Our New Normal: Supporting Employee Emotional Wellbeing During COVID-19...& Beyond

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Connecting the Dots

State and Local government healthcare spending increases, compounded by:

• Lack of individual accountability
• Lack of compliance for preventive care and/or provider recommendation prescription
• Poor behavior, lifestyle choices
• Increased employee and organizational stressors
  
  *(Cue Covid-19)*

_All Lead to Persistent Budget, Benefit Design, and Resource Challenges._
Leading employers have transitioned from wellness as the pinnacle goal in their healthcare strategy to wellbeing as a part of the total employee experience: Organizational Empowerment.
Why should we care?

$1500

Highly stressed workers (top 20%) have higher healthcare costs/year

- Aetna

23

Median # of lost work days due to occupational stress, anxiety or related disorder

- Bureau of Labor Statistics

Exposure to chronic work stress > 1 month

3x

Risk of catching a cold

- Journal of Health Psychology

Risk of weight gain

- University College of London

Risk of coronary heart disease

- Journal of American Heart Association
The Cost of Not Taking Action?

DIRECT AND INDIRECT COSTS

• Insurance
• Medical/Pharmaceutical
• Absenteeism
• Disability
• Workers Compensation
• Presenteeism

HIDDEN COSTS

• Engagement/Morale
• Overtime/Replacement Costs
• Delays
• Customer Inconvenience
• Turnover
• Accidents
The State of Municipality Health

Trends in city, town, school, and government wellness.

WHY WELLNESS?

What are the goals of a municipality wellbeing program?

98% to improve health of employees
83% for cost containment strategy

94% High Risk for Chronic Conditions
91% Chronic Disease
60% Dependent Health
64% Acute Illness

43% Gaps in Care

What are wellbeing programs designed to address?
Empowered Performance

- Integrates Wellbeing as part of Organizational Empowerment
- A strategy to measure performance, productivity and outcomes tied to Engagement in organizational initiatives
- An opportunity to diversify benefit offerings in lieu of salary increases to attract talent
- Supports a broad scope approach, allowing for individual values and personal goals
- Enhances a supportive Culture and positive Employee Experience
Wellness to Wellbeing

**Culture**
Everyone is doing it, team challenges, striving for better health is the expected norm vs the exception.

**Policies**
Wear tennis shoes to work, 30 minute exercise breaks, flexible work hours, walking meetings, benefit plans incorporate wellbeing.

**Environment**
Onsite gym, mapped out walking trails, bike rack, clean and well-lit stairwell, healthy food options.
Organizational Empowerment

Policies

Strong Focus on Mental Wellbeing Support:
• Boundaries
• Voice/Value/Vigilance (Mettie Spiess)
• Mindfulness (Leadership training, learning and development mod)
• Mental wellbeing training - QPR, stigma reduction

Employee Experience

Understand “Moments”:
• Positive experiences
• Employee Resource Groups
• Surveys & Engagement Measures
• Transparency
• Offering Tools for Career and Life skills

Environment

What is the complete environment where your employees engage each day?
• Incorporate all aspects of the employee experience
• Culture first, experience will follow
• Sights, sounds, feels of the built environment
• Opportunities and locations to take mindfulness breaks
• Leadership modeling using positive spaces
• Cafeteria, open and private spaces
Journey to Organizational Empowerment

1. DISCOVERY
Gather data to determine: what’s driving your health risk? What do your employees want and value? How is your organization supporting employee wellbeing?

2. BUILDING INTERNAL ALIGNMENT
Generate infrastructure for a sustainable program.

3. CREATING A PLAN
Establish short-term and long-term goals and objectives and a written strategy.

4. RESOURCE ALLOCATION
Establish a bigger budget and appoint the appropriate people needed to sustain the program.

5. COMMUNICATION
Effectively disseminate the program’s goals, purpose and the strategy to stakeholders, managers and employees.

6. EVALUATION
Whether you’re creating a new program or evaluating an existing program, establish quantitative and qualitative metrics to measure the impact of your strategy.
Key Strategies for Communicating With Labor

• **The Case for Union Participation in Wellness** – Provide examples, directly related to improved job capabilities

• **How Unions Can Make the Difference in Wellness** – Get the key stakeholders on your side

• **Understanding Union Leadership and Wellness** – Understand who the players are

• **Understand the Union** – Core Mission and the Union View on Wellness

• **How to Approach Union Leaders and Union Audiences** – Know what has worked successfully in the past
Organizational Empowerment

Case Studies - Best Practice Examples
What can we learn? Does it work? Why the delay in documenting success?

- **State of CT HEP** - financial Win-Win; Collaboration between the Governor’s Office and Unions representing state employees; one of the first, innovative VBID state programs

- **Town of Manchester CT** - slow, steady, commitment to cultural initiatives and strong Union buy-in

- **Kings County, WA** - innovative, big payout but big commitment
Organizational Empowerment

- **State of CT HEP**
  - 98% enrollment after the first 2 years
  - Increases in high value office visits, decreases in specialty and ER visits
  - Stakeholders can collaboratively design and implement win-win plans, even under difficult circumstances
  - Consumers will commit to health-promoting activities when appropriately incented
  - Long-term behavior changes and health outcomes appear to be trending positively but still too early to assess

- **Town of Manchester CT - steady commitment to cultural initiatives, strong Union support**
  - “A physical fitness and wellness program this is educational, rehabilitative, and not punitive”
  - “Requires a commitment by both management and labor to a positive individualized fitness/wellness program”
  - Results documented include physical and mental wellbeing, better capacity to support personnel and citizens

- **Kings County, WA - big investment, bit reward**
  - Incentives tied to increased deductible ($1500 total available)
  - Decreased smoking rates to <5% (from 12%)
  - 2000 employees classified as obese lost 5% bw and cut Diabetes risk by 50%
  - 90% participation
Creating a Plan

Leadership and Management

• Lead by example (vacation, break, after hours work); Leadership training
• Promote on-going feedback, 1:1 discussions, training and career advancement, mentorships
• Evaluate policies and work schedules, solicit input: what do employees want and value

Designate Goals and Objectives

• Develop tactical methods – policy changes as needed, flex scheduling, dress code, music, the built environment, establish culture committee, mental health first aid, resilience plans
• Establish success metrics- how will you gauge progress? ENPS scores, surveys, employee retention

Use Technology

• App-based vendors, kudos, Teams, intranet shared stories, newsletters, fun quotient
• Reporting can direct resources and evaluate progress towards metrics
What is a Psychologically Healthy Workplace?

According to the American Psychological Association:

“A psychologically healthy workplace fosters employee health and well-being while enhancing organizational performance and productivity.”
A more holistic approach

If your employees are suffering in any area, their work experience is suffering, and the ability to engage and perform is impacted.
Resiliency vs. Stress Management

Resiliency is the ability to bounce back, recover and continue on with positive momentum. Especially when we are in situations of on-going stress and uncertainty, it is resiliency skills that will bolster our ability to recover.
Your Stigma-FREE Workplace Blueprint

Create a culture of VOICE to shatter stigma and effectively support employee mental health.

Promote the VALUE of mental wellness to increase employee engagement.

Maximize leadership potential with support VIGILANCE.
Step 1: Creating a Culture of VOICE

✓ Voice your commitment to supporting employee mental health:

✓ Host an event to educate staff and start a conversation.

✓ Use Stigma-Free language:

- She/He lives with schizophrenia
- Died by suicide
- Use: Struggles with, or “survivor of”
Step 2: Value Employee Mental Health

- Equalize mental health and physical health initiatives
- Provide and promote access to support in a variety of ways

- Examples:
  - Create a 1:1 ratio
  - Ensure mental health questions are included on your HRA
  - Instead of giving all “sick days” include one as a designated “mental health day”
Step 3: Support VIGILANCE

✓ Know the warning signs of an employee in crisis:

- **VERBAL WARNING SIGNS**
  - “They’ll be sorry when I’m gone.”
  - “Everyone would be better off without me.”
  - “I can’t handle everything. I feel like I’m drowning.”
  - “I should just kill myself.”

For an extensive list of warning signs visit NAMI.org
Step 3: Continued

Encourage employees to seek support

• **Inquire**- “I’ve noticed you haven’t been yourself lately. Are you ok?”

• **Acknowledge Their Struggle**- “Thank you for being so brave to tell me __. I am so sorry you are in this pain.”

• **Reassure Your Support**- “You are so important to our team. How can I help support you?” OR “We will get through this.”

• **Persuade Your Coworker to Get Help**- “Are you open to..... (Calling EAP/going to this support group meeting with me/talking to your doctor/etc.)?”

• **Refer to Resource**- “This is the bravest thing you can do.”
Tools and Resources

2. Mindful.org website: https://www.mindful.org/
3. CT DOL Mental Health Toolkit: http://www.askearn.org/mentalhealth/
4. COVID19 specific: https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/
5. COVID19 specific guidance: Sara Tarca, starca@onedigital.com

Technology Resources:

8. Total Brain: https://www.totalbrain.com/
10. (Coming Soon) Virtual Mental Health First Aid: https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/

Apps:

11. Calm
12. Breathe
THANK YOU
Stay safe, well and thriving!

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