

Is It Time To Rethink Your Employee Wellness Strategy?

Many traditional corporate wellness programs only recognize the physical component of health. While this approach is better than nothing, employers that only emphasize physical health are missing out on a significant opportunity to positively impact their organization. That's because this type of approach doesn't account for all of the different elements of employee wellness. And it certainly doesn't recognize all the things that affect a person's life and happiness.

The trick to a successful employee wellness program – and healthier employees – is learning how to connect all of the components of employee wellness. These components include physical, financial, emotional and social well-being. It's essential for employers and employees alike to understand how these different components of wellness influence one another. For example, if an employee is having difficulties with their financial wellness, they are most likely feeling the emotional and physical impacts of that as well. When one aspect of wellness is lacking, it's difficult for employees to feel and perform their best at work.

This is why it's a good idea for employers to re-think their traditional approach to employee wellness. Before we can dive in on how to connect these elements, it's crucial to fully understand each component of employee well-being. Let's break it down:

Physical Wellness

The physical component of wellness is what we typically think of first when we hear the words "health" or "wellness." Physical wellness is what we can see and feel, so it usually seems to be one of the most important factors of wellness. This element of wellness refers to the general health of the body, including exercise, nutrition, health habits and preventative healthcare. Being physically well means being able to maintain a healthy quality of life.

Helping employees achieve positive physical health means helping them lower their risk for chronic illness, maintain a healthy weight and prevent other issues like chronic fatigue or headaches. Supporting physical wellness in the workplace can even help increase the lifespan of employees.

Employers can incorporate the physical component of wellness into their employee wellness program through:

- Annual biometric screenings
- Annual corporate flu shot clinics
- Opportunities for physical activity at work

- Nutrition education
- Healthy office snacks
- Healthy lifestyle education

Financial Wellness

The financial side of wellness is often overlooked; which is unfortunate because it can have a significant impact on other areas of wellness if left ignored. According to an article published by UC Davis, financial wellness refers to the process of learning how to successfully manage financial expenses. Research has found that financial concerns can lead to mental and physical distress. According to one study, 58% of employers reported that financial “illness” plays a role in employee absenteeism – while 71% of employees say their top source of stress is personal finances.

Incorporating financial wellness into a workplace wellness program helps employees become better educated about their personal finances – reducing a lot of the stress associated with finances. Employees will also be able to fully concentrate on their job when they aren’t worried about personal finances.

Employers can incorporate the financial component of wellness into their employee wellness program through:

- Providing financial resources to employees
- Tuition assistance
- 401(k) education
- Finance-focused lunch-and-learn sessions

Emotional Wellness

Emotional wellness is sometimes a bit trickier to discuss in a workplace setting, but it’s crucial that employers do. Emotional wellness refers to being aware and in touch with one’s emotions, thoughts and feelings. Positive emotional wellness helps support a healthy mental state and well-being. This includes stress management, emotional intelligence and positive mental health habits (like meditation or mindfulness). Without positive emotional well-being, employees aren’t able to perform or feel their best at work.

Employers can incorporate the emotional component of wellness into their employee wellness program through:

- Onsite meditation programs
- Group deep-breathing exercises
- Mental health days
- Stress management programs
- Emotional/mental health education and resources

Social Wellness

Social wellness is another commonly overlooked aspect of employee wellness. More and more employers are becoming increasingly aware of the negative consequences of loneliness in the workplace. Strong work relationships and opportunities for social connection in the workplace are essential for employee job satisfaction, happiness and overall well-being. In fact, lonely employees are much more likely to feel disconnected from their jobs, which can lead to lower work performance.

Employers can incorporate the social component of wellness into their employee wellness program through:

- Team outings and activities
- Book clubs
- Work celebrations
- Healthy potlucks
- Wellness challenges
- Creating social areas in the office

Moving the Needle: How to Connect the Components of Employee Well-being

Understanding each component of employee well-being is only the first step in the process. In order to help employees achieve optimal well-being in the workplace, employers must learn how to connect all of the components of wellness. Fortunately, workplace wellness programs provide employers the opportunity to do just that. Here's

how employers can shift their employee wellness strategy to connect all the elements of employee well-being:

Take a holistic approach. To be successful, workplace wellness programs must take a holistic approach to wellness. This means your program needs to recognize all areas of your employees' health and well-being, including physical, financial, emotional and social wellness. Be sure to provide education and resources that cover all aspects of health and wellness. Consider hosting a few lunch-and-learn sessions throughout the year that cover different components of employee wellness.

Provide flexibility in the program. Employee wellness is never a one-size-fits-all approach – especially when it comes to connecting all of the components of wellness. Every employee is on their own personal journey of wellness and at different levels. This is why it's important for employers to ensure that their workplace wellness programs are flexible. Employees should be able to choose which types of wellness activities and initiatives to participate in based off of their own wellness needs and interests. Give employees the opportunity to choose between a variety of activities and health coaching opportunities.

Create connected wellness activities. Another way to connect the different components of wellness in your workplace wellness program is to create wellness activities and challenges that grow off of one another. Consider creating a series of activities, educational events or challenges for each wellness component and have them build off of one another. For example, one wellness activity could combine stress relief practices with financial wellness education.

Ask employees. Do you know which areas of wellness your employees are most interested in? You should. A successful wellness program that encompasses the different areas of health should be based off of employees' goals, interests and opportunities for improvement. Without knowing these things about your employees, you can't possibly gauge the correct way to connect all of the components of employee well-being. Take the time to assess the health status of your workforce along with employees' individual wellness goals. Discover which components of wellness your employees need the most help with, and leverage the areas of wellness that employees feel most positive about.

Workplace wellness programs are about more than your employees' diets and their health screening results. While both of these factors are important, neither your wellness program nor your employees will thrive from concentrating on only one or two areas of well-being. Take the time to realign your approach to employee wellness so that it connects all of the important areas of health.

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