HERO Forum17 Campfire Chat

Inspiring volunteer Champions to motivate and support employee well-being

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Tuesday, September 12, 2017 | 4:40 p.m. PT

Abstract

According to the [2013 Health Care Survey from Aon Hewitt](), almost 50% of employers have onsite wellness Champions and more are expected to add them. Champion networks are made of employees with limited to no behavior change education or training. This poses an interesting challenge. How can Champions address important tenets of behavior change amongst employees such as skills, autonomy and motivation? Within a well-being program that relies heavily on volunteer networks, opportunities to foster these tenets must be created through strategic Champion network structure and intentional Champion conversations. In this session, participants brainstormed opportunities to enhance the success of their well-being program by indirectly fostering employee skills, autonomy and motivation through their Champion networks.

Discussion Summary

Question 1: MOTIVATION: What is a specific way you created a program or communication for a volunteer Champion to foster employee intrinsic motivation?

Campfire participants started by making sure those who manage Champion networks are able and willing to have an open dialogue with their volunteers. This open dialogue opens the door for two key strategies to improve intrinsic motivation outreach to employees as discussed by participants:

1. Modeling the language, behavior and messages desired of the Champions
2. Understanding and permitting some autonomy for the Champions

It is understood that culture is partially influenced by the values and behavior of leadership – this was not lost on participants who saw themselves as leading a Champion network. For those who speak often of extrinsic motivators to their Champions, it can be expected that Champions will share that message with employees. Even if a network manager uses extrinsic motivators (like health insurance discounts) to garner initial interest , Champions should be inundated with messages that focus on intrinsic motivation (like being healthy so you can play with your children). This, perhaps subliminally, encourages Champions to speak to that set of motivators.

Secondly, participants agreed that employees will be intrinsically motivated if genuine interest and excitement is seen from their Champion. Hence, it's important to allow a Champion some autonomy to promote well-being initiatives that are important to them. When talking to Champions, ask their input for what they'd like to promote and support them in doing so.

Question 2: SKILLS: With the driving shift to online programming, how can Champions support participant skills in regards to technological competence? What expectations are reasonable to have for your volunteers in this regard?

In general, participants in this session worked with older employees who have more limited understanding and/or access to computers. It was discussed that the expectations for Champions should be to be a resource by understanding a well-being program's websites. However, to respect the volunteer's time a network manager should provide a plethora of resources for Champions to give to employees, rather than spending hours helping employees navigate. These resources include how-to guides with screenshots of the website, talking points for different groups of employees, and training from experts about how to use the online resources.

One participant discussed how she works with a younger population. For this group, resources on how to navigate a website might not be as helpful. Rather, training and resources might be more effective if they were to assist with time management, financial guidance or other barriers to participation.

Question 3: AUTONOMY: Given the limited understanding of health behavior best practices amongst Champions, would you say employee's sense of autonomy (feeling enabled to make their own decisions about their well-being) is better driven from the top down (for example, incentive design or program offerings) or from the bottom up (Champion networks)? What are some examples of these different approaches?

Participants agreed that while a Champion can contribute to employees' senses of autonomy, especially if Champions themselves are provided autonomy, this value should be imbedded in the organization's well-being program for maximum effectiveness. For example, options as to what to complete and flexibility on when to complete it.

For this discussion, the idea of modeling behaviors and language was revisited. The tone a Champion uses might suggest that employees have to or should participate regardless of their interest. Network managers interested in increasing an employee's sense of autonomy should make sure the tone and language they use with their Champions reflects choice. One participant suggested asking, "What do my employees want," when creating and implementing well-being initiatives.

Conclusion

This conversation circled around how to equip well-being volunteers to be more than just microphones of a well-being program. Rather, stewards of employee behavior change. Participants agreed that in order to achieve this, volunteer network managers must impart best

practices like skills, autonomy and motivation through the Champion to employees. Participants focused on three main themes to assist volunteers with limited to no background in health and well-being; (1) modeling behaviors and language (2) providing some level of autonomy to the Champion and (3) providing many resources, tailored where possible.