



Helping firms develop successful wellness programs

By: Leah Warner, Corporate Program Director, Employee Wellness Solutions Network
(www.EWSNetwork.com)

Often when we meet with potential partners at presentations or during round table discussions we are asked the same question regarding corporate wellness programs – what makes a wellness program successful?

The common issues that HR managers, company owners and health and safety managers often deal with are an increase in benefit costs, rising short term or long term disabilities, an aging workforce, or simply the recognition that people in the workplace are like many Canadians - unhealthy. Unfortunately there is not a quick fix that can instantly eliminate these issues.

There are a number of steps that these individuals can take. Here's what to tell them:

1. **Take some time** – It is important to ensure that the necessary time is taken to gather the company metrics, input from other sectors and especially input from those who need the assistance to make sure that any resources used in the wellness program (this includes time and money) are targeted towards the highest need and the highest interest. Often, the impulse is to reach for the first thing that comes to mind; this usually means offering an initiative that appeals to the planner personally which decreases the overall impact on the company as a whole.
2. **Have realistic expectations** - The goal of a wellness program or initiative is long-term healthy behavioural change and it takes strategic, consistent effort to help people succeed in this. Not all initiatives offered will work for the entire staff base and that's okay. Different offerings will appeal to different people. The key to a successful program is to offer a variety of initiatives so that there is literally something for everyone. For example, not all staff will sign up for a lunch n' learn or participate in a group challenge but they might read the newsletter or an email campaign, try a healthy recipe at home or share some of the literature with their families. Some initiatives may seem more successful than others, especially when you can track participation in the events. Having the expectation that the majority of staff will participate in a program at various levels is more realistic than expecting 100% participation in each initiative.
3. **Pace yourself.** To ensure that 'wellness' becomes an ongoing part of workplace culture, it is important that a continuous message is being sent to staff. Offering these messages through various modalities throughout the calendar year is the most effective strategy. Spreading out the various wellness programs such as lunch and learns, workshops, health fairs and informational-based campaigns over the entire twelve months of the year can be effective, as can weaving wellness into all aspects of communication with staff. Organizations should think about creating a wellness page on the intranet or including an article each month in the staff newsletter. Consistency is key to success.

A strategic approach to workplace wellness takes support, time and resources.

Contact EWSNetwork today to work wellness into your benefits strategy.
Email us at leah@EWSNetwork.com.