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# HOW TO CREATE A CULTURE OF HEALTH THROUGH WORKPLACE WELLNESS PROGRAMS

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**Senior Thesis**

## **Introduction**

Human capital is the core of all organizations; people are imaginative and ingenious but the contributions that the employees make are, at times, overlooked. The skills and talents that employees have create the competitive advantage for the company; however, without these contributions, the company will lose its competitive edge.

To contribute to the improvement of human capital and the betterment of the workforce, creating a culture of health which focuses on improving the wellness of the employees is central. By promoting the health and well-being of the employees, the company can experience financial and non-financial benefits.

The following research demonstrates how to build a culture of health through the implementation of workplace wellness programs. It explores the history and development of wellness programs; highlights how to design and manage wellness programs; describes various forms of workplace wellness programs; and analyzes the monetary and non-monetary benefits of implementing workplace wellness programs. Additionally, the research addresses the Human Resource function throughout the creation and implementation of these strategic initiatives.

## **History and Development**

Throughout the past several decades, there has been an increased focus on developing a healthier workforce as there has been an “epidemic of ‘lifestyle diseases’ [developed] in the United States.” (1) These “lifestyle diseases” of people participating in behaviors, which can be extremely harmful to one’s life, are increasing the rates of major chronic illnesses, growing healthcare costs, and decreasing productivity (1). Additionally, while at work these diseases are increasing absenteeism and presenteeism (2).

Because of these correlations, there has been an increase in research on health promotion in the workplace to help reduce, and potentially prevent, these illnesses. Unfortunately, these “lifestyle diseases” are not simply created outside of the workplace, they can be created both inside and outside of work. Exposure to hazardous materials, long work hours or poor working conditions can “contribute to the development of chronic diseases” (3).

Workplace wellness programs are implemented as strategic policies to encourage healthy performance within the workplace and improve the overall health of employees. Promoting a culture of health through implementing wellness programs in the workplace is an efficient way to reduce these contributing factors of chronic illnesses, healthcare costs, and the rising rates of absenteeism and presenteeism.

## **Benefits/Advantages**

Katherine Baicker, professor of health economics at the School of Public Health at Harvard University; David Cutler, professor of economics at Harvard University; and Zirui Song, doctoral candidate at Harvard Medical School researched together the importance of investing in workplace wellness programs and the subsequent savings that are correlated with those

investments. In 2010, the group published “Workplace Wellness Programs Can Generate Savings” in which they “conducted a primary literature search from prior peer-reviewed meta-analyses of employee wellness programs, as well as a computerized search of MEDLINE, Lexis-Nexis, and other health and social science database” (22). Out of the sample, the group analyzed twenty-two publications looking at employee health care costs and twenty-two looking at employee absenteeism. The sample was, however, taken from large employers who typically have more resources and finances to support these types of wellness programs. The results of the study proved that “medical costs fall about \$3.27 for every dollar spent on wellness programs and absentee day costs fall by about \$2.73 for every dollar spent” (22). The research also stated other benefits to the employer, such as lower costs for replacing absent employees and the wellness programs functioning as a competitive advantage when attracting new employees (22).

The RAND Corporation performed a study focusing on the lifestyle and disease management aspects of wellness programs. Within these findings, the corporation found that the disease management component generated \$136 per member, per month. The study also valued that the overall ROI was \$1.50 for every dollar invested in the wellness program (24).

Another major benefit of wellness programs is the positive effect on retention. In a study performed by Towers Watson along with the National Business Group on Health, the organizations with successful wellness programs “report significantly lower voluntary attrition” (23).

## **Various forms of wellness programs**

Wellness programs take different forms and vary in levels of involvement depending on the company's strategies. As previously mentioned, wellness programs can act as preventative programs or incentive based to motivate employees to participate and reach goals. Some examples of the most common programs that would be fall under these categories are as follows.

Most companies choose health screenings, such as a Health Risk Assessment (HRA), option as the first active step before initiating a companywide wellness program. These screening typically measure one's weight, height, blood pressure, cholesterol, body mass index, etc. to gauge the person's overall health and fitness levels. These individual results allow the employees to begin managing their physical activity and overall health. However, an employer must be extremely cautious when utilizing an HRA to ensure that the assessment does not violate the terms of ADA, HIPPA, GINA or other applicable laws.

Nutrition education efforts are extremely common when initially beginning a wellness program. These efforts focus on providing easily accessible information on healthy habits and healthy options within the office. They emphasis topics such as obesity, salt intake or carbohydrate intake (15). According to SHRM.org "a basic wellness program should include information about the do's and don'ts of diet and nutrition. this does not require expensive equipment or health club memberships, nor does it require major lifestyle changes" (15). Nutrition education can occur when a company decides to offer healthy alternatives in the company breakroom/cafeteria or when there are postings around the office of exercise classes offered in the community.

Weight loss and weight control programs offered by an employer are on the rise. According to the CDC, obesity combines factors including genetics and behavior coupled with societal factors such as physical inactivity, food consumption, lack of education, and the way our foods are marketed. The CDC states that more than one-third of all U.S. adults are obese today. With obesity being a large issue in the United States, employers are focusing on trying to combat these statics by offering weight loss programs such as: onsite classes through weight loss programs, discounting gym memberships for employees, providing contacts to health coaches and life coaches, and creating companywide physical activity challenges for employees to compete as they try to reach goals. Other forms of weight loss programs include walk and talk meetings which are held outside the facility and promote walking while having meetings or creating walking trails around the facility to encourage employees to utilize the resources available to be active during the work day. (16) (17) (18)

Furthermore, the CDC states that roughly 36.5 million adults in the United States smoke and more than “16 million live with a smoking-related disease” (19). Having such a high number of those affected by smoking, mitigating this amount is attracting more attention by employers. Consequently, implementing a smoking cessation program is becoming more prevalent. Various forms of these programs could include implementing a smoke-free environment at the office, providing counseling options, or “eliminating employee co-payments for cessation-related expenses and providing other incentives” (18). According to the Society for Human Resource Management poll, 57% of employees offer individual counseling, 55% provide nicotine replacement therapy, and 53% offer smoking cessation medications (18).

Based off the study performed by The American Institute of Stress, “job stress is more strongly associated with health complaints than financial or family problems” (20). Stress in the workplace is leading to absenteeism, presenteeism, and various physical ailments (20). To battle these staggering issues, companies are focusing on stress reduction and stress management programs. These could include something as small as onsite meditation or quiet rooms, an onsite area dedicated to be a quiet space for reading or relaxing, or offering employee assistance programs (EAPs), which are some of the most common forms to tackle these staggering rates of stress. EAPs are “work-based intervention program designed to identify and assist employees in resolving personal problems that may be adversely affecting their performance at work” (18).

### **Successful Companies: General Electric**

General Electric is a multinational company based in Boston, Massachusetts. It is a Fortune 500 company operating in divisions such as Aviation, Transportation, Appliances, etc. The company “builds appliances, lighting, power systems and other products that help millions of homes, offices, factories and retail facilities around the world work better” (25). In addition to the various industries that GE populates, the GE is a leading company in the corporate wellness industry, as well. In an interview with the Corporate Wellness Magazine, Jason Morgan, the director of Global Health and Wellness at GE, describes the wellness program and results.

The wellness program allows employees to decide which specific program they would like to participate. Such programs include nutrition coaching, online training programs, health coaching, etc. Additionally, health cafeterias and fitness centers are provided onsite at most the locations. Mr. Morgan states that the company focuses on results beyond the ROI. GE wants to ensure that the programs are promoting happiness and satisfaction, an increase in engagement

and participation, and potentially biometric effects. However, specifically regarding the ROI, a global exercise program saved the company just shy of \$60,000.00, based off 473 participating. A unique aspect of the company's wellness program is the incorporation of gamification, creating a more easily accessible program via mobile devices. Since this was implemented, the company has seen a 30% increase in engagement rates (26).

Mr. Morgan emphasized the need for leadership in these programs from the top down; maintain that it is imperative to have senior leadership involved to ensure that there are no gaps correlating with the programs. The focus on wellness at GE has become a central focus of the company and has become integrated into the overall business plan of the company, which has proven to be beneficial especially with the success the company is experiencing (26).

### **Johnson & Johnson**

Johnson & Johnson is another multinational company which "offers the world's largest range of consumer healthcare products" (27). The company focuses on creating a culture of health in all areas. Dr. Fikry W. Isaac, J&J's executive director of Global Health Services, said "as a physician and as public health officer, I can't tell you how rewarding a journey [of creating a culture of health] has been for me. The company has developed a holistic approach to these workplace wellness programs to focus on the 'whole person' and all his/her needs which could range from 'mental well-being, to health and safety in the workplace, to preventive health screening, health education & awareness, etc.'" (28).

The program of J&J includes "an online health risk assessment, lifestyle and disease management counseling, services to promote mental health risk intervention programs; environmental changes in the workplace; and financial incentives for participation" (28). The

company provides healthy options in the cafeteria, onsite fitness centers, and discounts provided to those who choose to go to other facilities.

The results that Dr. Isaac specified were comparing the 2007 results to the 2010 results: smoking was reduced to 4% of employees; high blood pressure was reduced to 6% of employees; and high cholesterol decreased to 7% of employees (28). The company is continually adjusting the program to better fit the needs of each employee but the program has “resulted in time-adjusted savings of \$400 per employee per year and improved health status was achieved in eight high risk areas” (28). Additionally, it has been found that since the company has begun utilizing wellness programs, the company has saved over \$250 million on health care costs since 1995 and “between 2002 and 2008, the ROI was \$2.71 for every dollar spent” (28).

### **L.L. Bean**

L.L. Bean is a retailer of outdoor equipment, including shoes and clothes headquartered in Maine. The company is known for its reliable outdoor gear, but it also has an extraordinary wellness program that has been in place since the 1980's. The program is titled “Healthy Bean Program” and includes onsite fitness centers, workout classes, employee outdoor clubs, health coaching and health education programs, weight watchers program, smoking cessation programs, diabetes prevention programs, employee assistance programs, and annual biometric screenings (29). The company has incorporated healthy options in the cafeteria and even in the vending machines, implementing regulations that require that a minimum of 40% of the snacks in the machines are to be healthy (29).

Like the wellness program of General Electric, L.L. Bean focuses on the commitment from all levels of leadership. The company demonstrates that there is a strong commitment to its

employees' health and happiness. A unique aspect of the wellness program is that there are "regular employee led 'stretch breaks' on the floor of the distribution centers" (29). To measure the amount of success these programs bring, L.L. Bean utilizes "biometric, safety and benefits spending data to track improvement" (29). A major milestone for the company was the decrease of smoking rate down amongst employees to 6%, 13% lower than the state average the 19% average in Maine in the year 2013 (29).

## **Citi**

Citi is headquartered in New York and is one of the world's leading banks with nearly 200 million customers and provides financial services to individuals, large companies and governments in over 160 countries. The company has a unique history with its wellness programs in that it was "one of the first large companies to offer a paper HRA to all its employees" (33). In 2007, after over 17 years of creating and changing the wellness program, Citi created the Live Well at Citi program, which they offered to US workers. The primary focus of the program was to "support disease and illness prevention, discourage tobacco use, promote nutrition and exercise, help employees manage chronic conditions, and encourage resilience" (33).

To reach these goals, the company offered competitive programs such as 16 on-site fitness facilities, on-site classes, 10 on-site health clinics, health coaches, screenings, annual HRA's. Additionally, the company focused on offering healthy options and alternatives in the dining rooms. The program was based off incentives: completion of HRA would lead to receiving \$150, penalty of \$600 for the use of tobacco, and a \$50 reward for completing a healthy lifestyle program (33).

The company emphasizes data-based results and saw an increase in those who completed the company's health risk assessment to 85% (33). In 2012, Citi expanded the biometric screening opportunity to 13 additional locations and more than 25,000 employees received free flu shots (34). Like the success stories of the previous companies, Citi also benefits from the participation from senior leadership and sees that as being a key aspect of the success of the program. The scattered locations pose a challenge for the company, but it works to eliminate those issues through "team meetings and web portal to gather feedback, learn about employees needs and recognize and share inspiring stories" (33).

### **Case Study Summation**

Although these companies offer various wellness programs, the companies are reaping the benefits of creating a culture of health within the organization. A core aspect of the success is the involvement of higher management, diminishing the gaps between upper and lower management. In addition to incorporating higher management, these companies emphasize communication. The programs are holistic by offering a widespread amount of resources meeting the needs of all individuals, not one specific group. The companies truly demonstrate a care for their employees and have created a culture of health within the company. These companies are not staying stagnant; they are changing as the wellness industry is changing and are willing to accommodate its offerings to meet specific needs of the employees. Additionally, the companies are not simply focusing on the ROI of the programs but are looking at the value added to the company, placing an emphasis on the wellbeing of the employees and an emphasis on engagement. Although these companies may be some of the most successful companies based off annual revenue, the ways they are incorporating wellness initiatives are not all expensive and

do not all require an immense amount of funding. Rather they require strong leadership, communication, and a genuine desire for the employees to reach their goals and milestones and be healthier both in and out of the walls of the office.

### **Prevention Programs**

Some wellness programs, in terms of prevention, can be subdivided into three different categories: primary, secondary and tertiary prevention programs. These programs target ways to be proactive rather than reactive to health threats, when possible. Different wellness programs address these different stages. However, for most workplace wellness programs, it is easier to utilize primary and secondary prevention programs rather than tertiary.

Primary prevention programs focus on preventing diseases before they begin. This may be done by “preventing exposures to hazards that cause disease or injury, altering unhealthy or unsafe behaviors that can lead to disease or injury, and increasing resistance to disease or injury should exposure occur” (4). In terms of wellness programs, these may be exposing employees on the benefits of exercising, making healthy choices, etc. Examples of primary programs would be those designed to support exercise or nutrition, teaching stress and weight management, etc. (5) (8)

Secondary prevention attempts to lessen the intensity of an illness or injury which has already occurred. This could be done by addressing the issue at the beginning of its development in attempt to mitigate severity, lessen the advancement, or promoting healthy habits to return to one’s “original health” (6). Examples of secondary prevention would be routine check-ups or screenings to discover illnesses at the beginning of the development. It might also include smoking cessation programs and physical fitness courses. (7) (8) (4)

Tertiary prevention attempts to minimize the severity of sicknesses or injuries that have indefinite consequences. A program could be offered to someone with chronic arthritis or diabetes that helps to cope with the disease. (4) (6)

When creating wellness programs, having varied wellness programs is extremely useful because the programs demonstrate respect for the diversity in the workforce. Each employee has specific struggles and should not be placed in a category or wellness program that does not meet his or her specific needs. Knowing the difference among these prevention programs helps an employer know which programs are most needed in their workplace.

### **Strategies: Part I**

Rand Health, a division of the RAND Corporation performed extensive research on Workplace Wellness Programs. The study was initiated by the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. RAND Corporation is a “nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decision making through extensive research and analysis” (1). RAND utilizes research and evaluation to provide insight and answers to some of the most demanding issues. The research is funded through global donors including, but not limited to, governmental divisions, donations from various philanthropies, and RAND’s grants which “supports innovative research on issues that are crucial to the policy debate” (1).

This specific research reviewed literature, executed a national survey of employers in both the public and private sectors of organizations with a minimum of 50 employees, and performed case studies of employers with recognized wellness programs.

The research provides five factors which contribute to a successful promotion of wellness programs with an organization: communication, engagement, leadership, existing resources and evaluation (1).

Communication is central to an effective implementation. The information and rationale of utilizing a wellness program must be explicitly communicated to all members of the organization. There must not be an executive decision made to develop a program that has not been openly and clearly articulated to everyone. This communication can be face-to-face, emailed, plant wide meetings, or any tool the organizations uses as a large-scale form of communication. This communication should be regular and continuous throughout the entire process. This becomes especially imperative for larger organizations which may have a “geographically dispersed workforce” (1).

In the RAND’s research recommends making “wellness activities convenient and easily accessible for all employees” (1). If the programs are not accessible by all employees, the engagement and participation levels will decrease dramatically (1). Employees need to feel engaged and valued by the employer. This could also be done through continuous surveys or evaluations, thus providing insight and feedback.

A key driver to successful implementation and responsiveness is the participation and explicit engagement from leadership at all levels, especially of upper management. If upper management is not participating and is not actively engaged throughout the entirety of the process, others will not be as likely to participate. “Senior managers need to consider wellness an organizational priority to shift the company culture” if not, this process will begin to look like

another task assigned to lower-level employees (1). Support needs to be visible to all employees to excite the rest of the workforce.

According to RAND's analysis, "all organizations in our case studies leverage existing resources and build relationships, often with health plans, to expand offerings at little to no cost" illustrating that organizations can build off of existing means to increase wellness offerings (1).

Another area of wellness programs which is a core function is constant evaluation. Evaluation is vital for the success of these programs as it clearly demonstrates which aspects of the programs are or are not working. It also allows employees to feel more engaged because it is an opportunity for their personal views on the programs to be heard. A "continuous quality improvement attitude" is essential to measure the effectiveness of the programs, which should be within every aspect of the program (1).

### **Strategies: Part II**

Leonard L. Berry distinguished professor from Texas A&M and senior fellow of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement; Ann M. Mirabito of Baylor University; and Will B. Baun, manager of wellness programs at MD Anderson Cancer and director of International Association for Worksite Health Promotion published *What's the Hard Return on Employee Wellness Programs*. The work describes a six-pillar tactic for a successful wellness program. The researchers performed a study on 10 organizations which have had wellness programs with computable results. The organizations involved in the study included the Biltmore, Chevron, Comporium, Healthwise, H-E-B, Johnson & Johnson, Lowe's, MD Anderson Cancer Center, Nelnet, and SAS Institute.

Several similarities can be seen between this research performed and the findings of the RAND Corporation's investigation. However, unlike RAND's research, in *What's the Hard Return on Employee Wellness Programs* a key component of successful programs is alignment of the program with the company as a whole. The research states that "a wellness program should be a natural extension of a firm's identity and aspirations" (9). It is imperative to remember that these shifts and changes will take time for the employees to understand and acclimate.

Another aspect of this research is accessibility. In one of the interviews with the Director of SAS Institute, Jack Poll mentioned the importance of meeting the needs of the employees by allowing these programs to be easily accessible by all employees at all times of the day. "Convenience matters," and the study shows that having available resources is a key driver in the success of these programs (9).

Communication is vital throughout the execution, especially at the beginning of the process when employees may have the most questions and be unsure about the changes. Early on communication allows employees time to process and better understand the changes that will occur. Communication must be the central focus throughout the entire process, especially to keep employees up-to-date and aware of the amenities which they would have access. One specific type of communication will not work for all employees, therefore there needs to be several different forms. (9)

The execution of wellness programs must align with the company's culture and should be strategic in nature. The programs should be not sudden or unexpected, but rather correlate with the new tactics of the company and progress into fundamental operations of the organization. There should be a correlation between these programs and "broader organizational objectives"

to emphasize the intensity and seriousness of these programs (9). Organizational objectives are the core of the company. They illustrate the goals of the company and demonstrate where the company is going. Once wellness programs become an integral part of the company and align with the objectives, a culture of health will, too, evolve into an objective and core goal. (5)

### **Laws and Regulations**

While implementing workplace wellness programs, different federal and state laws will apply depending on the incentives and services provided to employees. Although those may vary, there are federal laws which apply to workplace wellness programs primarily focusing on forbidding discrimination.

The Americans with Disabilities Act “prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in employment, transportation, public accommodation, communications and governmental activities” (11). Regarding wellness programs, the ADA forbids employers from discriminating against those with disabilities and refusing access to those with disabilities to benefits and participation. Additionally, it obliges employers to offer reasonable accommodations to those with disabilities who choose to participate and requires that they “keep any medical information gathered as part of the wellness program confidential” (12). However, it is allowed for employers to question an employees’ health which align with voluntary programs. ADA “requires all wellness programs that obtain medical information form employees to be voluntary” (12). If a wellness program utilizes a questionnaire or some type of investigation regarding disabilities, it “must be reasonably designed to promote health or prevent disease” (12). For the program to be voluntary there must not be any requirement to participate, or any

adverse effects on an employee who chooses otherwise. Additionally, all information regarding gathering techniques and utilization of data must be stated explicitly and unambiguously (12).

The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act “prohibits discrimination in insurance and employment on the basis of genetic information” (13). However, when the wellness program is voluntary “an employer may offer a limited incentive to an employee whose spouse received health or genetic services offered by the employee and provides information about his or her current or past health status” (13) Therefore, incentives based off wellness questionnaires must not be required to be answered (1).

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act coupled with the Affordable Care Act typically prohibit charging different premiums on comparable employees. Under these acts, there are specific regulations which must be abided by if an employer is utilizing a participatory wellness program or health-contingent wellness program. Under a participatory program “either no reward is offered or none of the conditions for obtaining a reward are based on an individual satisfying a standard related to a health factor” (14). If offering a health- contingent wellness programs, which would require employees to reach a certain standard to receive a reward, there are five primary regulations and they are as follows. The opportunity to participate to receive an award must be offered at minimum once a year and the reward “must not exceed 30% of the cost of employee-only coverage under the plan and if dependents may participate, the reward must not exceed 30%of the cost of the coverage” (14). The wellness program must be “reasonably designed to promote health and prevent disease” and there must be an equal opportunity for the reward to all comparable employees (14). Lastly, the information of the program must be explicitly available (14).

## Incentives

Incentives are key to a successful wellness program and high participation. According to Jerry Noyce, representative from Health Enhancement Research Organization, “appropriately designed incentives with reasonable financial rewards have been shown to increase employee participation in completing health assessments, attending biometric screening events and enrolling in health improvement programs” (35). Incentives typically fall under three categories: participation-based, outcomes-based and progress-based. Originally, most incentives were participation-based which offered a monetary incentive for completing some task, such as an HRA. These are an efficient way to gain attention and increase participation levels. It is important to not “however, these incentives are not designed to deliver long-term behavior change” (35). Outcome-based incentives are a critical portion of the PPACA which establishes guidelines for the financial outcome-based incentives that can be offered. These incentives “reward employees for achieving a health standard based on specific health outcomes” (35). The newest approach to incentives is the progress-based incentives, which reward participants for the improvements they have made rather than forcing them to reach one specific goal before receiving any reward.

Investigating the growing rates of utilizing incentives, Stephen Miller, Certified Employee Benefit Specialist and online editor/manager for the Society for Human Resource Management analyzed the 2012 Health Care Survey. This survey evaluates almost 2,000 employers in the United States. The findings showed a growth from 37% to 59% of employers utilizing financial incentives to increase participation in wellness programs in one year (36). As for outcome-based incentives, it was recorded that in 2012 58% of employers offered “incentives for completing a

lifestyle modification program” (36). Incentives are key to a successful wellness program and increasing the rates of participation, but employers need to be aware of the restrictions especially rewarding PPACA.

### **HR’s Role**

The Human Resource team should play a vital role throughout the implementation and execution of these programs. The duties will vary depending on the intensity of the program, the number of employees, and the amount of HR employees. However, one of the core roles is providing unambiguous and explicit information to all employees, acting as the center of communication. Ensuring that all employees are fully aware of the changes that will occur and that they have full access to resources and information at all times is a core function of the HR team during this process.

Typically, the creation and execution of these programs will be categorized as an HR function. If that is the case, other responsibilities may include acting as constant advocate for the platform and promoting the program in its entirety. Additionally, the team would need to have full knowledge of the program to know which experts and specialists to hire for the programs. Since HR will focus on communication, the team should receive input, insight, and feedback from other employees and utilize that information to make improvements and changes as needed. This will also allow for the team to assess the how effective the program is and the responses of other employees.

As previously mentioned, there are several applicable laws and regulations that will be utilized throughout this process that the HR Division should have full knowledge of before

starting the process. The team should be fully aware of the terms and conditions and should keep the employees and managers informed when there is a policy change. (18)

### **Wellness Champions**

According to the research of Ron Z. Goetzel, researcher for the Department of Health and Productivity Research, utilizing a wellness champion is an effective tool. A champion is an employee “who works to improve the health and culture of the workplace in conjunction with an employer-sponsored wellness program” by informing others in the workforce of the offerings provided through the programs, the incentives, current information, etc. (10). The wellness champions should have excellent communication skills and the abilities to empathize with employees of different ages, sexes, experiences, etc. Champions must be enthusiastic about the program and have a strong willingness to share this zealously with others.

In addition to exceptional communication skills, these leaders should demonstrate leadership qualities to be activists and campaigners for these changes within the company culture and policies. The roles of these champions typically revolve around spreading awareness for these changes and increasing participation and engagement; they also act as a liaison between those making the policy changes and the others. Rather than a figure from upper management seemingly acting as the figure-head, wellness champions appear to be more visible in participation and hands-on.

Typically, these roles are fulfilled by volunteers which sets an excellent example for others in the company to participate and be more engaged. Additionally, the champions can act as a resource to gain feedback and detailed responses on the contentment that others are feeling regarding the changes.

## Going Global

The drivers for wellness programs in the United States differ from drivers in other countries and regions around the world. Looking at these strategies from a global perspective, the National Business Group on Health performed a global wellness survey and found some astounding information. The study consisted of surveying over 1200 employers in 47 countries (30).

Of the surveyed, around 54% had global wellness objectives. However, those which did have global wellness goals associated these initiatives with the company's global branding and as a differentiation tool from other companies. The results of the survey show that out of the eight regions surveyed, the United States and Latin America were the only areas which that the driver of their wellness initiatives was lack of physical activity (30).

The other regions that were surveyed specified various drivers for wellness plans and programs. Companies in Africa and the Middle East focused on morale and engagement; in Asia, they emphasized retention strategies; in Australia, workplace safety; in Canada, Europe and parts of Latin America, productivity/presenteeism (30).

When predominately in the United States, companies can focus on implementing wellness programs correlating with physical activity. However, for global companies, this research provides insight on the other factors that the company ought to focus on throughout the creation. It is imperative to know specific primary drivers for these programs and how they vary around the globe.

### **Recommendations: Readily Available Resources**

According to a study done by Deloitte, Americans, as a whole, check their phones close to 8 billion times a day. Although that is a sum of the entire population, that comes out to be roughly 46 times per day, per person (31). The research went further to state that people between 18-24 check 74 times a day, ages 25-34 check 50 times per day and 35-44 check 35 times each day (31). With that, utilizing the readily available resource of technology may be one of the easier mechanisms to reach the most number of employees. Previously, wellness programs have used paper handouts but considering the ease with which Americans have access to mobile technologies, web-based solutions could allow the employees to access the same information more easily and more frequently.

Additionally, it could eliminate serious costs associated with the programs. Online wellness programs “can provide basic nutrition and support for physical activity” (18). Utilizing online options could allow for the employees to have a more personalized, private way of creating goals and tracking success, and compare collective data. This would be a customized system that would be easily accessible at all times, it would also act as a more convenient location to track progress. The younger generation is accustomed to using apps on mobile devices for virtually everything; therefore, it may attract the younger generation to participate in the program.

### **Recommendations: ROI to VOI**

Based off the research, it appears some skeptics do not believe that the return on investment is high enough considering the time and money that is required when creating and implementing these programs. However, it is recommended to look at other areas rather than

focusing solely on the ROI. From a financial standpoint, the savings speak for themselves, however, the benefits of such programs go far beyond the monetary savings.

The value of investment, or VOI, goes far beyond just the ROI. VOI goes far beyond monetary rewards and measures other aspects of the effectiveness of the program. Yes, the VOI can account for the reduction of costs spent on health care, but it goes beyond that. VOI can examine more closely the value added to the company through the reduction in absenteeism or presenteeism and con notate increase of employee morale or productivity and job satisfaction that employees experience as a result of these programs.

This creates a more holistic approach because the employees are focusing more on the employer and his/her well-being. It is possible that there will not be massive financial savings through these programs, but if there are more engaged employees who are more productive or are experiencing less stress, the employer is creating an energized workforce and ultimately a competitive advantage.

Through these programs, an employer ultimate makes the wellbeing of the employers a central focus of the company. It becomes an objective of the company to care for their employees. The metrics should shift from strictly focusing on ROI to focusing on VOI. Employers can receive raw data through engagement surveys; one-to-ones with management of the effectiveness of the programs and receiving direct feedback from the employees on ways to enhance the programs; data reviewing productivity levels; and reports on absenteeism.

Employers should divert attention from ROI and focus on the VOI that wellness programs can bring. As Jim Purcell, former CEO of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Rhode Island stated, “when done right, workplace wellness offers both near and long-term financial and competitive returns

and provides an alternative to the toxic, zero-sum game of reducing health coverage and increasing employee insurance costs. This is an opportunity that cannot be missed” (32).

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