



Movement, Inactivity and Workplace Effectiveness



November
2015

A HERO CEO Brief on the Importance of Movement for Workforce Performance

Movement, Inactivity and Workplace Effectiveness

A HERO CEO Brief on the Importance of Movement for Workforce Performance

Incorporating movement throughout the workday is essential in order to maximize one's energy and performance as well as reduce the significant health consequences associated with sitting or standing without moving for several hours at a time. Sitting too long while working can cause the brain to fall into a slumbering state, contributing to short-term memory loss and slower brain processing speed as well as diminishing one's ability to learn. Business leaders have a unique opportunity to improve workforce performance by creating work environments that promote movement as a way of doing business. Specific tactics can be grouped into four categories including policies, people, places, and permission.

POLICIES - Implement written policies that support movement during work time and educate leaders and employees at all levels about why the policy is being initiated and how they can support it. Some suggestions to consider are policies that address flexible scheduling, moving meetings, more frequent breaks during longer meetings, moving workstations, and work attire.

PLACES - Make adjustments to the work environment that incorporate active movement into established workflows and minimize prolonged sitting time. Assess opportunities to improve stairwell aesthetics and access, promote workflow around fewer and more inviting common areas, shared moving workstations, and software that can encourage computer users to move or stretch while working.

PEOPLE - Identify and train movement role models across all levels of leadership who actively role model how to incorporate new policies into the work environment or take advantage of environmental enhancements to move more frequently.

PERMISSION - Educate everyone, including all levels of leadership and employees, about the positive influence that movement can have on individual performance and business outcomes. Emphasize self-leadership as a mechanism to influence social norms and work climate that makes moving throughout the day the default rather than an exception.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

Providing employees with the opportunity and support to add movement to their workday promotes the perception that the organization and its leaders care about their well-being. Such perceptions influence employee engagement with their work, which is strongly linked to worker productivity and performance. Happier, more productive employees contribute to better business outcomes such as client and patient satisfaction. Additionally, movement delivers immediate benefits such as increased blood flow to major muscle groups and to the brain, which promotes alertness, creativity, and problem solving. For all of these reasons, supporting movement at work can create a competitive advantage for an organization by optimizing its most important asset: a healthy and productive, high-performing workforce.

Interested in additional ideas? See below for suggested tactics and go to the HERO website for case study examples of how leading organizations have successfully developed a culture of movement.

POLICIES

- Flexible scheduling policies allow employees to incorporate physical activity into their day in a way that is most convenient to them while ensuring they meet essential business needs.
- Moving-meeting policies encourage meeting facilitators to incorporate opportunities to stand and stretch or move in meetings that last more than 90 minutes and to arrange for a facilitated 15-minute movement break during full-day meetings.
- Meeting length/time policies encourage meeting facilitators to end all meetings ten minutes early, enabling individuals to incorporate movement into a break before their next meeting and to avoid scheduling meetings over the typical lunch period.
- Moving work station policies encourage employees to use shared, designated work stations which allow employees to stand and/or move while working.
- Work attire policies encourage business appropriate, but comfortable, clothing and shoes, which can influence how much someone chooses to stand or move throughout the day.

PLACES

- Create and post examples of specific movements that can be safely performed while working in a sitting or a standing position.
- Enhance the safety and visual appeal of existing stairwells, and ensure stairwells are easy to locate.
- Design workflow around common areas that promote movement and social interaction.
- Designate and clearly mark approved walking corridors inside larger buildings and complexes. These areas can be promoted as preferred corridors for walking meetings.
- Create shared movement workstations that allow employees to stand and/or walk while using a computer or talking on the telephone.
- Add standing-height tables without chairs to common areas and meeting rooms.
- For jobs that allow flexible use of computer time, introduce software into employee computers that issue prompts to move at regular intervals.

PEOPLE

- Recruit and train leaders at every level of the organization who will agree to model appropriate movement into their workday as well as encourage their peers and direct reports to join them.
- Recruit and train movement champions within every major sector of an organization to model appropriate movement. This is especially important during meetings to begin to develop social norms that encourage people to stand off to the side of a meeting room or behind their chairs as needed during long meetings.
- Recognize leaders and employees who are “caught” incorporating movement into their workday. Leverage them as testimonials to help others understand how to make specific types of work more movement friendly.

PERMISSION

- Train all levels of leadership on the business relevance of movement during the workday, new policies and how to apply them to specific job circumstances, and the expectation that they model movement at work.
- Educate employees on the business relevance of movement during the workday and new policies that support movement during work.
- Embed into all work processes the assumption that movement is how work gets done most effectively.
- Acknowledge that the hardest permission to grant is often to oneself.
- Encourage employees to recommend low-cost, safe, and effective ways to add movement to the workday and recognize the top recommendations.