

# Businesses at Crossroads

## Wellness Direction Shifts to Culture Change

By Rebecca Patrick

*“The stakes couldn’t be higher. Employers depend on healthy human capital and a high performance workforce to compete today. And health ignites performance.”*

– Dr. Joel Bender, MD

**H**ealthy employees are better employees.

As the concerted effort on workplace wellness has spread nationally and beyond over the past decade, that simple notion is starting to sink in – even for change-resistant Indiana.

Wellness may have started out as trendy or perhaps more of an attractive public relations tool for some companies, but now it’s morphing into something more.

A wellness initiative for the sake of having one won’t do; only tangible payoffs that lead to healthier employees and improved workforce productivity are worthwhile and get the job done.

Assessing where workplace wellness stands today are:

### Participants:

- **Dr. Joel Bender**, global medical director of U.S. Preventive Medicine, a prevention plan provider located in Jacksonville, Florida
- **Mike Campbell**, managing partner of health and productivity for Neace Lukens nationally and longtime president of the Wellness Council of Indiana Advisory Board
- **Jane Ellery**, director of wellness management graduate program at Ball State University’s Fisher Institute for Wellness and Gerontology
- **Ellen Whitt**, director of INShape Indiana, Gov. Mitch Daniels’ health and fitness initiative started in July 2005

### A needed shift

“The model today is leaning far more toward cultural change,” Campbell emphasizes.

“A company can have the most stellar wellness program in place, but, if in fact, your culture is unhealthy and that isn’t addressed, the paradigm is never truly going to change ... all the programs that come to the forefront are going to fall on their face.”

The good news, he points out, is more companies are beginning to get it. “I’m thrilled. They are understanding that the people who have been talking about attitude for decades were correct.”

The state of Indiana is doing its part to stress the need for deep-rooted change, Whitt says.

“A piece of what we’ve been doing – through a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – is developing a statewide obesity plan. And that really focuses on policy and environmental change.

“While INShape Indiana, at least in the early stages, was about messaging to individuals on individual behavior change, we now have a long-term plan with objectives and strategies that are built around policy change.

“(As an employer) do you have healthy eating at meetings? That’s one example of a policy to have in place. Healthy vending options within a worksite, opportunities for physical activity during the day – those sorts of things,” she explains.

Wellness, as with any workplace program, hinges upon leadership.

“They have to be able to truly conceptualize this vision of a healthy and productive company, and with that make a commitment to make this vision happen and implement it,” Bender surmises.

“They also need to be a role model. Not that they have to be a triathlon participant and things of that nature, but do the fundamentals and then promote it within their organization.”

Instilling a culture of wellness won’t happen overnight though and, more often than not, doesn’t happen without some type of expert assistance to guide a company in the right direction. Those resources – such as the Wellness Council of Indiana – are increasing in number, Campbell states.

“Jane and I, before this meeting, were talking about this very thing – to teach someone how to fish versus giving them fish. That is the new paradigm today. I think there’s great hope for what we can do because we now have industry leaders who are coming to the table slowly but surely and are really embracing that they have to pick up the ball and run with it.”

## The business case

While wellness is viewed as a “no-brainer” for certain employers, it’s still met with resistance by others – despite some powerful trends.

For his part, Bender calls it “truly a business imperative for companies to get engaged in health promotion and well-being.

“It’s driven first of all by the linkage to health care, which is driven by medical claims, pharmaceutical claims, and then the big item that corporations are beginning to focus on finally is one of productivity and human performance.”

Yet, winning over a company’s financial team, in particular, may not be easy, Bender cautions.

“It’s sometimes very, very difficult to get the financial people engaged, even when the benefits people are,” he admits. “They are focused on the return on investment, when what we ought to be talking about is return on value because that’s what this really is all about.

“We can get a return on investment down the road and show it quite adequately over time, but there are too many in the financial sector that have this concept of ‘show me the money.’ And they want to see it within six months or a year.” That timeframe, Bender adds, is often unrealistic.

Companies that are patient and understand this can be rewarded in a variety of ways. Bender references a workplace health study from a few years ago that examined 350 employers.

“Guess what happened? Those employers with highly effective health and productivity programs yielded 20% more revenue per employee, 16% higher market value and 57% higher shareholder returns.

“And guess what else? They had happier employees, healthier employees and higher performing individuals. The evidence is very clear that this is certainly the way to go,” Bender asserts.

When it comes to Indiana statistics, the need is obvious.

Whitt points to these sobering facts: “If you combine the 23% of Hoosiers who smoke with those considered overweight and/or obese, that’s 65% of the adult population – over four million individuals.”

And then there is the common health risk factor that is often the biggest trigger.

“Stress drives us to make all of the unhealthy choices that we make, and it’s well established that lifestyle and our behavior

choices drive our costs and the low quality of life and so on,” Campbell begins.

“Specifically, the number one stress factor is finance. The true high value employee assistance programs have discovered this. According to (consulting firm) Deloitte, employers which really zeroed in on that had a return on investment of 14-to-1.”

## Getting employees engaged

The trick is increasing the awareness level. Ellery notes that



**“If every CEO in the U.S. would have a heart attack and survive, that would change everything. Not wishing ill, but to really exemplify that you really care, you almost have to have some kind of experience (yourself).”**

Mike Campbell  
Neace Lukens

80% of the population doesn’t think about health and well-being “the way that those of us who work in the industry think about health and well-being. So making that shift is going to be really key in bringing in everyone.”

Since many of these people won’t decide to change or improve their lifestyles on their own, there needs to be an incentive of sorts. Campbell points to a *Harvard Business Review* study that looked at what employers did for their workers.

“The number one incentive was the belief on the part of the employee that the employer truly cares. It’s back

to the leader. Because that isn’t going to happen if that leader hasn’t really bought into this and exemplifies the fact that I really care about you. If we can get to that point on the part of all of our leaders, then I think we will achieve the maximum engagement.”

Ellery underscores the importance of an employer supporting its workforce by re-telling a situation from Chip and Dan Heath’s book, *Switch*, which highlights bright spots and building on them.

“They talk about a young child who is in school and he’s flunking all but one of his classes. They go into that one class where he’s having success to see what’s different. They find that the teacher greets him at the door and recognizes he’s there,” she describes.

“So across the next semester, they have all of his teachers do that – simply greet him at the door. And all of a sudden this student is now passing all but one of his classes.

“Employees who feel supported



**“One of the keys to success is that companies are doing wellness because their employees genuinely matter to them and they want to help them maintain their well-being – it’s not just PR.”**

Jane Ellery  
Ball State University

in the workplace are going to be more trusting, they're going to be more open, they're going to be more willing to discuss difficulties. And that's a healthy exchange in a workplace," Ellery concludes.

Beyond emotional encouragement, there is a trend to provide actual financial incentives, with the average per employee at \$350-\$600, the group reveals. "That's an additional cost over and above what employers are going to pay for assessments and screenings," Campbell offers.

These dollars are largely based on offsets to premiums, according to Bender. He also contends companies and states don't have the money to stay on the financial incentive path on a continual basis.

"Somewhere along the line you have to use the other things that we mentioned (like socialization), so you constantly have to refresh these things in order to keep people engaged."

Adds Ellery, "Sometimes, incentives are not quite designed correctly to get the long-term impact. It's good to bring people to the table, but a lot of times what's the incentive beyond the fact that your company cares about you? Once it's gone, then the behavior goes away too."

"So we really have to pull in a lot of the modern thinking and modern technology to help us think a little differently as we try to improve lives."

**"The need on a personal level is about quality of life and their families, but collectively it is about economic development and job creation – and the ability for employers to have a healthy workforce."**

*Ellen Whitt  
INShape Indiana*



### **Technology options**

One way that can be achieved is through better use of social media.

"We're looking more at the importance of it, and it's real, because why does Weight Watchers work? It's because people can socialize, can encourage one another and so forth," Bender reasons.

"The other thing that is happening in some states (like California) is the mobile applications. We're working on these at U.S. Preventive Medicine, to trigger a short, subtle message to the individual about taking medication when the medication is due to be taken, as an example.

That approach is easily transferable to the work setting.

"In the office, there are issues with office ergonomics and back problems, eye strain and so forth. Again, you could receive a subtle message that it's time to get up and just walk around the office a bit.

"Lots of other things – like coaching – can be triggered by text messaging and other things that are available. So I think particularly as more and more people are engaged with smartphones and so forth, there will truly be an opportunity for a revolution," Bender predicts.

Whitt agrees. "I love this whole idea of using technology to kind of combat some of what technology has done to us, which is tie us to our desks and have us not going one office over to talk with somebody but shooting an e-mail or texting instead.

"So I think it's great to be able to use technology to spur engagement and drive the message in a different direction."

### **Doing it right**

For companies already pursuing wellness, taking stock in what is being done is a must.

"What companies really need to look at is what they want to accomplish – why are they delivering a wellness program," Ellery explains. "Then set those benchmarks and monitor the change across time in those items.

"If what they're doing isn't changing those items, then they need to rethink: 'Is this really what we're shooting for and do we have the right approach to make that happen?'"

In Campbell's job with Neace Lukens, he creates "data dashboards" for employers; these are typically used to report to the chief executive officer, the president or the owner.

"This will reveal the moving needle on a number of the gauges that are on that dashboard. As we analyze the data, what are those things that we're going after as it relates to the numbers of chronic conditions compared to prior periods that we've tracked," Campbell states.

The reality, he continues, is that "there are a lot of companies that think they're doing wellness, but they are going to fail because



**"For years, many people have wanted to tag their company as being 'into a wellness arena' – to have the best program and all these platinum awards, but it's merely a checklist. There's no commitment to really drive the participation and engagement."**

*Dr. Joel Bender  
U.S. Preventive Medicine*

they're not really following the proper steps and procedures.

"I've seen it happen and when wellness comes back to the table again in those boardrooms, they say we tried that and it didn't work so they move on to something else."

Campbell considers this scenario a cautionary tale for those in the industry.

"We need to make sure we do things right from the beginning. That's really the purpose of the Wellness Council of Indiana – to try to get people to do it right from the start so that the programs are successful."

### Today and tomorrow

Right now, Ellery applauds what she sees. "I like what Indiana is doing ... taking it in the health and productivity realm, saying 'We don't want you to be healthy just to be healthy, but we want you to be healthy because you're a more vibrant and committed part of our workforce.'"

Still, she is mindful of the "last mile" and the work ahead.

"Sendhil Mullainathan, a behavioral economist out of Harvard, talks about the last mile problem in the U.S. He says we're really good at going the first 999 miles to find out what should work, but that last mile proves difficult because we don't know how to make it really work in the real world.

"We've got to go this last mile to make the workplace a place where people can go and work to earn a living and stay healthy and well as a result," Ellery continues.

"That's putting a lot on American employers, but it's not just employer groups – it's really everyone in a leadership capacity who can impact the health and well-being of people in their community."

Looking down the road, what are the signs to look for, the indications that the last mile hurdle has been cleared and wellness has become more woven into workplace culture?

"If we are really successful, we will have empowered people to make the right choices," Campbell remarks. "People have been engaged and it's been sustained."

Whitt will be watching the notable barometers where improvement is needed in Indiana's population: overweight and obesity levels, as well as the smoking rate.

"But I'd also like to see there be such a culture shift that not only will employers want to offer wellness programming and create a healthy work environment, but there will be employee demand for that."

#### INFORMATION LINK

**Resources:** Dr. Joel Bender, U.S. Preventive Medicine, at [www.uspreventivemedicine.com](http://www.uspreventivemedicine.com)

Mike Campbell, Neace Lukens, at (317) 595-7349

Jane Ellery, Ball State University, at (765) 285-8119

Ellen Whitt, INShape Indiana, at [www.inshapeindiana.org](http://www.inshapeindiana.org)

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### *For Additional Information:*

Contact: Debbie Sheller, Academic Program Assistant, at 1-888-WELLBSU (888-935-5278) or [dsheller@bsu.edu](mailto:dsheller@bsu.edu) or visit our website at [www.bsu.edu/wellness](http://www.bsu.edu/wellness)

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