

Let's Talk Wellness

How to Create an Effective Workplace Program

By **Chuck Gillespie**



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There are some common misconceptions about the definition of wellness. This is largely due to how the word “wellness” is used in marketing and advertising. My favorites are ads that have nothing to do with health and productivity, but claim to promote wellness. Throw in that whatever they’re trying to sell will make you rich even if you’re working just two hours a day and you have something you can’t live without! Right?

Wrong.

Some businesses and salespeople claim that implementing a wellness program is the “cure” for reducing an organization’s health care costs. That can be true if internal leadership is committed to developing a consistent and comprehensive initiative that is sustained over multiple years. But, how do you define wellness? Furthermore, how do you put together a wellness initiative?

Let’s start with a textbook definition of “wellness”:

- Merriam-Webster defines it as the quality or state of being in good health, especially as an actively sought goal (e.g., lifestyles that promote wellness).
- American Heritage® Medical Dictionary states that wellness is the condition of good physical, mental and emotional health, especially when maintained by an appropriate diet, exercise and other lifestyle modifications.
- Mosby’s Medical Dictionary calls wellness a dynamic state of health in which an individual progresses toward a higher level of functioning, achieving an optimum balance between internal and external environments.

These definitions contain words or phrases such as “state of being,” “condition,” “dynamic state of health” and “quality of life.” Indeed, wellness goes beyond biometric screenings, weight loss programs and disease management. True wellness involves behavioral changes, lifestyle adjustments and a commitment to overcoming organizational roadblocks. If carried out consistently and comprehensively, wellness initiatives can cut health care and disability costs as well as worker’s compensation expenses. Furthermore, they can increase productivity, decrease absenteeism and help you recruit and retain great employees.

Dr. Jane Ellery of the Fisher Institute for Wellness and Gerontology at Ball State University has put it simply: “Workplace wellness is workforce engagement.”

Overcoming the odds

The toughest battles that lie ahead for those seeking to deliver a sustainable wellness program are barriers, real or perceived, that exist at the office. Issues that are often cited for why a workplace wellness program will not work include the following:

- It’s too expensive to manage

- Established HR policies override a wellness program
- Related changes will cause too much disruption
- There are no metrics that support the return on investment
- There is a lack of support from upper management

The Wellness Council of Indiana has assisted many organizations across the state in overcoming these types of challenges. The key is to help business leaders understand that there are proven wellness programs that are inexpensive to launch, simple to manage and that can have a very solid impact on their bottom lines.

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Working with Hoosier companies to develop and implement successful and sustainable wellness initiatives is the main goal of the Wellness Council of Indiana. It was established in 1988 to provide knowledge, support and tools to guide companies through each phase of wellness programming.

Tools to assist

Our workplace wellness certification program offers members a workbook, a coach and a wellness hotline to help ensure they are developing a successful program. The Wellness Council will review an organization’s program and certify it based on an outcomes-based audit. It is our vision to make Indiana a model state by improving the quality of life of its employees while at the same time improving the competitiveness of its workplaces in a global economy. Our team is here to assist Indiana companies in understanding the nuances of how to initiate, sustain and grow wellness programs.

The concept of wellness is simple to understand. The implementation and management of wellness programming is where it becomes difficult, however, without solid support and a good resource center. True wellness takes years, because we are changing people’s current lifestyle – and thus their behavior. Depending on where you are in your wellness efforts, remember to stay organized, seek simple and effective initiatives, engage those who are ready, communicate to everyone and celebrate successes. It is good to be well!

INFORMATION LINK

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