

HEALTH PROMOTION

# practitioner

practical solutions for health enhancement programming



## WELLNESS PROGRAM FLATTENS RISING HEALTHCARE COSTS

**Tim O'Neil**, Manager, Employee Health &  
Financial Wellness at Meredith Corporation

plus...

- KINDLE COMPASSION WITH WORKSITE WELLNESS
- 4 SIGNS IT'S TIME TO KILL THAT GREAT WELLNESS IDEA
- WHY YOU WANT A WELLNESS COMMITTEE THAT DOESN'T LAST

# on the cover & inside

*Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. The friends who listen to us are the ones we move toward. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand.*

**Karl A. Menninger**

In this edition of the *Practitioner*, regular contributor Paul Terry coins the term “Chief Listening Officer” in describing the skills needed as organizations strive for the ultimate, yet elusive culture of health. It’s a thought-provoking examination of the balance within individual and organizational responsibility for employee health.

Similarly, new contributor Beth Shepard outlines how an organization can foster compassion through wellness and other employee support activities, which in turn leads to greater engagement... and finally the right conditions for employees to take responsibility for their health.

Elsewhere in this issue we invite wellness managers to recruit employees to design your next wellness program, suggest you build turnover into your wellness committee structure, and outline how to know when that latest great health promotion idea needs to be put to rest.

And our Spotlight On column features the dramatic successes of Meredith Corporation’s wellness program. It points to the significance of top management support and reminds practitioners that a culture of health is a slow build involving collaboration between the organization and employees.

As always, we want to hear from you. Send your comments and article suggestions to [editor@hesonline.com](mailto:editor@hesonline.com).

## insight



...by Dean Witherspoon

# Let Your Employees Design Your Next Wellness Program

One of my first consulting gigs was with an energy company in the southern US some 20 years ago. They wanted help structuring their wellness committee, developing their charter, and getting their activities off the ground. I knew I was in for a tough

With that as background, you might think I’d be opposed to the notion of letting “nonprofessionals” design a wellness intervention. To the contrary, I think it’s the exact right thing to do, for several reasons. The most important: It creates a sense of ownership and commitment to the program.



*Letting “nonprofessionals” design a wellness intervention... creates a sense of ownership and commitment to the program.*

go when the first thing they wanted to do was order a bunch of free vitamin dispensers and place them at building entrances.

It wasn’t easy talking them off the ledge; after all, wellness is about taking your vitamins, isn’t it? In retrospect, that doesn’t seem as crazy as paying someone \$500 to complete an HRA.

But remembering all ideas are not good ideas, how do you harness employees’ creative energy to come up with a program that’s sensible, affordable, and has a good chance of actually improving health behaviors? Sponsor a wellness program design challenge. Here are some guidelines:

- **Set boundaries.** Wide-open, anything-goes challenges seldom produce concrete, actionable ideas – or they produce so many bad

ideas that fatigue sets in before you can settle on something workable. Clearly define the types of solutions you're looking for and success criteria. Keep it narrow enough that you can compare apples to apples and potentially cross-pollinate ideas to arrive at an even better solution.

- **Outline specific, bold goals.** Setting the bar low won't inspire anyone to take on the challenge. You want people thinking big, but within the boundaries you've established. Set quantifiable metrics for participation, behavior change, and/or outcomes.
- **Make it easy to contribute.** Don't require participants to go through a wellness program design course or put up other barriers to enter the design challenge (like the enormously absurd RFPs some purchasing departments impose on vendors).
- **Encourage team participation.** Some of the best solutions will come from 4-5 person teams composed of employees from across the enterprise. Include a category for diverse team contributions to drive the point home.
- **Create a toolkit.** Provide the tools participants need to organize and convey their wellness program designs, step by step. Make it detailed enough to gain a complete understanding of whether the idea is practical, but not so unwieldy that it discourages those who are put off by paperwork.

You'll also want a recognition plan for all contributors, not just the winners. Above all, follow through with the top idea(s). And be sure to highlight past implementations in future challenges if you want the program to grow and employees to embrace ownership of your wellness program. 📌

# 8 Ways to Kindle Compassion With Worksite Wellness

...by Beth Shepard

If you're like most wellness professionals, you chose your career out of a genuine desire to help people live healthier, happier lives. Unfortunately, that call to a higher purpose can get mired in the mud of today's workplace wellness issues... like ROI, incentives, and healthcare costs.

But compassion — a sincere desire to help when someone is suffering — is still a vital element in any program involving people, whether you're targeting well-being and long-term behavior change, selling a product, or managing a work team. What wellness pros have long expressed naturally is now creating a buzz in business circles; in a recent HBR Blog Network post, Bronwyn Fryer addressed the concept of *compassionate management*, a trend gaining traction among business leaders as a way to put corporate values into action, boost engagement, foster a culture of health, and, ultimately, to make a positive difference in the world.

In the Towers Watson 2013/14 Staying@Work Survey, employers around the world identified stress, obesity, and sedentary lifestyles as major workforce issues, with 77% citing low engagement in worksite wellness as the "biggest obstacle to changing behavior." The same survey predicts use of rewards or penalties for biometric outcomes will escalate from 26% in 2014 to 68% in 2015/16.

If you ask employees to pinpoint their biggest obstacles to adopting healthier habits, "not participating in my company's wellness program"



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won't even make the list. Changing deep-seated behaviors is far more complex than completing an HRA or undergoing a mandated lipid profile and blood pressure check. In the grab for wellness engagement, tightening the corporate grip on employees isn't the answer; could organizational compassion be the missing element?

Theodore Roosevelt offers a brilliant kernel of leadership and involvement wisdom in a nutshell: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." It begs the question *why would they?* Workers want to be known, to be treated with respect and compassion — consistently, not just when leaders need something. Nobody wants to feel like a number or a cog in a machine. When people believe they matter, they're more engaged... and more open to health improvement. As Paul Terry observed in his recent wellness champions article for *The Art of Health Promotion*, "Engagement has more to do with building relationships and making positive emotional connections than it does with promoting a healthy activity." Here at Health Enhancement Systems, we couldn't agree more.

As a health promoter, you can leverage the power of compassion to help create a kinder, more connected workplace and a wellness program that focuses less on numbers and more on people. Some ideas:

- **Teach self-compassion — and practice it yourself.** Showing compassion to another begins with being kind to ourselves; but we're often much more critical of ourselves

- **Make someone's day... every day.** No need to go around hugging people (whew!), but offering a smile and a kind word goes a long way toward building a positive culture. Have you noticed a group of workers who walk at lunchtime, rain or shine? Next time, give them a high five. Has the admin down the hall been organizing healthy potlucks? Give him a shout-out.

promotes physical and mental health in large part by building the meaningful connections we all need to thrive. Building meaningful connections also promotes compassion as we get a better glimpse of each other's humanity. Team-based wellness challenges — where members contribute to the good of the group — help people learn about each other and offer mutual support. Done right, peer support networks — wellness

The talking heads can argue all they want about ROI, healthcare savings, and productivity, but you and I know that enhancing quality of life for real, flesh-and-blood people is the heart and soul of workplace wellness.



than we'd dream of being with other people. According to Kristin Neff, PhD, self-compassion involves being warm and understanding with ourselves instead of delivering self-criticism. Practicing self-compassion even enhances health behavior change; in one study, subjects given a self-compassion intervention engaged in less emotional eating than controls. Helping participants develop self-compassion skills could have far-reaching effects in wellness outcomes and in promoting a psychologically healthier workplace.

- **Get to know the people you serve.** Showing an honest interest in people communicates kindness, builds the rapport your wellness program needs to be effective, and boosts your awareness of real-life influences on well-being; you'll also forge lasting friendships. Make a point of getting away from your workstation each day to interact in person. Extend your conversations beyond wellness goals and obstacles; ask about their interests, families, and weekend plans, too, as you get to know them.
- **Increase and strengthen social connections.** Experts say compassion

ambassadors — are a powerful force for positive change. They strengthen social connections while supporting healthy behaviors and can even inspire workers to pay it forward. Dr. Terry addresses this concept: "Incentives can diminish motivation. In contrast, the influence of peers can have a snowballing effect where feeling supported causes someone to support someone else." Envision that happening in your workplace.

- **Cultivate awareness of core values.** Living a life that feels misaligned is draining and takes a huge toll on well-being. Offer resources — like self-assessments, time management tools, and life coaching — to help participants zero in on what matters most to them (your EAP may be able to help). Aligning daily choices and behaviors with core values alleviates

stress and promotes a feeling of personal authenticity.

- **Offer mindfulness training.**

Learning and practicing mindfulness, or nonjudgmental, moment-to-moment awareness, is becoming popular in organizations from the US Marine Corps to Google. Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs are linked with an impressive array of wellness benefits, including enhanced brain function, reduced pain, and blood pressure improvement. Practicing mindfulness also enhances self-compassion as well as compassion toward others. Online mindfulness programs exist, but are relatively new to the market; your local medical center may offer an in-person program you can bring onsite. Learn more about mindfulness, and practice it yourself.

- **Promote volunteering.** Helping others feels good; it's no secret that volunteers tend to live longer and enjoy a better quality of life with a lower risk of depression. Whether or not your organization formally encourages volunteering, do what you can to spur employees to action in their communities. Designate a day each month to bring in local nonprofits, school reps, and other programs needing help. Position links to Volunteer.org, AllForGood.org, or United Way on your web pages, and encourage work groups to serve local charities together in team-building ventures. Highlight employee volunteer stories in newsletters, video clips, and social media posts.

- **Join forces.** Work with benefits, absence management, HR, ergonomics, employee relations, and other departments to identify opportunities to add compassion into your culture. Examples: Coordinate management training on communication skills; expand benefits to include caregiver support resources; create a policy allowing workers to donate sick time or PTO

to a coworker in need; organize an onsite holiday craft boutique with a portion of proceeds going to charity.

A compassionate workplace where workers feel valued, cared about, and connected stands a much better chance of making a difference — in employee and family well-being, in the community, and in the marketplace. 🇺🇸

## Recommended Reading and Resources

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- UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center: Free Guided Meditations, <http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22>.

# Traffic Stoppers

Late for the local high school football game, we were delayed further as a couple dozen hot air balloons drifted lazily across the blue sky, slowing traffic to near-standstill. It was a nice diversion at the wrong time, but it highlights how something unusual, big, and colorful can make the masses stop and take notice.

You don't have to rent a hot air balloon (though that could be a good idea), but you can still stop traffic and use the opportunity to promote a wellness service. Some ideas:

- **Dress like a carrot.** Or broccoli or other vegetable. One health promoter we know dressed like a turkey at Thanksgiving to promote the annual turkey trot running program.
- **Make some noise.** A jazz band or barbershop quartet in the cafeteria pulls people in and grabs their attention. As they listen, you're handing out your latest promotion.
- **Try a little abracadabra.** Like music, magic shows are a natural, fun draw that people can't resist observing for at least a few minutes. Here's your flier headline... "Make stress disappear magically in our new hatha yoga program."
- **Use Burma Shave.** Not the shave cream, but the old-style billboard technique displaying a sequential series of messages on consecutive billboards. You can do the same thing in a hallway, or electronically on your website.

You get the idea — stop traffic with unusual, big, colorful props, then use the pause to get a promotion in their hands. 🇺🇸



# Principles of Highly Effective Wellness Programs

We have the good fortune to peek behind the curtain of hundreds of wellness programs each year and have identified a handful of attributes linked to exceptional engagement and ongoing success. Surprisingly, you could visit any of a dozen successful programs and see they're offering different interventions. But the things that remain, that guide each, are the 7 principles we highlight here. See how your program stacks up:

**3. Make the most with what you've got.** Everyone wants a bigger budget, more space, additional staff, but highly successful wellness programs aren't necessarily the best funded. They invariably make the best use of committees, volunteers, champions, free community resources, and vendor partners that offer the best value in their service area.

life data points, participation, and health perception.

**6. Be flexible, adaptable.** The more layers in an organization, the more challenging adaptability becomes. But highly effective wellness program managers have figured out ways to navigate byzantine corporate structures to pivot annually if needed.

... Highly successful wellness programs aren't necessarily the best funded. They think outside the 4 walls of their wellness program.

## 1. Know your participants.

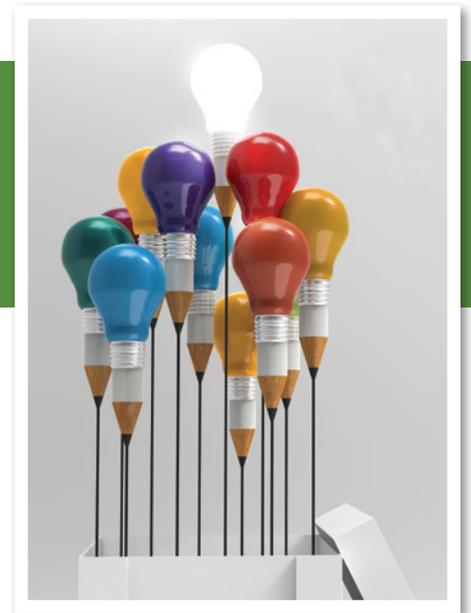
This means getting out from behind your wellness dashboard and spending work time with participants... not just at monthly department or safety meetings, but experiencing what your employees deal with day in/out.

**2. Keep it simple.** Our most successful clients don't have a hundred moving parts to their wellness programs. They've identified the combination of activities, tools, and talents with the greatest impact and leverage the heck out of it. In most instances, random employees can recite the main wellness offerings because they're not overwhelmed with unlimited choice.

They think outside the 4 walls of their wellness program.

**4. Iterate for success.** The best programs aren't swinging for the fences each time they step to the plate, but are looking at previous at-bats and learning from them so they can advance the runner and push home the winning run. Each intervention is evaluated to learn what worked, so it can be leveraged, and what didn't, so it can be minimized or corrected.

**5. Use data judiciously.** Our top clients aren't collecting reams of data and pouring over it every week only to say "well, that's interesting." They *are* gathering information on metrics they believe are crucial to success and acting on them. The elements vary by organization, but almost always include quality of



And smaller, flatter organizations are even more nimble in changing directions.

**7. Build for scale.** There's no doubt skillful health coaches could help just about anyone enhance their chances of success, but it's not a service that's easy to scale — at least not affordably. When making intervention decisions, our top wellness program managers look at the ability to scale to the entire organization without gutting the rest of the program. 📊

# Why You Want a Wellness Committee That Doesn't Last

There's renewed wellness interest in all things peer-driven... committees, champions, supporters, and buddies are among the approaches being tested. It's a healthy development with a lot of promise to help move toward the holy grail of wellness: the elusive "culture of health." But experiences in entertainment, software development, and volunteer organizations suggest that our natural tendency to recruit the most qualified and hang on to them for a year or more may not be the best method.

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When you look at great Broadway productions and blockbuster movies, producers and directors bring together the right talent with everyone focused on achieving something big within a well defined time and budget. Similarly, software developers creating a new product or feature set are recruited for a limited engagement and become totally immersed in the challenge, then move on to the next project. And volunteer organizations ramp up to respond to natural disasters or unique needs for a time, then regroup for the next challenge.

It's a model that author and consultant Tony Swartz of The Energy Project has written about often: intense bursts of work followed by time off for rest and renewal. It's an approach that leverages energy and creativity, but avoids burnout because the engagement is limited and you go into it knowing there's a light at the end of the tunnel. Ideas for applying this to your wellness committee:

- Recruit from all levels and areas of the organization. Mix members so each subcommittee is diverse.
- Disband subcommittees when the project is complete (not more than 3 months) and don't allow anyone to serve more than 6 consecutive months.
- Limit individuals to serving no more than 6 months in any 2-year period.



- Recruit for specific talents, but don't lock into assignments based solely on experience. Passion is often a greater predictor of volunteer success than background; more than anything, look for energy.
- Restrict total size to no more than 20 folks, broken into 4 teams of 4-5 subcommittee members who take on a specific project that can be completed in 3 months or less.
- Boot people off committees (ask them kindly to drop out) if they're not contributing. Nothing brings down the energy of a wellness committee more than the opinionater who doesn't do anything but share opinions. 🗣️

# Culture and Humility: The Leader as Chief Listening Officer

...by Paul Terry

Halbert Dunn wrote a paper in 1959 entitled “High-Level Wellness for Man and Society.” To the extent that leadership is about advancing a vision, Dunn should be credited with being the thought leader of the wellness movement in America. Of course, other leaders who preceded him held similar views about the importance of holistic health. Aristotle and his thoughts on metaphysics in the pre-Socratic Greek era portended a vision for wellness. In 1866 John Harvey Kellogg founded a “Sanitarium” that, expanding on his Seventh Day Adventist beliefs, attracted people from throughout the country (including Mary Todd Lincoln) to hear lectures on healthy living and to partake in “diet reform,” frequent enemas, and “physical culture.” The physical culture movement drew from folk dance, German gymnastics, and calisthenics during the late 19th century when reformers were concerned that the new class of white collar workers was developing “diseases of affluence” because of their sedentary office work.

Perhaps it is this early orientation toward diet, fitness, and lifestyle choices that leads some observers of today’s wellness movement to cast “traditional wellness” programs as limited. I don’t know whether there are more health promotion practitioners offering support to people one at a time compared to their public health brethren who work to advance health through organizational, societal, and systems changes. I’d venture each

approach has a similar number of devotees and that working in such silos will continue for decades to come. And that could be just fine since both are equally needed and both benefit from specialized knowledge and skills. What may change, however, given the right vision and leadership, is the wellness profession’s capacity to assess, support, and intentionally integrate individual engagement and organizational development.

## The Rebirth of Culture in Wellness

The ascendancy of a “culture of health” as an imperative discussed at wellness conferences and journals in recent years suggests we may have reached a plateau relative to how far programs aimed at individuals can go in improving population health. Even programs smartly designed to accommodate stages of change still leave behind chronic contemplators. What is likely the greater catalyst for the reconsideration of culture, however, is the obesity epidemic, particularly within our next generation. The omnipresent bad-for-you foods and addictive screen time are cultural forces that simply can no longer be discounted. Add to that the unrelenting stress in the post-recession workplace requiring us to do more with less, and the role of environment looms large. Wellness programs offered in a toxic environment are held back by leaden cultural ballast, but programs in

## Leadership in health promotion



Paul Terry, PhD

a supportive environment perform like booster rockets for a culture of health.

While there is an invigorating new appetite for addressing culture, the idea that wellness works best in a supportive environment is a theoretical construct long accepted by those schooled in wellness. Halbert Dunn’s seminal paper and lectures on wellness featured a matrix where environment and behavior intersected, showing “high level wellness” could occur only in a supportive environment. And though the word “lifestyle” is often associated with individual choice, the word was coined by Austrian psychologist Alfred Alder who used the term to describe a “way of life of an individual, group, or culture.” My era for matriculation in health promotion had me steeped in Larry Greens “PRECEDE” Framework – a brilliant exposition on the essential interactions of environment, culture, policies and individual behaviors.

## Asking Instead of Telling

In the Towers Watson 2013/14 Staying@Work Survey, 892 employers

were asked about top priorities for their health and productivity programs. The leading answer, at 70%, was to “develop a workplace culture where employees are responsible for their health and understand its importance.”

underneath. “Culture is to a group what personality or character is to an individual.” So, “we can see the behavior that results, but we often cannot see the forces underneath.” (Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*.)

organization’s environmental health practices? What are employees’ current needs and desires and how do they reflect on the supports or barriers present in today’s workplace?

As a health coach, I know the answers to well chosen questions reveal as much about values and beliefs as they do about current behaviors and future goals.

Wellness leaders intent on embracing



*“Wellness programs offered in a toxic environment are held back by leaden cultural ballast, but programs in a supportive environment perform like booster rockets for a culture of health.”*

culture will need to exercise the art of working with groups as much as they have been plying the science of individual behavior change. Since

And as organizational wellness leaders, we need to accept that the best questions are the ones that keep us humble. Asking rather than telling involves delving into things we don’t know and exposing ourselves to answers that may well be difficult to hear. 🚀

There is a bit of corporate jujitsu in a sentence that blends culture with individual responsibility; nevertheless, the report goes on to note that strategies will need to “recognize the needs and desires of the employee population.”

Where Dunn is credited as being the father of the wellness movement, Edgar Schein is credited as being the father of organizational development. In explaining culture as a concept that is an abstraction, Schein cautions against most culture surveys as too superficial and favors models that capture a “range of observable events and underlying forces.” Looking at what’s on the surface, says Schein, is the way to disclose the covert processes

Schein, quite late in his career, turned his attention to organizational health and safety challenges, he has concluded that leaders will need to replace their tendencies to do the telling with new and refined abilities related to asking. Schein’s latest book, *Humble Inquiry* will feel like familiar turf for those trained in motivational interviewing.

Our leadership challenge, if we are to be players in culture, will be to shine a light on discrepancies by asking questions of other leaders and on behalf of those we serve. How can we reconcile an interest in a culture of health with a continued push for doing more with less? Where is there opportunity to better align employee responsibility for health with the

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spotlighton...

# Meredith Corporation's Wellness Program Flattens Rising Healthcare Costs

Between 2004 and 2006, Meredith Corporation, a nationally recognized media and marketing company, experienced an 18.5% increase in healthcare costs. This unsustainable trend marked the beginning of a fundamental transformation, spearheaded by the new CEO and Chairman, Steve Lacy.

According to Tim O'Neil (Manager, Employee Health & Financial Wellness), "From the beginning, Mr. Lacy saw wellness as his legacy to Meredith."

*“When you look at the trajectory we were on, compared to the path we are on now, the numbers tell the story. The overall health of the population is improving.”*

**“As demanding as life can be, he believes taking care of yourself leads to feeling and performing at your best and simply experiencing the best possible quality of life.”** Mr. Lacy envisioned a program to help employees and their families live longer, healthier, and happier lives both now and ultimately into an enjoyable retirement.”

Starting in 2007, Meredith made substantial benefit plan design changes and began building a wellness program now seen as among the best in the country. The effort was driven by Mr. Lacy’s vision of providing a variety of services to help Meredith employees meet personal and financial needs. Overarching goals include high engagement and participation, health improvement, and flattening healthcare costs. The program combines an ongoing series of offerings:

- Live Healthy Meredith (January-March)
- Financial Wellness Check Up (April)
- Nutrition Education Campaign (May)
- Medical Care/Consumerism (June)
- Wellness Screening (July-October)
- Financial wellness courses
- Life coaching
- Tobacco cessation programs
- Preventive exams
- Specialized campaigns
- 170+ fitness-related classes/month.

## Program Elements

Getting maximum employee and family participation became Tim’s highest priority. “At the foundation of our entire program are the requirements for an annual wellness

screen and risk-appropriate preventive health exams. Employees must meet these before they can take advantage of all medical plan options. By tying the program so strongly to the benefits plan, participation rose to 98% in 2012 among our approximately 2400 insured employees.”

Tim anticipates this program will lead to a reduction in catastrophic health events. “Everyone going through the wellness screen gets a one-on-one consultation with a health professional. Those with elevated risk are encouraged to continue coaching sessions throughout the year. Current aggregated risk indicators definitely point in the right direction. When we started out, just 70% of the workforce was in the low-risk category. We’ve grown that number to 88% last year. We cut our high-risk population (more than 5 risk factors) from 9% to 3%.

That change didn’t happen overnight. It comes from providing enjoyable and engaging programs with consistent messages about healthy lifestyles. When you look at the trajectory we were on, compared to the path we are on now, the numbers tell the story. The overall health of the population is improving.”

In 2006, 11% of employees used tobacco. With ongoing support from smoking cessation programs, Meredith successfully transitioned to a tobacco-free environment in January 2008. As of 2012 the number of tobacco users had dropped to 3%.

Meredith’s wellness program point system encourages participation in campaigns, screenings, and workshops. Employees have until October 1 each year to accrue 1000 points, which earns a \$650 discount for medical plan contributions in the following year.



While recent statistics for employees in the wellness screening program showed a 27% lower history of medical claims than nonparticipants, spouses remained 32% higher than employees. So in 2013 Meredith began offering a \$350 discount on the spouses' 2014 medical plan contributions if they participate in the point system.

Because Meredith operates in 21 locations, it relies heavily on a robust web portal. Launched in 2010, *MeredithWellness.com* integrates all health, financial, and incentive components for easy access. This custom portal allows Tim to connect with Meredith's 3400 benefit-eligible employees and family members in numerous ways. "In addition to downloadable content, we offer online workshops and record our live programs for employees to access by computer, smart phone, or iPad. Whether they want to participate while riding the train to and from work or at home with their family... they can." Participants also can track their progress toward the 1000-point goal on the website.

## Financial Health

Tim emphasizes the value financial wellness brings to Meredith's program. "Good physical health is important, but so is good financial health. We work closely with the Personal Finance Employee Education Foundation (PFEEF) who designed our unique Personal Financial Wellness Check-up assessment tool and provide related education services. Since beginning this initiative, all key indicators are heading in a positive direction."

Not surprisingly, financial health indicators tend to vary by location, but all show consistent improvement. The initiative has been so successful that PFEEF placed a case study of the

## The financial health screening tool evaluates 4 broad risk categories. Meredith improvements are shown here:

Risk	2010	2012
High financial distress	22%	11%
High cash flow distress	41%	29%
Low savings rate	37%	25%
Understanding of employee benefits	75%	82%

Meredith program on their website ([personalfinancefoundation.org](http://personalfinancefoundation.org)).

Meredith boasts very creative reimbursement policies, including for the number of health club visits (versus covering membership fees). They're one of the few companies to offer reimbursements for bicycle commuting.

Tim leverages Meredith's numerous partnerships and brands in designing his programs. "Being a communications and media company, our internal experts have a wealth of health-related content and resources. I look to coaches with specific areas of expertise to provide personalized counseling, such as nutrition and meal planning."

The wellness screening program ends each October. During the following weeks, Tim and Meredith's leadership review aggregated screening data, as well as other indicators, to determine the program's progress and guide future strategies. "Since this is the timeframe our leadership team dedicates to Human Resource strategic planning, it works out great. Armed with their input, I dedicate December to put together a wellness calendar for the upcoming year and ensure participants who accrued the required 1000 wellness points start seeing financial reimbursements in the January paycheck."

## Maximized Resources

Tim is the only full-time wellness program employee; he believes it is important to have 1 person "own" the program. "You don't need a team of 20 people dedicated to the program as long as the right strategies are in place and leadership supports it. I do receive fantastic support from our medical clinic professional staff. I also oversee an ongoing internship program with local college students pursuing a degree in a health- and wellness-related field. And volunteer wellness committees provide feedback as well as help roll out initiatives at each worksite. I often work with Safety and Risk Management in achieving their ergonomic goals. I partner closely with Compensation and Benefits to make sure incentives tied to the benefit program are meaningful."

## Culture Change Takes Time

Meredith spends \$650,000 each year on its wellness program, but Tim says, "Considering that we spend \$22 million a year on health insurance and have flattened healthcare costs by about \$3 million a year, that's money well spent. Wellness has become a positive part of our culture — and I'm sure saved a few lives along the way. What could be more important than that?"



Tim was not present at the program start, but knows the culture change at Meredith has been profound. “We had a smoking room at one time. There was no fitness center. There were no wellness committees or incentives for healthy behaviors. People worked through lunch. We were careful not to change too fast, but at a pace that allowed employees to keep up. We kept

everything simple so participants knew exactly what was expected of them. We gradually added new features and made modifications based on feedback and results. Now it’s not unusual to see employees grab their gym bags and encourage one another to go to a fitness class or a walk during lunch breaks.”

Tim emphasizes that successful programs don’t do wellness *at* employees... but *with* them. “Employees know this is a collaborative effort and their feedback helps mold the program. If you are responsible for a multisite organization like Meredith, realize that the same strategy won’t work everywhere. Strive to build a nimble and flexible program. Use local champions to identify challenges and provide feedback on what will be well received. Be willing to learn and adapt from others’ experiences. Ours is an award-winning program, so we often speak around the country. We use such opportunities to benchmark how our program compares to best practices. We learn as much as we share — and that’s one of my best pieces of advice to other wellness professionals.”

For more information, contact [tim.oneil@meredith.com](mailto:tim.oneil@meredith.com).



## 9 Ideas to Keep Participants Well for the Holidays

It’s not too early to start planning for the holidays. Here are ways to boost participation to new heights this season and help everyone close the year a little healthier:

1. **Gifts From the Heart.** Offer discounted registrations to everyone who donates a gift to charity.
2. **Healthy Holiday Bake-Off.** Invite participants to share holiday treats and recipes. Have a contest for healthiest, tastiest, most appetizing, easiest-to-prepare, etc.
3. **Turkey Trot/Walk.** Sponsor a walk/jog event the week before
4. **Holiday Tune-Up.** Conduct a health screening or nutrition assessment as a way for participants to prepare for the holidays. Use the opportunity to promote other offerings.
5. **Holiday Harmony.** Invite local school or church choirs to perform holiday songs in high traffic areas over lunch or after work. Set up a registration table and hand out fliers to the audience.
6. **Cooking Demo.** Hold a cooking demonstration and taste test featuring low-fat holiday recipes.
7. **Maintain Don’t Gain.** Conduct a weight management contest from Thanksgiving to New Year’s. Consider making it a friendly team competition.
8. **Holiday Helpers.** Organize a food drive, afternoon of labor, or other worthy contribution to a local charity. Award door prizes.
9. **Wealth for the Holidays.** Offer a free seminar on financial fitness during the holidays. 

# 4 Signs It's Time to Kill That Great Wellness Idea

It feels like Christmas just about every month the last year, with wellness startups and gurus hailing shiny “innovations,” creating a new model for behavior change and the promise to usher in an era of corporate health with too-good-to-be-true ROI. While they may approach the challenge from different directions, all seem to have this in common: the erroneous notion of ease in changing individual behavior and scaling it to influence population health.

This “there’s an app for it” attitude completely ignores the fact that changing behavior is hard. Damn hard.

*“This ‘there’s an app for it’ attitude completely ignores the fact that changing behavior is hard. Damn hard.”*

It doesn’t matter how you arrange your triggers, gamify tracking, incentivize participation, or penalize poor outcomes, unhealthy habits don’t pop up overnight... and they’re not magically going away for good this year with the revolutionary health portal you just launched.

All of the attention and startup capital is, on balance, a good thing. The chances of a real innovation go up the more minds you have working on a problem. But frenzy also makes room for a lot of schlock, where, for example, consultants and vendors draw a direct link between influencing consumer purchasing behavior and health behavior. They’re not close. Not even remotely close. One requires a trigger and happens on impulse, while the other is a deep-seated, often

emotionally and psychologically ingrained habit reinforced over decades of practice. Yes, they’re both behaviors, but just as a skateboard and the space shuttle are both transportation, the differences are so vast it’s silly to think of them in the same context.

That’s not to say you shouldn’t be trying new things; you should — and often. But there are signals to tell you it may be time to rethink, cut your losses, and move on.

- ***No one is talking about it.*** For an online wellness service, a certain amount of positive postings are a given. But if you’re not also hearing

chatter in the hallways, at meetings, in the cafeteria, or on the walk to the parking lot, chances are you’re not having much impact.

- ***You’ve not been congratulated by people above your boss’s level.*** Great wellness services don’t go unnoticed by VPs and CEOs. After all, they need what you have to offer as much — maybe more — than the line worker. But if no one in the upper ranks seeks you out to tell you what a difference the service or program has made for them, you probably haven’t made a difference... for them, or many others.
- ***There are no serendipitous surprises.*** Wellness services that make a difference take on a life of their own, where someone in a remote corner of the organization

leverages what you have to offer and builds on it, creating an even bigger win for their workgroup, and sometimes the entire company. If you set a goal of 75% completion for a health assessment and achieve it, so what? Big deal. But if your execution and communication of the assessment are done in a way that inspires a manager to change the environment — making health improvement easier for her employees — now you’ve accomplished something.



- ***You’re not learning something new about your population, your program, or your organization.*** Exceptional interventions always teach you something — like a more effective way to recruit former non-participants, a more efficient way to reach larger numbers, or a better way to affect long-term behavior. If you’re not learning something new, you’re likely not achieving much either.

If you buy services, the seller will likely push for a 3-year (or longer) agreement based on it taking that long to show positive results. While that’s true (actually, it’s probably longer), it doesn’t mean you have to lock yourself in and ignore the signs it’s not working. 🚫

# Holiday Walks



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From Thanksgiving through New Year's, the holidays offer a pause from everyday life to take part in the joys of the season. For many of us, traditions — special meals, friendly gatherings, evenings by the fire — enhance these joys.

## Create a New Walking Tradition

Pleasurable walks offer time to reconnect with family and friends, unwind from stress, reflect on happy memories, and look forward to the year ahead. Even more, walking can energize your body, help burn extra holiday calories, and revitalize your mind during these often-hectic months.

## Consider some of these ideas:

### Thanksgiving

While the bird is in the oven, celebrate with a turkey trot. You can even make a contest out of it — break into teams and plan a route; the team that finishes in the shortest time wins and the losing team has to clean up the kitchen. Or plan a walk after your meal to give everyone a boost of energy and battle the post-turkey sleepiness.

### Winter Solstice

Invite family and friends to honor the longest night of the year and lighter days ahead, with a celebratory walk. Mark your walk with luminarias, then finish with a bonfire, storytelling, and singing.

### Hanukkah

The 8 days and 8 nights of Hanukkah set the stage for daily walks. After your candle-lighting ritual, take a walk on each of the holiday's nights.

### Christmas

On Christmas Eve, walk through local neighborhoods while singing carols. Plan for a Christmas morning hike before or after opening gifts, or enjoy an early dinner in anticipation of an evening walk.

### Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is a celebration of family, community, and culture. A ceremonial walk is a wonderful way to commemorate the well-being of those you care about.

## New Year's Eve and New Year's Day

A New Year's Eve stroll provides solace from the hectic season and time to reflect on the previous year's experiences and accomplishments. Welcoming the New Year with a walk affords a special opportunity to think about personal resolutions and look forward to what lies ahead.

## Find More Ways to Walk

- Tour local neighborhoods on foot while viewing decorated homes
- Take a break from holiday shopping and briskly walk through the mall or shopping district
- Make a day of walking by doing a holiday tour of your city or town
- Plan a walking vacation.

Brighten your winter holidays with a few walks to make the most of this distinctive season. 🇺🇸

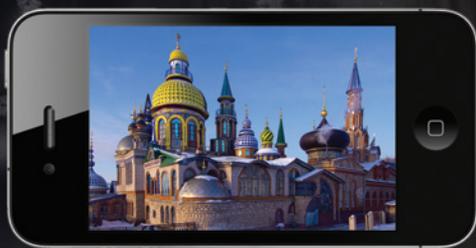


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