



WELLNESS
WORKS

How to Engage Employees in Wellness Programs

You know that a strong culture of wellness will help your company and its employees flourish. Now you need to get everyone else on board. How can you engage employees in workplace wellness?

Follow these steps:

Step 1: Make It Relevant

Step 2: Start at the Top

Step 3: Develop a Strong Culture

Step 4: Stay Positive

Step 5: Communicate Frequently

Step 6: Provide Rewards

Step 7: Adjust as Needed

Why Does Workplace Wellness Matter?

According to the [American Institute of Stress](#), approximately 1 million workers are absent every day due to stress.

Workers aren't robots. When they're stressed about their workload, money, health problems and relationships, their productivity is impacted. If they feel their work is meaningless, their motivation will plummet. Wellness initiatives address these problems directly. The result is a happier, healthier, more productive workplace.



Step 1: Make It Relevant

Staff are more likely to engage in wellness initiatives that are relevant to their personal needs. As a result, boosting employee engagement starts at the very beginning, with the design of the program.

Workplace wellness is a broad concept that can include everything necessary for a happy and healthy workforce. When selecting wellness initiatives, think about what your workforce needs the most.

- **Are they struggling financially?**



Financial wellness programs that help them budget their money, pay off student loan debt or save for retirement might be what they need.

- **Are they struggling with work-life balance?**



Pick wellness programs that address stress management, flexible hours, childcare, and career planning.

- **Are they struggling with a lack of motivation and meaning?**



Provide opportunities for volunteerism and community engagement.

Not sure what your employees need? Get out there and find out!

- **Talk to management.**

Managers work closely with employees and will have a better understanding of what their team needs.

- **Start a conversation with your workforce.**

Ask what their priorities are when it comes to health and wellness.

- **Conduct some surveys.**

Written questions and anonymous answers might provide the best feedback.



Step 2: Start at the Top

According to the [2016 Progress Report](#) for the HERO Health and Well-being Best Practices Scorecard in Collaboration with Mercer, 82 percent of companies that experience a substantial impact on cost from their workplace wellness program report strong leadership participation. Similarly, 84 percent of companies that report a substantial impact on health also report leadership participation in programs.

Apply lessons learned from PTO usage

To better understand how a lack of managerial support can undermine a company program, just look at what often happens with paid time off. Knowing that employees need paid time off to recharge, a company may provide generous vacation, sick, and personal time. However, this does not mean that employees will use their paid time off. Managers may discourage the use of paid time off by setting unrealistic expectations when it comes to workload. As a result, many employees will avoid taking time off, resulting in a stressed, burnt-out workforce.

If managers aren't actively promoting wellness programs, employees probably won't feel comfortable participating.

The same thing can happen with your various workplace wellness initiatives. If managers aren't actively promoting wellness programs, employees probably won't feel comfortable participating. On the other hand, if managers encourage participation – and participate themselves – engagement will likely increase.

Company policies and programs won't be very impactful if they're not supported by management. To boost employee engagement in your wellness program, you need to start at the top.

- Educate management on how the wellness program will benefit the company.
- Ask management to actively encourage participation.
- Make sure management is participating.

Step 3: Develop a Strong Culture

In some workplaces, employees don't feel comfortable, and they may spend the day watching the clock and waiting to go home. In this situation, it's unlikely that staff members will want to participate in additional wellness initiatives.



It's also important to ensure that everyone, regardless of race or gender, feels welcome. According to a [2018 survey](#) from Culture Amp and Paradigm, belonging factors and employee engagement are strongly and consistently correlated. This results in better engagement and business performance.

Although competition can be an important motivator, it should not be the only factor in determining career advancement. Turnover rates may skyrocket, and employees may resort to sabotage to get ahead. This is not conducive to wellness.

Strive for a supportive environment in which coworkers help each other succeed and everyone feels like they belong.

	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do create hiring and promotion policies that support a diverse workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't make any groups feel unwelcome.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do provide teambuilding activities that foster communication and cooperation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't instigate unnecessary competition among coworkers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do acknowledge all team members for their contributions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't reward workaholism or unfair practices among staff.

Step 4: Stay Positive

Nobody enjoys being criticized or nagged. Although a wellness initiative may be designed to address a serious problem, focusing on the negative aspects might not produce the desired results. Instead, it may be helpful to focus on the positive aspects and the desired outcome.



To see how this works, look at the following two examples:

You've developed a wellness program designed to help employees deal with stress.

- **Negative Framing:** If you tell employees that they're too stressed and it's impacting their productivity so they need to participate in a program, they might get defensive.

VS

- **Positive Framing:** By reframing it as an opportunity to learn useful techniques that will help them feel calm and capable, you may see more engagement.

You're offering a financial wellness program.

- **Negative Framing:** If you tell employees they're mismanaging their finances and need to take a class, they might feel bad and disengage.

VS

- **Positive Framing:** If you focus on how the program will help them achieve their financial goals, they'll be inclined to participate.

Keep it positive. Focus on your employee's goals. Then show them how the wellness initiative will help them achieve those goals.

Step 5: Communicate Frequently

Your employees are busy with work duties and other responsibilities. As a result, they may forget about anything that does not constitute a workplace emergency, and this may include your wellness program.

Announcing a wellness program once probably isn't enough. To help employees remember and to boost participation, send frequent communications. Provide information well in advance so employees have enough time to plan their schedules and to ask any questions they have about participation.



Don't forget to vary your communication methods:



<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schedule emails.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Put up posters in the breakroom.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Send text messages.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide face-to-face reminders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask leaders to lead by example and reinforce the message.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Schedule social posts.

Step 6: Provide Rewards

When promoting your company's wellness activities, include incentives for participation to maximize employee engagement.

Employee incentives are always well received. A [survey](#) from the National Business Group on Health and Fidelity Investments found that 86 percent of employers provide financial incentives for the wellness programs.

Wellness rewards can come in different forms:

• Provide a reward for enrollment in the program.

• Provide a reward for completion of the program.

• Enter participants into a drawing for a prize.

Although wellness rewards are popular, the incentive does not necessarily need to be an expensive prize or bonus. In some situations, the activity itself may be presented as the incentive. Present participation as an excuse to get away from the desk and do something enjoyable.

Also, remember that people love free food. If you provide healthy snacks during the program, make sure you mention this when promoting the activity.



Step 7: Adjust as Needed

You're picturing great results from your wellness program, and those results are possible – but you might not get them on the first try.

If employee engagement is not as high as you would like, don't give up. Engagement can improve. However, you don't want to continue following the same plan if it's not working.

Figure out where things are going wrong. To do this, you'll need to look at the data. In addition to pulling numbers on program enrollment, you may need to conduct a survey to get some of the key facts and figures from the employees' perspective. Ask questions that will help you determine which steps need more work.

Make It Relevant	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Among employees who participated, did they find the program helpful?• Is there anything employees would like to change about the program?• Among employees who did not participate, what did they give as their reason?
Start at the Top	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What percentage of management participated?• Did management talk to staff about the program?
Develop a Strong Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Did employees feel that participation was encouraged by management and coworkers?• Did employees feel like they had the time needed to participate?
Stay Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did employees view the program?
Communicate Frequently	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Among employees who participated, how did they hear about the program?• Among employees who did not participate, were they aware of the program?



Provide Rewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Among employees who participated, what did they report as their motivation?• Among employees who did not participate, what could convince them to participate in the future?
Adjust as Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Was participation higher in some departments than in others? Which factors could explain this?• What changes could improve future engagement?

[Click here for more Workplace Wellness topics.](#)

Additional Wellness Topics



WELLNESS
WORKS

