



Assorted observations on life, business and other games.

**Raving**perspectives

by Chris Faria

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# Fat Kid, Fat Adult, Overcoming Decades of Poor Decisions -- Part III

How organizations are helping their employees break that bad, bad cycle.

Dear Ravers,

In between workshops, about five years ago at a national tradeshow for Tribal gaming, I went to grab water at the complimentary networking break station. Not only was the table set with refreshments, but generous piles of cookies and pastries. A Native American man said to his companion something like, "Yeah, that's real smart. Just what we need is more sugar, when we all have diabetes."



That comment stopped me in my tracks. This is a REAL issue that generates a lot of talk at meetings, but when it came down to walking the talk in a very practical sense, an organization that **should've** been paying attention to the details, wasn't.

At that time, I was pretty much the ignorant white girl and didn't know what an [epidemic](#) this had become: American Indians in Southern Arizona had a 33.5 percent rate of diabetes, compared to 16.1 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives versus the national average of 9.3%. And this is just folks who are diagnosed -- over 8 million Americans are undiagnosed. One out of two Native American children born since 2000 are expected to develop type 2 diabetes, according to [NB3F](#).

In part, this man was right, a table full of sugar isn't the best snack option for anyone -- diabetes or not, over 69% of Americans are overweight! (Do you ever wonder if tourists to the U.S. have their own car "punch" game of being the first to see a skinny American?).

It sure made me think twice about my responsibility as a meeting planner, and I've changed our menus at Raving conferences since then. Frankly, the fresh veggie tray and hard-boiled eggs are the least popular; I get it. At least the choice is there. As someone who has [battled fat all my life](#), I can tell you that if I'm bound and determined to sabotage myself, I will, despite having better options right in front of me.

Have you noticed though, when you're in that "healthy zone," being around active and health-conscious folks and having healthy foods accessible makes it easier to toe the line? The camaraderie of being part of an athletic group [can be a drug](#), as much as the high from not having to lie on the bed to zip up my jeans. I'm fortunate; I can afford quality food and a workout program that I enjoy.

***But what about those folks who work in the casino industry who can only afford commodity foods, like pasta, rice and peanut butter, or can't afford personal trainers or nutritionists who could really help them make a change? What about the people who have family members or friends who don't support them? (Whaddya mean, you don't want to go out for beers and fries tonight?).***

Smart gaming companies are paying attention. They know about the connection between productivity and wellness, and many times they can fill in the gap for their employees. They might not be able to get everyone on-board, but they'll be there when the timing is right for that employee. They are trying to foster an environment that makes it fun to be healthy. And many of these companies, in addition to realizing the long-term savings of having healthier employees, do it because *it's the right thing to do*.

In [Part I of this series](#), we discussed "real food" and our American culture of food confusion and misleading marketing. In [Part II](#), we covered some of the terms and fads about food that are trending now. In this final piece, we'll hear from folks who are doing more than talking; they're taking a leadership role in wellness programs:

### **[River School Farm](#) and [Patagonia Reno](#)**

In my research, I didn't find a casino that used their own on-site garden to feed their employees (some had gardens for their retail-customer restaurants). I did find a local company here in Reno that's doing "farm-to-fork." One of the many functions of River School Farm (besides being a year-round farm and educational facility) is landscape services for businesses and residences. What makes them



different, is that they'll do edible landscapes -- they can plant and harvest, or educate businesses how to. Why not have a gorgeous landscape that provides employees with fresh food? Monique Monteverde, River School Farm's Director, said the idea is slowly catching on in Reno. "If you are going to pay a monthly landscape fee for your office, why not do something good for your employees and the environment?"

One of their clients is the Patagonia Distribution Center (outdoor clothing manufacturer), which has a huge warehouse right by the Truckee River and a couple of blocks from my house. The landscape is surrounded by native plants -- and on one side, hidden from the main road, you'll find a garden filled with fruit trees, tomatoes, eggplant, summer and winter squash, sunflowers, vegetable vines, and more (see right).



Maintained by the River School Farm (Patagonia employees are encouraged to dig in the dirt as well), their organically grown fruit and vegetables are used by Patagonia's employee café. If there's any additional produce, it's sold inexpensively to the employees. The café opened in May of 2013 and has been supplemented by produce from their on-property garden this year. The garden is too small to provide everything they need, and they hope to expand in the future.

The café, headed by Laura Rowland, Executive Chef and Kitchen Manager, told me that prior to the café opening, employees had to bring their own lunch, or travel a distance to get food -- using up their entire 30 minute lunch period. The café charges \$4.50 a pound for a healthy lunch (compared to \$8.49 per pound at Reno's Whole Foods Market). Her menu includes about 75% organic fruits and vegetables, with meat, vegetarian, dairy and gluten-free options.



Laura estimates that about 50% of the employees (which range from over 100 permanent to 500 during the pre-holiday season) utilize the café, but it's growing daily and she bets they'll hit 75% participation soon.

The café is subsidized and [follows the lead of the innovative owners](#) of Patagonia and their corporate offices in Ventura, California -- that position themselves as an environmentally and socially responsible company. Laura said many of their employees are outdoor and sports enthusiasts. Many [not only bike to work](#), but take to the trails by foot and by bike right outside the building during lunch. So, having a healthy café on-site makes total sense. Good food, for hard working and hard playing employees.

### [Barona Resort and Casino, California](#)

*Thomas Dullien, Executive Director, Human Resources and HR Development*

"Barona tried twice to institute a wellness program with two different companies. The second attempt included a reduced rate (discount) on the health insurance premium. In either case, we started with about 30% participation, dropping to 13% within 6 months. We did have an organic vegetable garden, which just supplied enough vegetables for our steakhouse restaurant, but we are purchasing organic vegetables from local producers. Our Employee Dining Room features a full buffet, as well as a grill with separate menu items. I feel the selection is great and includes many healthy foods, including fresh fruit, low-cal cereals, heart-smart items like fish, etc. The biggest problem is that we don't have restrictions as to the quantity, and we have a good number of employees who load up two plates, as well as desserts and cookies.

The most refreshing development started last year in January, when I met a younger Tribal member who grew up with obesity, and at age 17 changed his life by starting to work out and to learn about fitness training. He was able to attract other Tribal youth and started a workout program in his garage. It was named the DUNGEON. Over the following ten years, he trained street fighters in mixed martial arts, took seminars and practiced crossfit training, psychology, and healthy diets.

When he approached me about attracting potential staff members from Barona to his small gym, we spoke about the importance of the medicine wheel, the balance between our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual realm. I realized quickly that he completely understood the holistic concept behind it, even though it was more intuitive. The GM agreed that staff members, who would make a commitment for six months to participate in this program at least three times per week, would not have to pay for the classes. We anticipated about 12 to 15 employees joining. The first 'cohort' was actually 25 staff members, and within one year it has grown to 212 participants, we now have a waiting list, and it could be that we reach the 10% mark by the middle of 2014.

Weight loss is celebrated, but the amazing positive side effects are increased engagement and camaraderie, higher self-esteem and confidence, awesome mentoring relationships between already 'fit' staff members and those on their way. Most importantly, the program is self-perpetuating and now includes entire families, even though family members are paying for their participation. Many staff members are also electing to take yoga and dietary classes on their own."

### **[Pechanga Resort and Casino, CA](#)**

***Tony Chartrand, SPHR, Vice President HR/Talent Management***

"Pechanga is very active in this area. Given the health situation in this country, we almost feel that we have a responsibility to promote and encourage healthier lifestyles for our team members. We are 4,000 strong, and this is a large enough demographic that mirrors what is happening in the US in general.

Secondly, the ever-increasing, staggering cost of health care is almost forcing us to look closely at disease management and what is controllable through better lifestyle choices. In addition, the Tribe takes great pride in providing their team members with comprehensive, affordable health care for them and their families, so this is an area of priority for us on a values and cultural level.

Lastly, healthy team members have a better quality of life, are more productive, and promote better guest service for the property.

Focus on healthy living begins at hire. Every new hire must have a biometric screening. This is the beginning of a journey to a healthier lifestyle at Pechanga. The results are independently shared and a discussion around potential changes ensues. Every year at open enrollment, the screenings are offered again and once again, the 4 core areas are measured, blood pressure, BMI, glucose, and cholesterol. If they maintained or improved their scores over the previous screening, they can receive up to a 6% reduction in their health care premiums. This is a very popular incentive for folks to actually look at, measure, and make choices about their lifestyle choices.

Additionally, our Health and Wellness Committee has numerous offerings for team members, healthy living seminars, walking path and competitions, an on-site fitness facility, healthy cooking demonstrations, healthy, discounted choices with calories indicated in the TDR, salad of the week/day, group sporting events, running shoe, GNC, and club membership discounts. Our intranet posts a 'Healthy Tip of the Day.' Our initiative is branded 'Discover Wellness at Pechanga' with a graphic of a green apple and is well-recognized."

### **Marin Denning, Raving Partner, Diversity and Leadership Training**

***Enrolled Member of the Oneida Tribe of Wisconsin Indians***

"This is a huge issue, one I had to address in my first few years with the Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin. We were serving all the wrong sorts of foods at our business, community and council meetings. Donuts, cake, fry bread, even oatmeal and bacon grease for morning gatherings. It wasn't unusual to see people falling asleep after the meals and not feeling as good as they could. We knew the science was there to show that what we were doing with the meals we provided was wrong, so we changed.



Our attempt to change menus was met with lots of resistance, especially when we took fry bread off the tables. An education platform being put forward and slower changes to what we did was met with greater success. We folded the food program into behavioral health, too! The key to the program change was incremental at first. Once we got past the educational component about the link between diabetes, heart

disease, obesity, and especially impact on child health -- the changes were met with greater success and we became advocates.

When the changes we hoped for were fully implemented, people stayed longer for meetings and conversations on topics became robust. It was great to see an energized community, people at our potlucks started to bring healthier food and even swap heart-healthy recipes. It was the right thing to do, and our concentration towards a truly traditional, healthy diet was worth the first difficult steps towards providing a more holistic aspect of service to all."

### **Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Biloxi**

#### ***Tarzan Treadway II, Slot Operations Manager***

"We definitely struggle with the balance of Southern fried foods and healthy foods. Fortunately, our Management is very conscious of providing healthy alternatives for our coworkers. It's approached from a 'healthy employees are happy employees' standpoint and from a 'cost of providing insurance coverage at a lesser cost' standpoint. We also provide several incentives through the benefits program, contests that incent better health choices, and we invite health professionals to speak about specific health issues. As a result of this concerted effort, we were just recognized as a 'Fit-Friendly Worksite' by the American Heart Association for the second year." (That's Tarzan to the right at the Mississippi Spartan Sprint).



#### **Time to walk the talk? Time to help yourself or encourage someone?**

Whether these articles strike a chord because you don't like the person you see in the mirror, or you suspect the pain you have can be helped by different food choices, or if you just want more energy to do the things on your bucket list ... nothing happens just thinking about it while you're watching infomercials from the couch. Believe me, I've tried it. Several times. Doesn't work. And for all of those reasons, I keep on trying and will share my [successes](#) and failures with you.

When all else fails, remember that you can't go wrong with "real foods," and if you screw up, don't give up, just get back on track. And if you're blessed with good health and are active ... why not take a role in your company or your community? Invite folks to a 5K -- the first time is scary, but what a great motivator. Start an employee garden or one at home. Invite someone as a guest to your yoga class. Maybe they are just waiting for a "sign," and that "sign" might just be you. Why not? Your encouragement, your hand held out, just might be accepted, and change someone's life.

[Drop me a line](#) if your company is going above and beyond for its employees. I want to hear about your success stories, too. Looking to set a goal in the next couple of

months? If you'll be down at G2E this year, join me for my annual, unofficial 5K on the Strip. I took my own advice and asked Dennis, who is now 50 lbs thinner and saying "[no" to his diabetes](#), to join us to walk or to run! A friend and I are also doing the [1/2 of the Half at the Las Vegas Rock N Roll Marathon](#) that falls right before [Raving's Table Games Conference](#) in November. It's her first run ever ... **so, why don't you join us?**

All the best,



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# SAVE THE DATE

January 26-28, 2015

Raving's 17th Indian Gaming National Marketing Conference  
Harrah's Resort Southern California

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The conference, a staple for tribal casinos throughout the U.S. and Canada, encompasses two and a half days of relevant *presentations*, hands-on *workshops*, signature *networking events* and *tradeshow*. Email [Christine Faria](mailto:Christine.Faria@ravingconsulting.com), Raving's VP of Marketing, or give her a holler at 775-329-7864 if you have any questions.

Last year we SOLD OUT of exhibit space. Contact Amy Hergenrother at [amy@ravingconsulting.com](mailto:amy@ravingconsulting.com) today to reserve your booth.