

A one-size fits all wellness strategy for a diverse workforce? Does it make sense?

Gillian Goerzen, BSc(kin), BCRPA TFL/ PT

If your work force is like most, it is comprised of a wide range of ages and abilities accompanied by a diverse range of wellness needs and desires. In developing a wellness strategy, how do we meet these diverse needs with a limited wellness budget that tends to lead us towards a one-sized fits all approach?

What is the effectiveness of a “one-size fits all” approach?

All too often we speak with organizations who have tried to develop a simple program and have found themselves frustrated and confused by lackluster results. More often than not, the problem was not that the program they launched didn't have merit; just that it didn't suit the needs and desires for their unique group of employees.

When your organization started its wellness strategy, what was the intention? What were your first steps? For many organizations the strategy is initiated by a desire to promote the health and wellness of the work force in a manner that is valuable to employees and cost-effective for the organization. Usually the next step involves looking at other companies, what they're doing as well as evaluating options that suit the budget.

While the intention is clear, often times the next steps taken end up overlooking one of the key factors to the success of any program – understanding the wellness needs and desires of your unique work force.

“You can lead a horse to water, but you can't force him to drink.”

While it is admirable that so many companies are interested in contributing to the health and wellness of their employees; that effort and cost may go to waste if some consideration is not given to the needs and desires of the recipient. When the recipients vary widely in age, interests, abilities, needs and desires, programming can seem quite cumbersome. The good news is that it doesn't have to be – an effective program can be developed for any group of people; it just involves three simple steps.

STEP 1: Set your Objective, Goals, and Budget

'How can you get there if you don't know where you're going?'

Setting up your Objective(s), Goals and determining your budget are essential to the success of any program. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What is your intention for the Wellness Strategy (i.e. increased awareness, participation rates, increased retention and productivity, decreased sick time, etc.)?
- What are your goals for the program (i.e. when do you expect results, and what results are you hoping to achieve)?
- What is your budget? Consider both the employer budget and possible employee contributions through fee for service.

STEP 2: Know your work force

What are the unique needs and desires of your unique work force?

- Look at your basic statistics (average age, gender differential)
- Do a simple survey to determine the wellness interests, needs and desires of your group. Consider asking some of the following questions:
 - When would they participate in programming?
 - Are they interested in onsite or offsite programming?

- Are they interested in information based programming (ie. workshops and lunch and learns)
- If so, what type of information are they interested in?
- Are they interested in service based programming (ie. fitness classes, massage therapy, chiropractic care)?
- If so, what types of services are they interested in?
- Utilize the information you gather when developing any programming.

STEP 3: Think Outside the Box

More often than not, if the correct questions are asked, the information gathered from getting to know your work force will lead you in a clear direction. If not, think in broader scope and on a smaller scale – ie. instead of one huge program that only meets the needs of one unique group within your work force, do multiple smaller scale programs that each target different groups.

For example, if your work force is interested in onsite fitness – but in a variety of types (ex. Yoga, Pilates, Exercise Tubing, etc.). Instead of offering a 6-week Yoga class, why not offer a shorter program for each that teaches participants a simple routine they can do at home? Or if people are interested in onsite informational sessions, but with no clear direction for topic, why not hold a “round table” lunch and learn with an expert on Nutrition, Fitness and Mental Health? Each expert can offer a short 10 minute ‘lecture’ followed by 30 minutes for round table open questions and discussion.

Get creative, consider your unique team, and develop a program that meets your unique needs and desires – then celebrate your success!

Gillian Goerzen (BSc. Kin) is a registered Personal Trainer and Director of Development for LifeWorks Health Solutions. LifeWorks provides outsourced wellness solutions to corporations, resorts and residential developments of all sizes. Whether you are looking for onsite lunch and learns, workshops and team building events or comprehensive development and management of your onsite wellness facility LifeWorks Health Solutions has solutions that will work for you. Visit us online at www.lwhs.com for more information.