

Workplace Wellness Benefits: Healthy Minds For Healthy Returns



Now that many businesses are calling employees back into the office, at least part-time, it's likely that many CFOs aren't mourning the loss of virtual happy hours and trivia games.

But, instead of being focused on the fact that everyone can get back to productive work in a face-to-face environment, data shows that many businesses should keep those remote social traditions going since they play such a role in workplace wellness.

Investing in employee wellness not only helps to boost well-being, but also helps retain the productivity achieved during the pandemic. CFOs listened to their team during the pandemic to find out what their teams needed to remain productive – and keeping some of those measures in place may just be what keeps businesses thriving in a post-pandemic landscape.

Employee well-being is a critical part of what CFOs must focus on now, as businesses bring back a workforce that demands focus on health and safety (both mental and physical).

With as many as ¼ of American workers looking to switch to jobs that better support their overall well-being, business leaders must quickly rebuild their teams and reshape their culture for the current economy. It's no secret that we'll feel the effects of the pandemic across the global economy for years, even decades to come.

Taking action now may make all the difference in an organization's ability to weather the storm.

When it comes to workplace wellness benefits, many organizations have found that their traditional approaches (such as offering free or discounted gym memberships) have failed.

For instance, many employee wellness programs provide a gym discount to promote physical activity. But for the average employee with health risks or some health conditions, adding physical activity (even with rewards) may not be possible.

And there's a good reason for that. While helpful for some, that type of initiative only addressed general issues. It ignores the fact that today's workforce requires a more holistic approach to give employees what they need.

In the past, working long hours was considered a badge of honor because it indicated that you were dedicated to your position and willing to work hard. But as culture shifts, people now realize you can still work hard and be dedicated without working over time.

So what you can do to foster workplace wellness benefits within your organization? Offer workplace wellness benefits that promote physical health, but also mental health, freedom, and flexibility.

Identify Behaviors to Reward

Typically, employees get recruited based on their past successes, whether individually or as part of a team effort. Instead, focus on rewarding skills and behaviors that foster workplace connections.

Work with HR to adjust hiring practices and screen new recruits from team-building skills. Re-evaluate current reward systems so that you reward employees

for creativity, empathy, and innovation.

If you already have some kind of workplace wellness program in place, take a look at what it promotes - and ask employees for their input. Find out what's stopping them from participating. Ask how you can improve it.

Consider gamification to help build a reward system. An easy way to do this is to allow each staff member to claim tasks and receive a point value for each of those tasks once completed. When a certain amount of points have been amassed, allow the employees to redeem the points for rewards such as a gift card for a meal, some extra PTO added to their account or company-paid continuing education.

Work to Build More Trust and Psychological Safety

Research shows that only about half of full-time workers say they have a lot of trust in their fellow coworkers - those who work alongside or above them. By building trust among team members, you build loyalty through a sense of purpose.

You can also foster innovation throughout the entire organization, which could propel you past the competition.

When team members trust each other, they are more likely, to be honest, respectful, and accountable for their actions and words. That results in a workforce that focuses their energy on the tasks they need to accomplish, rather than covering up their own mistakes.

You'll have greater employee retention and less absenteeism.

As you build a corporate wellness program, go beyond providing health insurance and encouraging a healthy lifestyle with healthy snacks in the break room. Wellness activities also include practicing mindfulness and meditation, among other things.

People Over Systems

In the past, corporate culture has been built on the assumption that people work best when they stick to a system and work within the confines of the system to accomplish a series of tasks in a set particular order.

That approach doesn't create the environment your team needs to be innovative - and innovation is what you need to stay on top.

By focusing less on the systematic approach to tasks and encouraging employees to act mindfully with intent, they can learn more about the various systems that affect their work - not just the organizational, but the technological, cultural, and personal. Ideally, you'll give your team the freedom to modify those systems to better serve themselves as well as the business.

Examine the Established Routines and Hierarchy

Company leaders should look for ways that any long-standing organizational habits may be harming the high-value skills of creativity and trustworthiness.

Consider speaking with your team about how you can reorient your employee and team goals, work styles, and technology use to foster strong connections while also enabling better well-being.

Do team members absolutely have to work a 9a to 5p schedule five days a week? Do they absolutely have to be in the office every day? Maybe they are more efficient from 6a until 2p. Maybe they'd rather work four 10 hour shifts.

Build New Traditions

Going back to the office doesn't mean reinstating the same practices that were in place before the pandemic.

If you do that, you may end up with employees who feel overwhelmed and burnt out - just like they did before.

Break down the constraints of a specific hourly or daily schedule, if your business

allows. Giving employees the freedom to choose their work schedules and to adjust them as day-to-day things arise, can do wonders for well-being.

How to Find a Style that Works

Most people spent the last 15 months “in the moment.” They likely didn’t think about the bigger picture of how they want to work and what they want to accomplish over the long term.

With so much uncertainty in the world, it’s been hard to think beyond the next few days or even minutes at times. That’s been exhausting for everyone, which is why workplace wellness benefits are coming to the forefront for many workers now.

CFOs are too, entering unknown territory with their team. One way you can reduce stress and anxiety for yourself and your team members is to provide a little bit of clarity. You need to reassure your team that revamping your work environment will be a collaborative effort. Don’t set the expectation that all efforts will succeed. Ask yourself:

Am I leading by example with well-being practices?

Aim to display random acts of micro-kindness whenever possible. Check-in on employees who are recovering from a health issue. Chat with a colleague who’s headed on vacation, and follow up with them when they return. Model the behavior you want to see in others.

Are we giving employees more autonomy?

Sure, when we first made the switch to working remotely, there were some hassles – the kids making it hard to concentrate and hearing a dog bark on meetings. But the freedom to choose what, when, where, and how they work is definitely lingering for many.

Giving your team the chance to set up a schedule that is best for their needs, even if it changes from one workday to the next, is much better for employee health.

How can the traditional office support the new shift?

If everyone wants to work remotely all the time, what's the point of even having a physical office location anyway? Some people may still want the option to come into the office occasionally.

Some people may want to use it on days where they need a peaceful, quiet place to work. You can also offer programs or other incentives to motivate the team to work in the office.

Are we regularly engaging employees in conversations about what they want and need from their positions?

If you're not talking to your employees about where they are with how things are going - you're missing out on a ton of insight.

Make it a point to check in with employees about more than just what's going on in their lives outside of work. Ask for recommendations on how to make them feel more valued and supported.

Find out if they know about your wellness program initiative. If you've not created it yet, ask for their input. If your existing program isn't doing well, it could be because it's not well aligned with what they need.

Ask what they need from you to build healthy habits and keep stacking healthy behaviors.

Are we working to establish routines?

In a corporate culture upheaval, even if it is to promote a culture of health, establishing some kind of routine is important. It helps to make everyone feel more comfortable throughout all the changes. This could include things like:

- Designating certain days as in-office days
- Providing a timeframe for emails to be replied to
- A weekly lunch happy-hour (in person or virtual)

Ultimately, employee benefits help to boost productivity and decrease turnover. When workers feel like you care about them, it boosts employee morale. They will feel more invested in the success of the company and put forth more effort to do a good job.

Ways You Can Show Employee Appreciation Right Now

Whether you're investing in your employees' health through a new program with perks or overhauling your existing program, it's going to take time and effort to implement.

Try setting aside some time at one of your weekly meetings for the team to go around and highlight the accomplishments of other team members. This way, everyone feels recognized and appreciated for their recommendations. That in and of itself will help improve employee engagement.

Send some social media shoutouts. Aside from the time you pay your social media manager to type up and post the recommendation, that's free and easy to do.

Surprise everyone with lunch. If you've got people who aren't electing to come into the office, send them a Doordash gift card so they can order a lunch of their choice and participate.

Final Thoughts

Healthier employees are better for everyone. They're more likely to show up to work on time, more often than not because they take fewer sick days. And when they're happy and healthy, you won't have to worry as much about employee turnover, because they'll continue to work for you for years.

It may be difficult at first, to quantify your return on investment in workplace wellness benefits and see how it impacts your bottom line.

That's just because the whole employee well-being movement is still growing. One thing we know for certain - companies that are willing to commit to employee wellness initiatives make up for it with reduced health care costs and improved

employee productivity.

Ingraining this new approach into your company culture will require all leaders to spread the message at every possible opportunity. Spread the word at all meetings, any cross-functional team gatherings, and any other time when team members come together.

With time, those kinds of meetings may become company tradition, which may be more valuable than the virtual social hours of social distancing.

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