

Making the Switch

Wellness Requires Special Workplace Culture

By Michael F. Campbell

(Editor's Note: Third of a series)

In the last issue of *BizVoice*®, we asked two questions. First, when I must access health care, how do I know I need to and how do I do it most cost effectively, efficiently and with the best possible outcomes? Even though we recognize that consumer driven health is not “the end all,” it does help us, along with education, to answer this initial and critical question.

We have also established that once we are in the health care system there are many drivers behind the increasing costs such as litigation, inflation, technology, legislation ... the list goes on. However, if we are truly going to have an impact, we must pose the second question: How do I keep from needing to access care?

As we have also recognized here, there is one overwhelming answer to this second inquiry – by changing our lifestyle! Our poor choices and behavior are, without question, what has eroded the health of our nation. As we previously noted, a true change in how we see this whole picture is desperately lacking. The “tunnel vision” of just focusing on health insurance costs has taken us even further away from the encompassing paradigm of health and productivity management.

What is health?

On April 7, 1948, the World Health Organization established and published a definition that has become one of the hallmarks in managed health arenas: “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Webster’s has defined health as: “The condition of being sound in body and mind; especially freedom from physical disease or pain.” I propose that wellness is far more than mere soundness of body and mind, as spiritual issues are at its very core.

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Health and wellness is multifaceted. Psychologically, our decision-making process, even in the most mundane of daily matters, is not so much based on what we know, but what we believe, and we simply come to believe what we hear most often. This view is most clearly demonstrated in the power of the media and entertainment industries that have changed the behavior of tens of millions. When using this process in the clear, steady drumbeat of a wellness strategy over a prolonged period, belief patterns are changed and lifestyle is modified.



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Setting the stage

When educated with the statistical data of tobacco usage, smokers readily admit that they know they should make a change. Well, why don't they? Even though they “know” their terrible destiny should they continue, they don't “believe” it will happen. Many have said that freedom is the right to do what you want to do. I believe true freedom to be “the power to do what you should do.”

We need to be about the business of empowering our employees to “do the right things and make the right choices.” Some may say, “Who is to tell me what the right thing is to do?” As many famous writers have said, “Herein lays the rub.” How difficult is it for an employer to establish that set of principles or core values to live by? Turning to Webster’s once again, integrity is defined as a strict adherence to a code of ethics. If you have not already established these principles or values, this may be the beginning point of your wellness culture.

Making it work

At the Wellness Council of Indiana, we recognize seven reasons wellness programs fail. Playing at wellness and a lack of planning head the list.

Such is not the case with Highsmith, Inc. of Wisconsin, a distributor of library and school products. The company has paid close attention to the many facets of wellness, including physical, mental and personal well-being. In orientation, employees attend training that focuses on such things as stress management and coping with relationships. Highsmith also conducts on-site health screenings that include spouses, provides face time with an Employee Assistance Program counselor to address emotional well-being and delivers an array of work-life benefits. As a result, the company has been able to maintain rich health care benefits without shifting costs, a low 5.4% increase in health insurance premiums from 2002 and an average employee tenure of 14 years. It is this broader spectrum of health and productivity management that will generate the desired results.

In the last two articles of this series, we will dig deeper into behavior change, the role of leadership and the vast importance of personally leading others into a culture of wellness.

INFORMATION LINK

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