

Seven Steps to Creating value – Driven

Work place Wellness initiatives

Research shows that wellness initiatives may provide a financial benefit for companies that are dealing with costly healthcare expenses. Common health issues such as high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, obesity and diabetes are often viewed as low- hanging fruit that can be addressed through corporate wellness initiatives.

The financial impacts of an employee who suffers a heart attack can cost a company thousand of dollars in insurance costs, not to mention the ramifications of temporarily or permanently replacing that employees on the job.

According, to Bicker, Cutler and Song (2010) “medical costs fall by about \$3.27 for every dollar spent on wellness programs and absenteeism costs fall by about \$2.73 for every dollar spent.” Other experts tout the value based benefits of workplace wellness initiatives, focusing more on factors such as company morale and job satisfaction.

Bradley Crop., a Wisconsin-based manufacturer of industrial safety products and commercial restroom fixtures, launched its workplace wellness initiative in 2010. “Our main intention has been to raise awareness of the importance of total health and well-being.” Says Diane Rudy, Bradley’s human resources directors. “Ultimately, we want to catch health issues early so employees have the very best outcomes. In general, these efforts can also result in lower cost claims.”

As part of the initiative, the company offers on-site exercise classes, wellness clinics and fitness challenges. In addition to offering fruit and other healthy snacks as its facilities, the firm employs on onsite health coach to help guide employees to more healthful habits.

“Our employees” responses to these health initiatives have been remarkably positive,” says CEO Bryan Mullett. “Over the past few years, we’ve seen greater awareness, participation and engagement in Bradley’s wellness program, and have heard many health success stories. Without a doubt, our employees are healthier, happier and more engaged in their work and our company because of these efforts.”

Based on these experiences, following are several recommendations for developing an employee-focused and impact full wellness initiative.

1. Consider the value of wellness programs, Not Just ROI

Years ago, when companies first recognized the need for health and wellness programs, there was a key emphasis on the return on investment. Understandably, decision-makers base their companies' budgets and program on the benefit-to-cost ratio. However, a company's degree of employee wellness is not easily measured as a dollar-for-dollar expense and return. Rather, it is helpful to look at the benefits of such programming through a prism of overall value to employees and the company. Instead of return on investment, the emphasis is on the value on investments.

When Bradley launched its program nearly 10 years ago, there was an effort to tie the program to input and output. Today, while the company's financial investment is still taken into account, the key emphasis has been on the program's value. Employees and their families are the company's most valuable assets. Instead of looking only at dollars saved, it is important to consider other benchmarks such as job satisfaction and employee morale. For example, ask questions such as, Is the program engaging employees and gaining traction? Does the program help recruit and retain employees? Are there success stories? These types of indicators give feedback and momentum for improving the program.

2. Establish a Clear Employee-Focused Objective

A wellness program should be tied to a clear objective. What does the company want to accomplish long term? Companies want employees to be healthy but how will that happen? Bradley's wellness objective is to create a distinct culture of well-being throughout the company. The strategy for meeting that objective is to ensure that wellness activities and events support employees' overall lifestyle, not just physical health. Therefore, the company organized its program and activities to focus on five dimensions of well-being:

- Purpose: Liking what you do each day and being motivated to achieve goals (e.g., comprehensive and interactive performance reviews);
- Social: Having supportive relationships and love in your life (e.g., company outings such as sporting events and family picnics);
- Finance: Managing your economic life to reduce stress and increase security [e.g., meetings with 401(k) providers or fiduciaries to manage financial well-being];
- Physical: Having good health and enough energy to get things done daily (e.g., having on-site resources and experts for exercise and nutrition, participating in health challenges);

- Community: Liking where you live and work, feeling safe and having pride in your community (e.g., volunteer outreach in the community such as participating in Habitat for Humanity).

Here is an example of a multidimensional wellness activity: Throughout November, employees are invited to write down something for which they are grateful and post it on a wall of gratitude. These acknowledgements might focus on a coworker, a family member, a successful project or the weather. Not only does this help employees focus positively, it also speaks to the dimensions of purpose, social and community.

In all, broadening the scope of a wellness initiative to encompass the entire spectrum of well-being increases the depth, efficacy and overall value of a company's wellness program.

3. Engage Employees With Health Experts

To augment a company's wellness program, it is helpful to employ a dedicated on-site wellness coach. This demonstrates a company's commitment to wellness, individualizes the outreach and helps workers track successes.

Once per week, Bradley offers employees an accredited on-site wellness expert, Garrett Stangel, who focuses on educating, motivating, training and counseling employees individually or in groups. Stangel finds ways to create an easy dialogue with employees while they are at their cubicle or out on the shop floor. He asks how they are feeling, including how they are managing stress, aches and pains.

"Both office and shop positions often require repetitive movements, so I remind people to take a break, stretch, strengthen weak areas, try stress management techniques, and reset their minds and bodies," says Stangel. "Workers typically have about 90-minute attention spans. Pushing beyond that limit can make employees feel like they're burning the candle at both ends."

Stangel also participates in new employee orientations, and corporate and community events as a go-to resource for health and wellness advising.

"Periodically, Bradley checks employees' health with biometric screenings and blood pressure, height and weight measurements," Stangel says. "Helping out with these health check-ins opens the door for me to discuss health concerns right on the spot. Similarly, when Bradley employees see their doctor for an annual physical, they become eligible for a \$50 gift card. When they turn in paperwork to verify the checkup, I offer to help them keep focused on any health-related goals they may have discussed with their doctor."

4. Use Organizational Tools to Track & Motivate Employees

Many healthcare insurance plans offer monitoring and incentive programs to help companies and employees with their wellness journeys. By using online tracking platforms in which employees accumulate points for participating in activities, these online programs help drive and track employee involvement. For example, roughly 60% of Bradley employees use Go365, a wellness and rewards points program offered by Humana. The program allows users to complete and update their health assessment, set challenges and milestones, and submit verification of eligible activities (e.g., completing an exercise class or donating blood) to earn points. As users receive points for logging their health-related activities, they are able to redeem them in a virtual mall for items such as gift cards to major retailers. In Go365, users can earn rewards when completing healthy actions such as prevention activities (e.g., annual wellness visits, flu shots, bone density screenings), community events (e.g., volunteering, fitness and nutrition classes, health-related fundraising events) and verified workouts (e.g., documented exercise by trainers or coaches, electronic fitness trackers).

Offering a multidimensional program such as the five dimensions of well-being will broaden the range of trackable health activities, making the program more valuable to a wider range of employees.

5. Invite Employees to Give Input & Take Ownership

The success of health and wellness programs are tied to employees' level of engagement. One way to increase interest and participation is to organize wellness committees whose members represent the departments in which they work. Committee members regularly gather input from fellow employees to share with program organizers. This feedback keeps the activities relevant, fresh, creative and tailored to its core audience. It also helps employees take ownership of the program, which can increase engagement.

"I've been a member of the wellness committee for more than 2 years and I really appreciate being able to advocate for the company and its commitment to employee health and well-being," says product manager Valerie Bonney. "Our wellness committee helps get the word out and pique interest about upcoming events and activities, as well as success stories. E-mails, message boards, posters, flyers and announcements at meetings help keep the program top of mind."

6. Promote Benefits & Successes Internally & Externally

While it is important to highlight employees' accomplishments internally, consider sharing your program's collective successes via qualified nonprofit third-party organizations. Bradley has worked with Wellness Council of America (WELCOA) to ensure that its initiative meets industry standards. With more than 6,000 member organizations located

throughout North America, WELCOA is known for its results-oriented approach to workplace wellness.

Along with local affiliate Wellness Council of Wisconsin, WELCOA recently presented Bradley its second gold-level Well Workplace Award for its commitment to the health and well-being of its employees (Bradley, 2015). The Well Workplace Awards initiative is driven by a set of criteria outlined in WELCOA's seven benchmarks.

7. Anticipate Participation Challenges

Expect employee participation levels to fluctuate over time. Several factors can affect the level at which employees engage with the program. First, each employee is on his/her own wellness journey. While some are naturally inclined to exercise, others may be dealing with chronic pain or injuries, and lack time or motivation. An employee's availability and participation may change from one month or year to the next. Also, some departments in a company may have greater flexibility than others for taking the time to participate in wellness activities during work hours.

Companies should also recognize that some employees simply may not see the benefit of such programs. Interest and participation are ultimately a personal choice, and it is OK if some choose not to be involved. Regardless of whether an employee chooses to participate, the gesture of offering such a program demonstrates that the company cares for and values each employee.

Finally, wellness programs need not be an all-or-nothing proposition. As long as employees are aware of the opportunities and take time to engage when they need to, they are receiving valuable resources while working in a supportive culture that prioritizes well-being

References

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