

Lessons From Health Coaching...

Are you conveying the VOI of coaching?



...by **Paul Terry**

When you coach employees you learn that, for many, offices are venerated work spaces with wonderfully supportive colleagues and cultures. You see the workplace as a priceless source of satisfaction that fuels purposeful lives. But when you're also privy to the workplace as the prime source of stress or the greatest barrier to achieving a healthier lifestyle, you are reminded that it's impossible to put a price tag on the impact of low morale or team dysfunction. Still, when we offer health promotion services, we are expected to defend the value. But how would you assign an amount to this exchange with a client in stress management coaching?

Brian: "You know I've had a lot of complaints about my department but it's not all bad."

Paul: "What has your workplace done well to support you?"

Brian: "Well, I didn't even know about our employee assistance program until you cajoled me into using it."

Paul: "Cajoled? That was a gentle nudge. What else has mattered to you for dealing with your stress?"

Brian: "Just being able to talk it out. I wouldn't want to burden others in the office with the stuff I share with you. But I always come away with a new goal for managing all the changes going on."

Paul: "How have the goals been working out?"

Brian: "I'm connecting better with my boss and my team by using some of the feedback methods we've talked about. If I don't do my part to make these relationships work, my goal to take on more duties won't be possible."

“The current inordinate focus on achieving a 3:1 ROI . . . understates the benefits of engaged employees.”

It has always been the case that health promotion practitioners are held to an ROI standard that far exceeds what is expected from other healthcare services. Indeed, if commonplace clinical tests, medical procedures, or surgical practices were expected to demonstrate a 3:1 ROI to qualify for reimbursement, half or more would be discontinued. So why is it we keep paying for them? Because it is the *value* of the investment (VOI) rather than the ROI that sends us to the doctor.

Tangible benefits like pain relief or symptom management along with intangible gains like peace of mind and delay of illness have made healthcare the largest economic sector in America. Brian is looking for a different type of pain relief and it's endemic in corporate America. Brian's symptom was lack of full engagement in his work; the value of offering a health coach to help him work through his stress and communication challenges with coworkers is immeasurable.

ROI has been the coin of the realm for a CFO because it's concrete and

the value is easy to count. During the genesis of employee health programs, including early wins with blue collar workforces and a focus on fitness for labor, it has been logical to highlight the productivity and healthcare cost containment benefits of improved physical functioning and reduced health risks. The current inordinate focus on achieving a 3:1 ROI, grounded in improved biomedical measures, has been a product of our own making that understates the benefits of engaged employees.

In a recently published study from StayWell[®], Jessica Grossmeier and colleagues describe the methodology used to achieve a credible ROI. More important, this study points to the program process and outcome metrics that produce a more convincing case for the value of employee health programs than ROI alone would capture.

The VOI of a business process or employee program has become increasingly vital for management to understand, despite the fact it's difficult to quantify. That's because in an era of the ascendancy of knowledge workers, the CEO — focusing on where value is created — inevitably cares most deeply about employee engagement. When success depends on technology and process flows that accelerate knowledge transfer and the development of new ideas, it compels leaders to conclude that value creation resides within employees' heads and hearts, not merely their bodies.

Of the many components that make

* Grossmeier, J., Terry, P.E., Cipriotti, A., Burtaine, J., "Best Practices in Evaluating Worksite Health Promotion Programs." *American Journal of Health Promotion*: Vol. 24, No.3, TAHP1-9.2010

up an effective employee health improvement program, health coaching may hold the key to achieving the Greek ideal of both sound minds and fit bodies. I've noted often that health coaches do the hardest part of health management and disease management. Without drugs or medical procedures, our words are really the only thing at our disposal. Gratefully, the same time we spend supporting employees in improving physical health practices also helps them sort out their relationships and ability to navigate more successfully at work.

By offering Brian a health coach, his employer is leveraging Brian's knowledge and allowing a supportive resource toward a greater good for the company as well as for Brian. By providing Brian a nonjudgmental ear, his employer has linked Brian's capacity to improve his health directly to the company's ability to create value. It is a VOI chain that starts and ends with one of the company's most valuable, though intangible assets: Brian and his level of engagement. 📌

Paul Terry, PhD



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Creative Wellness: It's About Time and Connections



When you ask creative people where the creativity comes from, they usually can't tell you. They'll say something like "It just happens" or "I don't consider myself more creative than the next person." And some aren't shy about telling you they've never had original ideas.

Regardless of your creativity level, you can come up with new ways to attract participants, get more lasting behavior change, and have a greater impact on your organization with these tips.

Time to Mess Around

One of the most innovative companies of all time is 3M — with some 66,000 different products. Management strives for new products to account for 30% of annual sales. They support this goal with a policy that says technicians should spend 15% of their time pursuing their vision.

How much time do you spend envisioning... asking "what if ...?" Many health promoters are caught up in an operational mode that feels like beat-the-clock day-in and day-out.

To come up with new ideas, you need time. If you're tempted to say "I don't have time to be creative!" — stop. How have you responded to participants who say "I don't have time to exercise"?

Ultimately, time to do *anything* is about priorities. If new ideas are important in your job (and in health promotion they are), make this a priority and block out the time.

Don't Be an Island

Whether you work with a large staff or are the sole person responsible for health promotion, it's tough to be creative if you brainstorm only inside your cranium. Innovative companies pull together teams with members from marketing, research, engineering, and sales to come up with new product ideas and ways to make them work.

When was the last time you involved people from outside your department to solve problems or generate new ways to enhance health? Add it to your to-do list for your next big program initiative.

Accumulate and Associate

Good ideas are everywhere. You acknowledge it when you say "how clever" about a product or an ad. Instead of letting it slip away, jot down the concept or tear it out of the magazine and file it. What started out as a single Good Ideas file in our office has turned into a whole drawer that gets updated each week, after discussing the application to our business in a staff meeting. 📌

With some dedicated time and thoughtful connections, you can produce fresh program ideas that will keep participants coming back for more.