Creating a Culture of Health
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Give employee wellness the attention it deserves

Healthy employees are our company’s greatest asset.” This phrase shouldn’t be a cliché. It should represent a corporate value. Employee well-being is a strategic corporate responsibility. Creating a culture of health should be part of any company’s plan for a productive, top-performing workforce.

A culture of health is more than a focus on reduction of health claims and injury. It plays an essential role in an organization’s growth and prosperity and in its ability to attract and retain talented employees. A culture of health encourages each employee to be as healthy as they can be, even if – or perhaps especially when – dealing with a chronic illness.

The State Accident Insurance Fund, or SAIF, in Salem, Oregon is an excellent example of a corporation that has consistently taken steps to build a culture of health. From early initiatives that banned smoking and added an employee health services clinic, to more recently launching a Health and Wellness Center, the efforts at SAIF continue to expand.

Through collaboration, networking, regular communications, community involvement, and wellness events, SAIF is using the essential ingredients to provide a comprehensive culture of health for their employees.

1/3 of U.S. employers with 50-100 workers offer a workplace wellness program.

More than 90% of employers with more than 50,000 workers do.

47% of employers without a wellness program plan to add one within 5 years.

23% of heavy industry companies offer wellness programs.

47% of service companies do.

Why do companies offer wellness programs?

42% increase productivity

43% reduce absenteeism

71% control healthcare costs

78% improve employee health

To see long-term benefits of corporate wellness, you need to promote a lasting culture of health in your organization.
The Benefits of Having a Well-Developed Culture of Health

Better employee retention.
Employers have discovered there is value associated between a culture of health and retaining employees by increasing morale, job satisfaction, and workplace productivity. An employer that encourages and role models a culture of health shows commitment to the wellbeing of its employees. According to the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), millennials tend to value the culture and commitment of a company to its employees, in addition to salary, when considering a job opportunity or deciding to stay or move on. Therefore, it stands to reason that efforts to make employees healthier and happier can tip the balance between good employees staying for six months, or for six years.

Less absenteeism.
An effective wellness program reduces costs associated with illness and disability. A 2010 Harvard study stated that wellness programs return three dollars in reduced absenteeism for every dollar invested.

A productive workforce.
Wellness initiatives can combat presenteeism, the practice of not working at full capacity usually due to working when ill or very distracted. A staff that is healthy – mentally and physically – performs better and is more productive.

Cost savings.
Lifestyle factors and certain behaviors contribute to costly and preventable conditions. Improved employee health through wellness programs and corporate culture that encourage healthy behaviors and habits can significantly reduce employee health care expenses.

Lower risk of illness.
A sick office is a less productive office. A virus or a bout of the flu can affect multiple employees and wipe out a lot of productivity. Health-conscious organizations have policies to encourage employees – including executives – to stay home when sick. They offer free flu vaccines to their employees, reducing the risk of sickness and disease. Some employers, such as Cummins and Intel, offer on-site clinics.
How to Create a Culture of Health

It doesn’t happen overnight; however, those who make the effort and financial commitment to launch an employee wellness program can sustain a strong culture of health – and see a long-term return on their investment. Here are some key tips for creating a culture of health:

1. **Get senior management on board.**
   Your organization’s leaders must show a commitment to promoting good health and safety. They should allocate a budget, encourage participation in wellness programs, and more importantly, actively participate themselves.

2. **Assess the health of your group and establish baselines.**
   An evidence-based health risk assessment, such as the WellSuite® IV Health Risk Assessment (HRA), can paint a picture of your workforce’s current health and provide you with actionable data to prioritize and target wellness programs. The HRA helps an employee gain information about their health status and identify areas for improvement.

3. **Support a healthy work-life balance.**
   Companies that have experimented with shorter workdays or telecommuting find that their employees’ productivity increases. Consider granting generous time off, flexible work hours, and work-from-home options that can help your employees work more effectively and not feel overworked and overstressed.

4. **Diversify Communications.**
   Let your employees know that their well-being is important. Encourage two-way conversation and invite them to share new ideas. Communicate a culture of health through regular emails, newsletters, events, health challenges and annual preventive screenings that include administering confidential health risk assessments.

   Be sure to diversify communication venues to meet employees’ needs who may be working from home or traveling. Meet the needs of different genders, ages, and ethnicities. In the Middle East, a wellness program provider uses a variety of communication methods to accommodate cultural mores and a geographically dispersed population. Communication methods include email notifications, executive videos, access to online educational materials, and on-site health and wellness workshops.
5. **Enlist Wellness Ambassadors.**
Recruit employees to help motivate and encourage others to participate in wellness activities. The employee who bikes to the office, brings his or her own healthy lunch, and uses a standing desk, sets a good example and inspires the rest of the team.

6. **Create a health-conscious environment.**
An organization that intentionally creates a health-conscious environment sends a loud message that wellness is a priority. Providing gym equipment, standing desks, healthy whole foods for snacks and meals, beautiful art on the walls, and an occasional musician in the lobby promotes wellness and is an inviting and health-promoting setting. Cleveland Clinic has classical performers in their main lobbies most days of the week as well as musical performers in residence. Intel Corporation offers their employees nutritious food options and fitness centers. Wellsource provides a fitness room, monthly lunch ‘n learns, and standing desks.

7. **Identify short- and long-term goals.**
Achieving a healthy workforce takes time and a multifaceted approach to wellness. Keep your healthy employees healthy. Targeting disease prevention efforts to at-risk employees helps intercept chronic diseases before they occur. Emphasizing healthy living nets a savings in reduced absenteeism and improved productivity. In the long-term, your healthier workforce will incur less healthcare costs. An effective culture of health incorporates all three aspects.

8. **Track data and measure results.**
If a company takes action but doesn’t know if those actions translate into improvements in health, then the efforts may be wasted. Through surveys, questionnaires and/or employee interviews, employers can determine what areas of wellness their employees are most interested in and find out the impact of activities and events held. Gathering follow-up information helps guide future activities by better understanding what is and what isn’t working for employees.

9. **Offer meaningful incentives.**
It’s important to tap into an individual’s intrinsic motivation – doing something because they enjoy it or find it challenging and exciting versus doing it for a reward. Getting input from your employees about the kind of incentives that are meaningful to them will help craft your offers and foster greater engagement in your wellness programs.
Emerging Hot Trends for Corporate Wellness Programs

Healthy eating, regular exercise, and stress management are naturally top-of-the-list topics to include in communications and events. These behaviors are addressed in the health risk assessment. What else can you include in your wellness program?

Emerging trends focus on programs and events that promote collaboration, community and a whole person perspective. Employees should not feel that they are being forced to participate in a culture of health. They should want to be an active participant.

A progressive culture of health provides a comprehensive program with components that address coping with stress and building community.

Community Service.

Organizations that reach out to their local community help to increase a wellness culture both inside and outside of the company. Giving back to the community and getting employees on board to volunteer their time for charitable organizations is good for the employee and good for business. General Mills places an emphasis of its wellness program on philanthropy – contributing to causes tied to education, the arts, and hunger and nutrition through its foundation and employee volunteer program. Wellsource employees contribute to their favorite charities via the Charity Miles app and serving on non-profit boards.

Financial Wellness.

Companies are always thinking about the bottom line. So, too, are employees in their individual lives. Employees who are stressed out about finances tend to be less engaged in their work and are more likely to make poor decisions that impact their well-being and the well-being of those around them. Helping employees understand what it means to be financially healthy can contribute to the stability of the individual and also help employees better understand the economic concerns of the company. Because money is a major source of stress for employees, companies such as Staples and Pacific Market Research are finding innovative ways to provide financial wellness services for their employees, such as through entertaining games that teach financial management skills along with on-site classes and one-on-one counseling sessions.

Mindfulness.

In a world that at times can be full of chaos and concern, mindfulness is one area that helps people to lower stress and improve interpersonal relationships. It can even lower blood pressure and improve blood sugar levels. Mindfulness is the practice of focusing attention on the present and living in the moment. A variety of mindfulness tools and techniques can help employees feel better.
Some companies provide a “quiet” room. This room typically includes a comfortable chair or couch, dimmed lights, and a no-phones-allowed policy. This creates an environment for meditation, reflection, and a quiet break.

**Creativity.**
Bringing out an individual’s creativity gives him or her license to be authentic and share or develop creative talents. Many corporate settings today offer art, music, photography and other classes to help enrich the lives of their employees and enhance right-brain thinking. Not only does this provide a positive outlet for employees, but it helps foster innovation. The Cleveland Clinic in Ohio offers weekly art classes for employees as well as for patients and the public. A company called Creativity at Work specializes in helping corporations use creative, art and design processes. Drawing, painting, storytelling, and improvisation can all be used as team building exercises and can encourage collaboration and innovation.¹⁰

**Social Support.**
Science has proven that a person who is more socially connected is a healthier person. In fact, being socially engaged can help lower a person’s risk of heart attacks and premature death. Holding social activities such as after work events at a restaurant or sponsoring workplace support groups facilitated by professionals such as an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, help employees become connected with other people in the company through common interests or needs. The staff at The Motley Fool can join a variety of employee clubs, ranging from knitting to kickball. And the folks at Zappos enjoy cross-departmental mini golf or laser tag outings.

**Collaboration.**
Who else is involved in wellness in the company’s region? Team up with other organizations, restaurants, exercise facilities and health care settings that offer wellness events, and let employees know about these activities. Start a wellness challenge with another company to see who can shed the most pounds or log the most walking steps during one month of the year. Collaboration is a great and inspiring tool for expanding and optimizing wellness efforts.

**Get Out in Nature.**
Take advantage of nearby surroundings. Encourage your employees to get out and enjoy nature. A change of pace and scenery nearby can do wonders for clearing the mind and re-framing problems. Walking meetings can improve brainstorming sessions.¹¹ Is your office located near a lake or river? How about a park? Schedule quarterly kayaking outings. Encourage employees to hike nearby trails. Have a company picnic. Plan a game of Frisbee or kickball.
Wellness Takes a Culture of Health and Action!

Wellness is not just one step, but rather a sustainable process that requires many actions on a regular basis for an individual to improve and maintain their health. Let’s face the facts. When it comes to improving health, we all need help in at least one or more lifestyle behaviors. Focusing on all of the target areas of wellness helps to maximize the potential for change.

Wellness also demands educating people about how to best optimize their health. This is where the employer can make a great and lasting difference in an employee’s life. Fostering a Culture of Health encourages employees to adopt healthy lifestyle behaviors. Reaching out to employees through a comprehensive program enables employees to find better life balance, which ultimately can translate into better work performance.

About Wellsource

For nearly four decades, Wellsource has been personalizing population health by designing innovative tools that are grounded in evidence-based medicine, making us one of the longest serving and most experienced companies in the industry. Wellsource uses the power of technology to drive informed decisions with actionable data. Health plans, employers, care and service providers, and delivery networks use our tools for predicting health risks and reducing avoidable costs. Visit www.wellsource.com to learn more.

Get started on an improved Culture of Health today! Download our list:

30 Low-Cost Ways to Promote Wellness in Your Organization

References


