

Top 10 for 2010: Top Ten Ways to Create a Culture of Wellness in the Workplace

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1. Educate

Make a case for the development of a wellness program for your organization. Look for research that clearly shows the link between healthy, well employees and decreased absenteeism, increased productivity and greater job satisfaction. For members of the executive and management team the proof is often in the pudding. They will want to see the potential benefit (in numbers and figures) before they are willing to take that next step.

2. Gain Executive Support

Culture is created from the top down. Get the support of the entire executive team and upper level managers to ensure program success. This starts with Education, but is further solidified by having the Executive and Managers experience the benefits themselves. Consider offering a sample pilot program to executive team members to show results or a wellness component such as in chair massage or a fun team building exercise at the next executive meeting.

3. Have a plan

Develop your company health and wellness philosophy and intent and use it as a launching pad for your program. A good plan starts with a solid foundation. When a clear intention is driving the development of a well thought out plan the results can be incredible.

4. Practice what you preach

Make sure those seen to be organizing and managing the program are walking the talk. This starts with the leadership behind the program – generally the Human Resources person who is tasked with taking on the initiative of wellness, often off the side of their desk. Make sure as an HR Manager you are taking breaks, eating healthy and participating in any programs offered. If you're not willing to participate or can't or won't take the time away from your desk to do so, consider the message this sends.

5. Be consistent

Make sure your wellness message is clear and is followed throughout the organization. I.e. avoid preaching about eating healthy and then offering unhealthy options at work provided lunches or no healthy options in vending machines onsite. If you offer a wellness initiative, ensure employees are supported in participation.

6. Engage Employees

Gather ideas for the development of your program from your employees. This ensures the program you offer is meeting the needs of your unique group and also helps them take ownership which in turn increases participation. The involvement of employees at the grass roots of a movement will help you take great strides in encouraging other employees to become involved. A program designed in part by peers is more likely to be accepted. Consider creating a focus group or steering committee formed by employees that can assist you. In

most workplaces you will find a group of individuals interested in volunteering on such a steering committee due to the benefits they foresee from their involvement.

7. Maintain Momentum

Develop a series of smaller events that maintain interest rather than one big budget event that may not work for the whole population. One large event, while impressive, won't generally engage people on the long term. While a large event can be very exciting, a series of smaller events with varied themes along a unified intent (in line with the organizational wellness philosophy) can be extremely effective in gaining support and participation.

8. Find Feedback

Ask for feedback every step of the way – the steering committee or focus group can help this, but it is also important to ensure you're asking the general group on a regular basis as well (at least annually, but ideally more frequently). This is especially important after events or programs run to ensure the offerings are meeting the needs of the target population.

9. Review and Revise

Take the feedback you receive and act responsively on it. If a program receives less than favourable feedback, take that as an opportunity to learn more about what people are interested in. If a program or initiative is well received, look at how you can offer the same or similar programs or initiatives again.

10. Recognize and Reward

Make sure you acknowledge those who are taking positive steps towards greater health and wellness. This goes a long way to help employees feel it is not only acceptable to participate but seen as commendable to do so. Create the snowball effect of living well and the culture of wellness in your organization will follow suit!

Recommended Resources:

For information on creating a case, best practices and program ideas check out the following resources.

The Canadian Council for Health and Active Living at Work:

<http://www.cchalw.ca/english/council.aro>

Health Work and Wellness: <http://www.healthworkandwellness.com/articles/>

Health Canada: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/occup-travail/work-travail/index-eng.php>

Wellness Council of America: <http://www.welcoa.org/freeresources/>

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