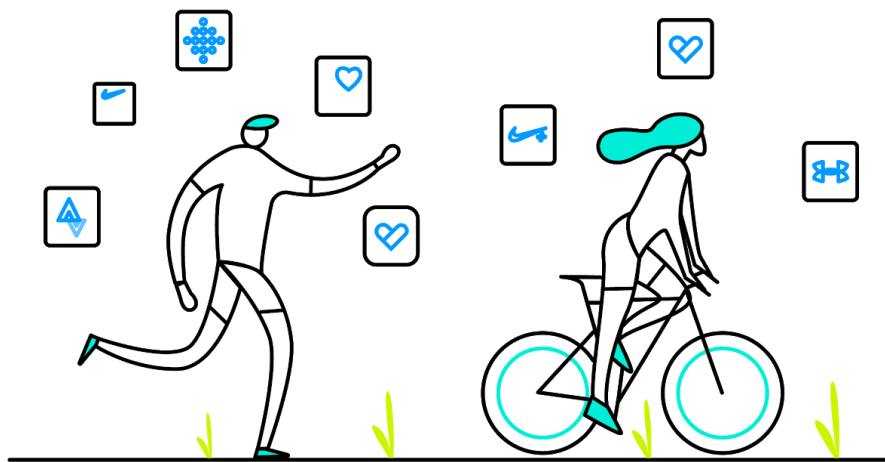


Secrets to a Happy, Healthy and Effective Workforce



Healthcare reform has been a subject widely debated. It has transformed industries, and motivated people to take steps towards better health on a personal level. It's no wonder that savvy organisations now recognise good health as a business imperative—it transforms employee well-being, and has a significant impact on the bottom line.

The connection between wellness, workforce effectiveness, and organisational health is undeniable. And nowadays, it has a considerable influence on the development of new strategies aimed at offering more attractive and beneficial employment deals between employees and organisations.

Regardless of your employee activity, health and wellness strategy, there is one fundamental component that is essential to ensure your efforts are successful:

Technology

Without specific technology to support the exposure, roll out, management and tracking of your program, your initiative will struggle, and is more likely to fail in the long run.

The right technology helps you automate the process; it:

- ensures immediate exposure and fast roll out to all parties
- helps manage all aspects of the program
- measures result to encourage engagement
- integrates the program with your company goals and mission
- promotes healthy competition between departments and branches
- identifies progress at any given time
- measures reward process on an individual and group level
- provides regular reporting to assess engagement
- encourages ambassadors and program champions to help drive the program
- builds community
- motivates candidates towards attaining goals
- reinforces the health and wellness value of the program
- helps make the program fun and inviting

The Fitlink App and software solution we discuss later in this paper delivers all of the above and is the best technology available on the market today.

So how do you create an evidence-based health promotion program that does work? And what can employers do to avoid common pitfalls that lead to ineffective and, in worse case scenarios, harmful initiatives?

To tackle these questions, in 2016 Harvard Business School's respective organisations (the Transamerica Center for Health Studies and the Institute for Health and Productivity Studies at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health) prepared a report,

"From Evidence to Practice: Workplace Wellness that Works."

It offers practical advice to employers, large and small, based on the latest research on workplace programs, expert advice from practitioners and candid interviews with business leaders.

The following is an extract:

One of the biggest lessons we learned in the process of creating the report is one-time events masquerading as health promotion programs – that is, activities not integrated into a comprehensive workplace health promotion strategy – are likely to fail. And there are five common ways these solitary initiatives tend to pop up in companies.

Administering health risk assessments only

Health assessments typically involve asking employees questions about modifiable risks, such as smoking behaviour, physical inactivity, poor diet, and high-stress levels. Oftentimes, these surveys are coupled with biometric screenings of blood pressure, cholesterol, height/weight, and blood glucose levels. But providing feedback reports that remind employees that smoking, not exercising, or being overweight is unhealthy does not motivate change unless workers are given the tools and resources to actually change and track their behaviours.

Undoing decades of poor health habits won't be achieved by asking employees to complete a 15-minute questionnaire. And for otherwise healthy employees, frequent biometric screening is often unnecessary, and from a clinical standpoint may do more harm than good because follow-up treatments can be unnecessary and costly.

Paying people to change their habits

While financial incentive programs are popular, they may not achieve long-term behaviour change; instead, they may lead to resentment and even rebellion among workers. This is because many traditional incentive programs are grounded on the assumption that people will behave in certain rational ways if paid to do so.

Behavioural economics tells us otherwise: Sometimes people do things that are irrational and even counter to their best interests. Individuals may not focus on long-term benefits of a given action when a short-term reward (for example smoking a cigarette, consuming a large pizza, or spending hours watching television) is more appealing.

While there is some evidence that incentives work in specific instances for a small subset of workers, there is little research on the use of financial incentives in achieving long-term lifestyle changes like losing weight and not regaining it.

Sending people to your health plan's website

Surprisingly (at least to us), many employers think they've offered a wellness program if they direct their employees to a website made available by their insurer. These under-the-radar programs do not improve population health unless they are part of a broader comprehensive health promotion program that offers many ways to become engaged.

Introducing short-term campaigns

Biggest Loser-themed events or pedometer challenges are random acts of wellness and are not very effective. In fact, they may even do more harm than good by promoting quick fixes as opposed to long-term progress.

Hiring a vendor to "fix" unhealthy employees

Employers sometimes hire outsiders and call it a day. Worse yet, they'll sometimes hire different vendors to address different issues – lifestyle coaches, employee assistance counsellors, case and disease management vendors, nurse lines, occupational health and safety experts, workers' compensation specialists, disability managers, organisational development consultants, you name it.

When hired independently, these vendors often work in silos, which can result in overlapping or duplicated work. In addition, relying on outside entities to attend to organizational needs may not get at the root of a systematic problem.

So what does work?

We've identified five approaches that, while comparatively difficult, can actually change the health and lives of employees for the better.

Leadership commitment and support

A successful health promotion program starts with a commitment from company leaders, and its continued success depends on ongoing support at all levels of the organisation. In particular, leaders at companies with successful programs establish a healthy work environment by integrating health into the organization's overall vision and purpose.

At Lincoln Industries, a manufacturer and distributor of trucking accessories, promoting workers' health and well-being is embedded in the company's core mission and values. Senior leaders not only speak of its importance to the organisation's success, but they also lead by example.

Building a culture of health

Healthy company culture is built intentionally. It is first and foremost about creating a way of life in the workplace that integrates a total health model into every aspect of business practice, from company policies to everyday work activities. By "total health" we mean a culture that's supportive of career, emotional, financial, physical and social well-being – not just an occasional road race.

Examples include offering flexible work schedules, giving workers latitude in decision-making, setting reasonable health goals, providing social support, enforcing health-promoting policies and establishing a healthy physical environment (healthy food offerings, staircases instead of elevators, walking trails in and outside buildings and treadmill workstations).

Asking for help

A workplace health promotion program cannot be imposed on workers as yet another management cost-containment initiative. Boosting engagement in wellness can only be achieved when workers own the program, understand how they and the company benefit and are given a meaningful voice in its ongoing operation.

There are a few simple ways to start doing this. The most common approach is to conduct regular surveys or focus groups to determine which aspects of health and wellness are important to employees, and which initiatives are not a good use of time.

Honest Tea discovered that employees were not interested in yoga sessions offered by the company and instead began a series of vigorous workouts that many of its younger workers wanted. Now participation exceeds 50% since this change and has helped workers become more actively engaged in the company's wellness program.

Another approach is creating and supporting wellness committees. These groups of employees can be given a budget to come up with initiatives supported by their co-workers. Lastly, it may also be worth involving spouses or other family members who can help build a broader web of social support.

Spreading the word

Strategic communication leads to greater engagement in employee wellness programs. This boils down to getting clear messages out to workers: this is what the program entails, here is how it works, here's what's in

it for you, and here are ways to get involved. This can help overcome some of the top barriers to program participation and success: lack of awareness, lack of interest and suspicions about employers' motivations.

These communications must be frequent, varied in content, multi-channel, and tailored to the target audience so that it doesn't fade into background noise.

For example, USAA describes its communications with workers as relentless and surround sound. Wherever employees turn, they are reminded that the company cares about their health and wants to support their efforts. The messages are clear – this program is there to serve you, your family and our customers, who rely on you to be positive, healthy and performing at a high level.

Offering smart incentives

As we've already noted, simply paying people to change life-long habits may not work. However, there is strong evidence that proper incentives drive participation rates, keep employees engaged and motivated to begin efforts to achieve self-determined health goals.

The challenge is to migrate employees from simply participating for a reward (external incentive) to a place where the new behaviour or habit is sufficiently satisfying and worth maintaining (internal incentive), such as taking a walk daily while listening to music or a favourite podcast.

At NextJump, teams participate in a weekly Fitness Challenge where virtual cash rewards for the winning teams are coupled with bragging rights, creating camaraderie and social cohesion among workers.

The company has found that motivating employees to fit in a workout during the workday gives them more productive energy and is helping drive better performance. Employees feel good, are happier, establish close partnerships with their office mates, and at the end of the day find work fun and personally rewarding.



Measuring the right things

Program evaluation is critical to maintaining accountability for a wellness program. To do this well, develop an evaluation plan at the start of a program so that useful baseline data collection can occur and be monitored over time.

So what should you measure? There are generally two answers: return on investment (ROI) and value of investment (VOI). ROI in this context is generally limited to examining the tangible benefits of a program, such as a reduction in medical costs or absenteeism. Fortunately, a robust scientific literature review supports the conclusion that well-designed and well-executed programs can produce a positive ROI along with significant improvements in population health.

Johnson & Johnson, for example, has published dozens of studies in academic journals over the past three decades showing its wellness and prevention programs have improved employees' health, saved the

company millions of dollars and enhanced workers' productivity – something they could only conclude after the smart collection and analysis of data.

In our view, ROI in isolation fails to capture the full benefit of workplace health promotion. VOI calculations, on the other hand, allow employers to examine the broader impact of programs and their impact on core priorities for their organization, which may include improved employee morale, talent attraction and retention, enhanced company loyalty and heightened customer loyalty.

There are a lot of misconceptions about wellness programs out there. As a result, many leaders pick and choose options fairly blindly, doing their employees and their company a disservice. In the end, you don't necessarily need the latest wearable or a new vendor. To achieve very real health improvement at the workplace, employers should first understand what the evidence says about what works and then weave together individual health promotion programs with organisational change interventions that build on and support healthy company culture. This isn't always easy. But the rewards can be huge, both for your company and for your employees for years to come.

Let's consider two critical outcomes of a highly effective health and productivity programs and practices

Improved Workforce Health

Improving workforce health and lifestyle behaviours lowers medical and disability claims and reduces unplanned sickness, absence, and lost productivity.

Selection of benefits listed in Healthy People = Healthy Profits article.

Emphasize Workforce Effectiveness

An effective health and productivity strategy invests in a comprehensive set of programs that spans the entire health continuum. But the recipe for a successful health and productivity strategy involves much more than having health programs in place.

The most effective health and productivity strategies extend beyond physical and mental health to encompass the work environment, culture, and interpersonal relationships that connect employees to the mission and goals of the organisation.

Strategies that create a compelling, enterprise-wide employment deal through the organisation's reward structure, leadership, and communication program cultivate a highly engaged and effective workforce.

Recent research points to a consistent relationship between high employee engagement and strong buy-in for employer initiatives promoting a healthy workplace environment.

Is your Current Program Falling Short? What to Do About It

Despite the evidence supporting the potential employee and employer benefits of improving workforce health and lifestyle behaviours, many employers are falling short in these areas. For instance, in the U.S., half of the employers participating in a Staying@ Work Survey say they offer various employee programs but do not have formally articulated health and productivity strategies.

Only 30 per cent, however, report having effectively communicated a strategy and accompanying value proposition.

Globally, roughly half of survey respondents in each country indicate that, while they offer various employee programs, they do not have formally articulated health and productivity strategy aligned to business

priorities. In fact, only 10 percent to 15 percent of organisations in each market have an articulated health and wellness strategy with stated objectives and goals.

However, most employers recognise the importance of capturing this missed opportunity and the key theme echoed across all markets is the need to create a workplace culture of health.

The most important actions fall into two categories: improving employee engagement in wellness programs and upgrading the behaviours and actions of managers and executive leaders.

To develop an effective health and productivity strategy that will drive such a culture, senior leaders and HR staff must understand and address the challenges they face on their journey.

HR plays a central role in the development and management of initiatives that drive wellness engagement and improve leader and manager effectiveness.



Improving Wellness Engagement

Employers striving to develop and implement a coherent health and wellness strategy should start by understanding what employees value. Because health and well-being is a personal issue, many organisations use employee opinion surveys and consumer marketing techniques to segment their employee population to better understand the needs, preferences, and values of different employee groups.

Using this knowledge, they can then establish program strategies and priorities, implement different program elements, measure their progress, and modify program elements based on those results to drive sustainable change.

What are some specific tactics that employers can use to improve participation in health and productivity programs? Employers with leading health and productivity programs in the U.S. look for ways to connect with employees in the workplace by sponsoring competitions between employee groups and worksites as well as tapping into the emerging social media by sponsoring affinity groups and promoting the use of mobile apps to complement health and wellness programs.

Incentives can also play an important role in motivating employees to participate in these initiatives. Globally, more than 50 per cent of employees report incentives would encourage them to participate in an employer-sponsored activity. Financial incentives to encourage healthy behaviours are used primarily in the U.S. But there is a growing recognition that external incentives may not be enough. Consequently, some organizations are shifting their focus to more intrinsic values of health and wellness.

It is also critical for employers to communicate their health and wellness strategy using consistent messaging via a combination of high-touch (e.g., in-person meetings) and high-tech (e.g., social media apps, web tactics). They should target their communications to a segment of “persuadable” employees. This

segment may be sceptical about the initiatives offered but can be persuaded if compelling reasons are offered.

Overcoming Employee Resistance

Employees have different attitudes about their employer's role in their health and well-being. Targeting employees that are more receptive to employer involvement will lead to better outcomes. To help employers better understand their employees, Towers Watson identified three types of employees based on their attitudes to employer-sponsored health and wellness initiatives as reported in our Global Benefits Attitude Survey.

- **Onboard.** These employees support the role of the employer in encouraging health and willingly participate in employer initiatives (globally 25 percent of employee populations).
- **Persuadable.** Employees in this group are sceptical about the well-being initiatives offered but can be persuaded given suitable circumstances (56 per cent of all employees).
- **Resistant.** These employees are not supportive of employers having a role in their health and well-being (19 percent of employees).

“On-board” employees are twice as likely to participate in their company's wellness programs, 50 per cent more likely to have a healthy BMI, and report nearly two fewer lost workdays throughout the year. Moreover, they are twice as likely to be highly engaged as employees who are resistant to their employer's involvement in their health.

Employers must build trust with their employees to overcome the most common workplace stressors and to connect on personal issues such as health and lifestyles. These are critical factors to cultivating an environment that can motivate employees to embrace and sustain good health habits. But it's important to note that there is more than one path to building a stronger relationship with employees. In fact, the health and well-being initiatives may be the key factor that connects some employees—including the more health-conscious employees—to the mission, vision, and direction of the organisation.

Regardless, these foundational elements will help employers build a culture of health and well-being in which engagement in these initiatives is not just a narrow “health” issue. Rather, the impact of this health culture can extend to broader worker engagement in the company.

Strengthening Executive Leader and Manager Effectiveness

Multiple research efforts highlight the need to improve the role of executive leaders and managers in driving health and productivity initiatives. According to the Towers Watson 2014

Global Workforce Study, only 45 percent of employees say that senior leadership is sincerely interested in employee well-being.

Even more disturbing is the finding from the Staying@Work Survey that reveals senior leader support is a leading obstacle to changing employee health behaviour in many countries, including China, Brazil, Canada, and the U.S.

Reinforcing the urgency of this situation, Towers Watson's 2013/2014 Global Benefits Attitude Survey indicates that, while employees are receptive to employers taking an active role in supporting their health and well-being, they do not perceive senior leaders to be supportive of a healthy work environment. Moreover, fewer than half of employees say that their managers are actively encouraged to support the health and well-being of their direct reports.

Effective executives are committed to an organisation's strategic priorities and model its values and culture. From the CEO on down, they prioritise the development of a culture of health and reinforce those programs that deliver strategic value to the organisation. And to build a foundation of trust with their employees, leaders model the behaviours they want from employees: They get themselves in shape; they participate in wellness challenges; they get flu shots.

Our research shows that inspiring and motivating employees is the most important driver of leadership effectiveness. Given that trust and confidence in senior leaders is a key driver of employee retention, leadership support for health and productivity efforts and the resulting bond of trust between leaders and employees will help give employees a reason to stay with their company.

Like effective executives, high-performing managers model a healthy lifestyle. In addition, they provide face-to-face communication using consistent messaging about the value that health and productivity initiatives deliver to employees.

Managers also help drive program engagement. More than half of employees (54 per cent) say that the best managers help remove obstacles to success, a key driver of enablement and sustainable engagement. In the context of wellness programs, this may involve clarifying program goals and objectives, and providing employees with the tools to track progress and communicate success. Effective managers also drive sustainable engagement in these programs by ensuring employees have a supportive environment that energises them to participate and sustains them through the required program activities.



The Role of HR

HR plays a critical role in the design, execution, and ongoing management of health and productivity initiatives. To build a culture of health, HR executives begin by enlisting the support of senior leadership to make health a top priority. They use data and analytics to better understand the employee population, including demographics, drug utilisation, absence/productivity statistics, and engagement levels. This information is then used to develop programs focused on wellness, prevention, and managing illness.

At the same time, HR must promote financial well-being, which reduces stress and supports a culture of health. This involves ensuring the baseline competitiveness of both compensation and benefits, and establishing a clear line of sight between employee performance and pay by differentiating salary and bonus awards based on performance. It is also important to periodically assess employee preferences and adjust the total rewards package accordingly.

To be sure, this is not a simple or easy set of tasks. Building a healthy workplace environment is a multifaceted challenge where there is no silver bullet solution. It requires continuous time and attention where the activities, programs and even your strategy evolve with the organization.



We observe, however, that few investments organisations can make will generate a higher return on investment. From our perspective, this makes the investment in employee health and wellness a prudent strategic initiative, as well as the right thing to do.

Using Technology to Promote, Drive and Manage Your Activity, Health and Wellness Program

As mentioned earlier, without specific technology to support your program exposure, roll out, management and tracking, then any initiative will struggle and is more likely to stall or even fail in the long term.

Technology helps automate the process and:

- ensures immediate exposure and fast roll out to all parties
- helps manage all aspects of the program,
- measures result to encourage engagement
- integrates the program with your company goals and mission
- promotes healthy competition between departments and branches
- identifies progress at any given time
- measures reward process on an individual and group level
- provides regular reporting to assess engagement
- encourages ambassadors and program champions to help drive the program
- builds community
- motivates candidates towards attaining goals
- reinforces the health and wellness value of the program
- helps make the program fun and inviting

The Fitlink app and software solution delivers all of the above and is the best technology available on the market today.

Conclusion

Without a doubt, healthy people = healthy profits

It's clear if you do not currently have an effective activity, health and wellness program OR if the one you do have is not working as well as you want then you need to:

- recognise the need to create a workplace culture of health
- evaluate the technology to support and manage your program
- formally articulate your health and productivity strategy aligned to business priorities, with stated objectives and goals
- effectively communicate your strategy and accompanying value proposition
- upgrade the behaviours and actions of managers and executive leaders
- ensure senior leaders and HR staff are heavily involved and understand and address the challenges they face on their journey



FITLINK

- improve employee engagement in wellness programs
- recognise that HR plays a central role in the development and management of initiatives that drive wellness engagement and improve leader and manager effectiveness

The program you implement program needs to:

- promote company-wide exposure and fast roll out to all parties
- define how to manage all aspects of the program
- easily measure results to encourage engagement
- integrate with your company goals and mission
- create healthy competition between departments and branches
- be able to identify progress at any given time
- measure your reward process on an individual and group level
- provide regular reporting to assess engagement
- encourage ambassadors and program champions to help drive the program
- build community and individual interaction
- motivate candidates towards attaining goals
- reinforce the health and wellness value of the program
- be fun and inviting

Fitlink has developed the Fitlink app and software solution to help you seamlessly integrate your activity, health and wellness program with your company goals and mission, and can support organisations of any size.

For an initial discussion to evaluate how Fitlink can help your business please visit fitlinkapp.com or email hello@fitlinkapp.com.

