova this month. “I’m so glad there’s a yoga class here,” she says, adding: “What Philipp does is super, it’s a really good thing to have available.” As she takes her leave, she says that she is looking forward to going into her next meeting – and indeed her whole afternoon – completely relaxed and full of energy.

The time and effort required to organize the sports groups is minimal as the classes all coordinate their bookings and activities themselves. If necessary, Sonova’s HR department will also help out staff with financial support to buy sports equipment. “Working with us should be fun and we are extremely pleased that so many people are getting involved,” says Mevina Caviezel. “In addition to the positive effects on people’s fitness and health, sports help to build a sense of solidarity.”