



# Workplace wellness: 3 ways to kick employee engagement into high gear

Having a wellness program in place is good for your employees and good for your company. But don't stop there. Realizing the program's full potential takes a commitment to culture, customization, and communication.



**Health  
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## How to engage employees in workplace wellness

It's no secret employers want healthy and productive employees, and they often turn to corporate wellness programs to help their workforce thrive. But, while 62 percent of companies offer wellness programs, only 40 percent of their employees say they're aware of the offering. Even fewer are actively participating.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, most corporate wellness plans are launched with the best of intentions and align with expressed employee interest. But turning interest into increased engagement can be a complicated story. The most successful wellness programs build upon the foundation of the existing workplace culture, which may greatly impact employee engagement. Even the best, most detailed corporate wellness plans will flounder in an environment that places employee wellness as a second-tier priority.

Jump starting employee engagement relies on three essential elements:

- **Culture:** Embed a culture that places employee well-being on par with achieving top business goals;
- **Customization:** Tailor programs and incentives to fit the specialized needs of the workforce; and
- **Communications:** Leverage communication channels and events that engage and excite the employees.

## What is employee engagement?

Having wellness programs in place is only a piece of the puzzle. The workforce must engage in the programming to fully reap the benefits.

In its most basic definition, employee engagement is the emotional connection employees have to their work and their company. It influences how employees behave and the level of effort they put into their work. Engaged employees are more likely to take discretionary action to further the company's business goals, with studies reporting that companies with engaged workers outperform their peers by 147 percent in earnings per share.<sup>2</sup>

## Cultivate a wellness culture tied to company success

Creating a holistic culture of wellness goes beyond supporting an array of programs that promote health solutions for employees. It means breaking down the obstacles that typically deter participation. According to a survey conducted by The Economist Intelligence Unit, the biggest barrier is time. 51 percent of employees and 46 percent of employers cite lack of time as the main thing preventing greater participation in wellness programs.<sup>3</sup>

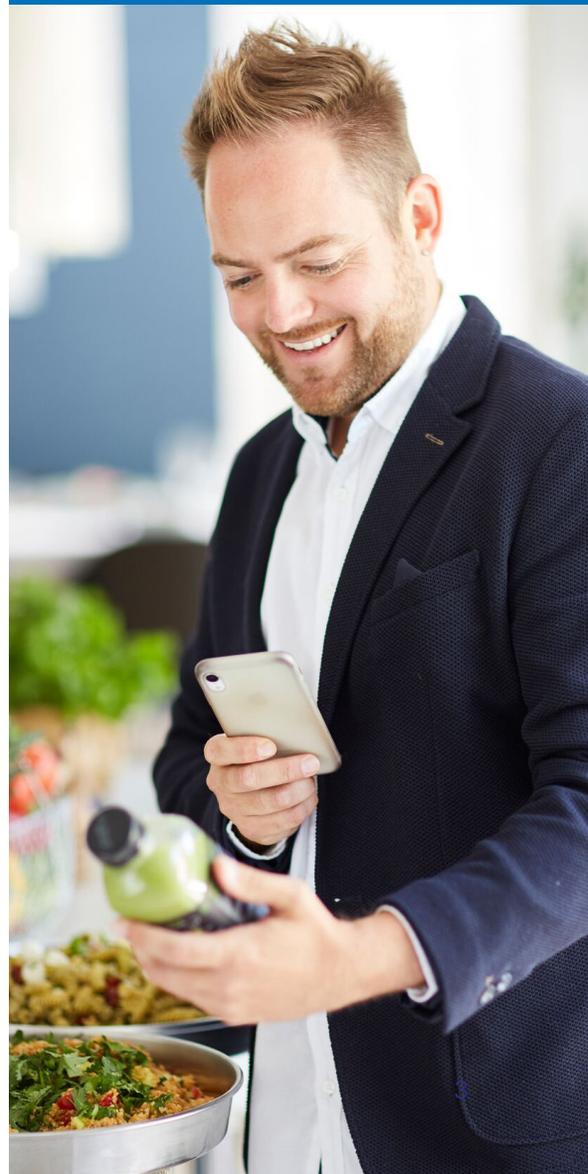
The best way to address this is to embed a culture of wellness into the strategic vision of the company. A culture of wellness means employers recognize that the health and well-being of their employees is directly linked to engagement, job performance, and overall company success. Therefore, companies with standout programs weave wellness into the company's corporate values, and have a corresponding plan of action with a clear set of values, measurable short-term and long-term goals, and objectives.

After making a culture of wellness a priority, foster and reinforce it by aligning company policies and practices, including:

### Building top-down support:

Strong, top-down support from leadership is crucial. Not only do senior leaders control the resources of the company (such as financial support, meeting space, etc.), they are also the primary change agents who enforce policies and foster the commitment to company goals, both formally and informally. According to the American Psychological Association, **73%** of employees who have leaders who support wellness initiatives indicated that their company helps employees cultivate a healthy lifestyle, compared with only **11%** of employees who work in a company without that level of senior support.<sup>4</sup>

**1. Embed a culture of wellness into the strategic vision of the company through top-down support.**



## Creating time during the workday:

Employees shouldn't have to choose between doing a great job at work and staying healthy. Carving out time during the workday for employees to participate in wellness initiatives empowers them to take charge of their health, and demonstrates that the company is committed to their well-being. This can be as simple as encouraging 15-minute walk breaks during the day, turning one-on-one meetings into walking meetings, or enabling employees to take 30 minutes out of their workday to go to the gym.

## Adding healthy plus-ups-

It's also helpful to reevaluate the physical and social environment in the workplace. According to Willis Towers Watson, 70 percent of organizations have incorporated wellness into their workplace by adopting initiatives such as supplying healthy snacks in the cafeteria and vending machines and creating designated walking paths.<sup>5</sup> This makes adopting good wellness habits an easy choice.

The return on investment is well worth it. Seventy-six percent of employees at large organizations believe that wellness is ingrained in their company's culture, and, in turn, these employees have responded with increased productivity, engagement, and morale—and have noted a reduction in workplace stress.<sup>3</sup> The bottom line: When you embed a culture of wellness, both employees and employers win.

## Deploy the power of customization

Engagement depends on aligning your wellness program with employee needs. While it's tempting to assume what they are, you should go straight to the experts: the employees! Consider conducting focus groups or building an anonymous online survey where employees can provide feedback on the programs in place, and identify new areas that they would like to be addressed.

Based on the feedback, adopt policies and choose programs that are strong, yet flexible. In other words, programs should effectively address the over-arching wellness concerns of employees while offering the ability for individuals to tailor the components to fit specific needs. For example, you may discover that your employees struggle with weight management. While most corporate wellness programs provide information on a variety of topics related to weight management, they rarely provide the time and support needed. Implementing a program from WW into the workplace could help address a request from employees and minimize accessibility barriers.

“Cultivating an engaged workforce requires a commitment from all levels of the organization. Leadership needs to ensure employees feel they have the support they need to take the time to care for their own wellbeing.”

**Chere Scythes, Senior Vice President and General Manager, WW Health Solutions**





## 2. Customize the programs and incentives to the needs of the employees.

### Build success with perks

From partially subsidizing wellness programs to publically recognizing wellness achievements, there are many ways to incorporate incentives to motivate your employees without busting the company budget.

Incentives are an effective way to increase engagement. Popular and proven incentives include covering half of the cost of a wellness program like WW. We've seen a correlation between higher employee engagement and a greater subsidy (some companies cover up to 80-100 percent of the cost). Often, success is seen when fully integrating wellness programs with programming perks, such as providing points toward company incentives for attending a WW Wellness Workshop.

Consider the following alternative incentives to motivate your employees with

#### Results-based rewards:

Rewards are tiered, based on level of success. For example, supermarket chain Safeway provides a major reduction in insurance premiums for employees who pass the company's Healthy Measures test.

#### Surprise incentives:

Employees are randomly rewarded participation with incentives like a free healthy lunch or snack.

#### Social incentives:

Successful employees are rewarded with social recognition, such as an employee spotlight section in an internal newsletter.





### 3. Effectively communicate the offerings to engage and excite employees.

## Engage employees through targeted communications and events

Engagement ties directly to the amount of clear, targeted communications employees receive. Create multi-channel communications that answer the employees' number one question: "How will this benefit me?"

Employees face different wellness challenges at different life stages, so consider basic age profiles when crafting messages. Then, keep them concise—and focused on how the program will help each employee achieve greater wellness.

Partner with your company's marketing or communications department to identify the best channels for reaching employees. Whether it's through email, flyers, a company wellness app, or a post on the company intranet site, choose a mix of formats to capture the attention of employees. Visual messaging channels, such as desktop alerts, screensavers, desktop wallpaper, and desktop tickers are other great ways to increase engagement.

Also, consider bringing in program reps for wellness fairs and presentations to inform your employees about your wellness offerings. Partner with company leadership to encourage employee attendance. For example, make attendance at wellness fairs and presentations mandatory for company leaders with little room for exceptions. Recent studies show that leadership participation and support is a major factor, with their participation accounting for at least 70 percent of the difference in terms of engagement levels.<sup>1</sup>

## Wellness in the workplace: City of New York

From 2004–2014, the cost of providing benefits to the City of New York's 1.2 million active municipal employees, their dependents, and retirees had doubled. Challenged with the need to mitigate costs, the City sought an innovative solution to reduce the financial outlay without placing a monetary burden on the employees.

Labor and management agreed to reduce costs by working together to generate cumulative healthcare savings of at least \$3.4 billion over the four fiscal years 2015 through 2018. This was primarily achieved through embracing a culture of health, where prominent issues such as weight management and preventative care were addressed by incorporating WW Health Solutions, which integrated on-site and online wellness programs. However, the key component of the agreement was an employee incentive, which stated if the savings exceeded the \$3.4 billion minimum, employees would unlock access to the first \$365 million of excess savings in the form of a bonus payment. This incentive was one of the driving forces that encouraged employees to save money and reduce healthcare costs, without increasing their financial burden.

**The takeaway?  
Creative incentives work!**



## Your communications checklist:

Events are also successful when there are incentives or games involved. One example is to incorporate a passport program into the event. Give each employee a card at the door and encourage them to visit three or more stations. At each station they visit, they will receive information on a specific offering and a checkmark from the presenter. Once they hit the minimum number of stations to visit, they are entered into a drawing to win exciting prizes. Not only does this method increase participation and engagement, it allows employees to focus on the offerings and incentives that are relevant to them.

### Putting it all together

Building a culture of wellness doesn't happen overnight. It takes time, planning, and strong top-down support. When you combine those with customized programs, enticing incentives, and a solid communications plan, you not only have a winning strategy for increased employee engagement, but you also increase the chances that your company will be more productive, agile, and ultimately more successful in the future.

- **Are your messages tailored** to the different demographics represented in your company?
- **Are your messages clear and concise**, with an emphasis on what's in it for the employee?
- **Did you highlight the contact information** of the person designated to answer employee questions?
- **Are you utilizing the channels your employees use the most** to distribute your messages?
- **Is it an appropriate time to reach employees?** Will employees see your messages, or will they be checked out for the day?

WW Health Solutions, a division of WW International, is committed to helping organizations across the U.S. improve the health of their employees. As experts in wellness for over 50 years, we anchor corporate well-being initiatives with the most scientifically proven program to promote sustainable behavior change and achieve reductions in obesity, chronic illness, and related healthcare costs. We enable employers, health plans, and consumers to go beyond the scale to improve overall well-being by offering multiple ways to succeed along the road to healthy living: eating healthier, moving more, and shifting mindset while seamlessly integrating into the places where we work and live. For further information about how you can partner with WW Health Solutions, contact us at **1-800-8-AT-WORK (800-828-9675)** or visit us at [www.weightwatchers.com/hr](http://www.weightwatchers.com/hr).

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