


# **PACKING A PUNC**

## **PROVEN WELL-BE STRATEGIES**

by | Jessica Grossmeier, Ph.D.



What's the best way to ensure strong participation as well as positive outcomes for your workplace well-being programs? These ten best practices—based on new research—boost the likelihood of success.

**E**very employer wants the biggest bang for their well-being investment. But how do they know which levers to pull and what collective strategies work best? While the answer is different for every organization, research shows there are best practices that are most often associated with strong participation in comprehensive health and well-being initiatives, as well as positive health and business outcomes. Research also demonstrates that employees are more likely to have a positive perception of their employer when these strategies are in place.

Comprehensive health and well-being initiatives are a broad set of strategies that include an organizational culture of health with policies and built environment supports as well as leadership support. Comprehensive approaches also include a wide array of offerings that address physical, mental, social, financial, career and other aspects of well-being.

The following ten strategies were identified in *Workplace Well-Being Factors That Predict Employee Participation, Health and Medical Cost Impact, and Perceived Support*, a study by the Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) that was recently published in the *American Journal of Health Promotion*. Employers and well-being professionals can use these strategies to refine

their approaches to well-being and help their organizations realize outcomes.

### 1. Demonstrate Organizational Commitment to Health and Well-Being

Organizational leaders at all levels are more likely to actively support employee health and well-being when such actions are aligned with the val-

ues and business goals of the organization. Organizations communicate this alignment through development of a mission/vision statement that supports a healthy workplace culture, including employee health and well-being in organizational goals and value statements, and ensuring that senior leaders correlate the value and importance of health to broader business objectives.

### 2. Ensure Senior Leaders Understand the Link to Business Results

Organizations are more likely to invest in a culture of health when senior leaders understand how employee health and well-being are connected to broader business results, such as increased revenue, profitability and corporate sustainability goals. Numerous studies demonstrate that organizations that invest in a culture of health and well-being are more financially successful. Getting such information into the hands, heads and hearts of senior leaders increases the likelihood that they'll actively support employee well-being efforts.

### 3. Walk the Talk and Actively Support Employee Health and Well-Being

Higher levels of organizational and leadership support lead to higher levels of participation in activities like biometric screenings and health assessment completion, as well as improved employee perception of well-being initiatives. When leaders—from the executive level to direct supervisors—support and participate in workplace well-being initiatives, employees are more likely to follow suit.

That doesn't mean leaders have to bike to work every day or run five

#### About the Research

*Workplace Well-Being Factors That Predict Employee Participation, Health and Medical Cost Impact, and Perceived Support*, a study by the Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO), draws on data from 812 organizations that completed the HERO Health and Well-being Best Practices Scorecard in Collaboration with Mercer® (HERO Scorecard) between January 2015 and October 2017.

Collectively, these companies represent more than 4.7 million employees. Most of the responding companies (58%) are in the service industry, with 21% each in manufacturing and other business types. Companies ranged in size from as small as two employees to more than 175,000 employees, but nearly half (44%) were midsized operations. Another 32% were small companies and 24% were large businesses.

Based on information those organizations provided about their well-being initiatives and outcomes, HERO identified ten strategies that consistently predicted participation in health assessment surveys and biometric health screenings, employee health outcomes and cost reductions, and perceived employee support.

#### About the HERO Scorecard

Employers of any size and industry can access a free, online assessment tool to evaluate their health and well-being initiatives, benchmark themselves against other companies and better understand opportunities to improve their efforts.

The assessment tool—the HERO Health and Well-being Best Practices Scorecard in Collaboration with Mercer—includes 48 scored items in six domains:

1. Strategic planning
2. Organizational and cultural support
3. Programs
4. Program integration
5. Participation strategies
6. Measurement and evaluation.

The tool is available at <https://hero-health.org/hero-scorecard/>.

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miles at lunch, but they must demonstrate that they believe the health of their employees is important. That could mean holding walking meetings at work, sharing personal well-being stories, modeling work-life balance by not sending nonessential emails while on vacation or simply letting employees know it's OK to take time for their health during the workday. It also means recognizing employees for healthy actions they take to improve their well-being—for example, by inviting employees who have achieved significant health goals to a special recognition lunch with the CEO.

#### 4. Support Midlevel Managers and Supervisors in Promoting Employee Well-Being

While many organizations report senior-level leadership support, far fewer say they are supporting their midlevel managers and supervisors as influencers of well-being for the teams that they lead. The most effective initiatives include providing managers and supervisors with training, budgets and resources that allow them to support well-being in ways that are most relevant to their team's needs. Some organizations establish grant programs that allow midlevel leaders to apply for funding for specific programs or resources at their location, such as providing a refrigerator and a microwave in a break area or providing resiliency training to a workgroup in a high-stress job.

#### 5. Implement Policies That Support Employee Well-Being

It's not uncommon for employers to have a policy that limits tobacco use at the workplace, but well-being initiatives are more successful when multiple health-related policies exist and are enforced collectively. This might include allowing employees to take work time for physical activity, a rejuvena-

tion break or participation in available well-being programs. Healthy-eating policies might require healthy options at all company-catered events, office cafeterias and on-site vending machines. Or organizations might promote work-life balance by offering flextime policies, enhancing their paternity leave policy or allowing job-sharing options. Employers should make sure those policies are concrete and measurable by specifying to whom the policies apply and by offering specific examples of how policies should be implemented or applied.

#### 6. Engage Employees at All Levels of the Organization

Not many people can argue with the idea that companies benefit when employees are healthier. But to get the most from a well-being initiative, employers need to proactively engage employees to shape the direction of programming. Employees should have opportunities to provide input on program content, delivery methods and plans for future needs, and it's important for employers to heed that feedback by allowing it to influence what and how they implement programs. They should consider focus groups and employee testimonials to give everyone a chance to share their thoughts about company well-being offerings and use surveys to gauge whether employees feel they are supported in their efforts to improve well-being. Creating a wellness champion network for employees who are enthusiastic ambassadors for wellness efforts can also be an effective way to collect ongoing feedback from their peers.

## takeaways

- Organizations that demonstrate a commitment to health and well-being and have senior leaders who understand the link between wellness and business results while modeling healthy behaviors are more likely to have successful wellness programs.
- Policies that support employee well-being can include allowing employees to take time for physical activity or a rejuvenation break, requiring healthy options at company events as well as in cafeterias and vending machines, and supporting work-life balance through programs such as flextime and job-sharing.
- Employers should engage employees at all levels by providing them with opportunities to give input on programs. Communication strategies also should take into account varied employee populations.
- Well-being programs should have a strategic plan that details goals and how results will be reported.



## 7. Develop a Strategic Plan With Measurable Goals and Objectives

For optimal results, employers should develop a strategic plan that details what they hope to accomplish and how they expect to report results. They should think about how the various elements of the initiative will work together to produce measurable goals and objectives. Being specific about what success looks like for the organization and how long it might take to yield results will directly influence how and what is included in performance reports to leadership and other stakeholders. For example, a goal might be to achieve a 10% increase in the number of employees who say their immediate supervisor is supportive of their health and well-being within the next year.

## 8. Regularly Share Program Performance Data and Information With Multiple Stakeholder Groups

When an organization invests significant resources in an employee well-being initiative, it's typical for executive leaders and decision makers to receive an annual report about program results. But the most effective initiatives regularly share program performance data with managers and supervisors (including those not overseeing programs), employees, program vendors, as well as spouses and dependents of employees. Organizations with a community-oriented mission may also share program results with the broader community or even with company shareholders.

## 9. Target Communications to Diverse Groups

Today's workforce is diverse and dynamic, and the way in which we work continues to change. Reaching a diverse group requires a thoughtful communication strategy that uses multiple channels to reach the entire employee base. Emails might work for some groups, while employees who rarely use a computer might respond better to posters or written communication.

A message that works perfectly with one group might seem ineffective or even culturally insensitive to another group. For example, a nutrition message about choosing healthier pork products may offend cultural groups that forbid members to eat any type of pork. Suggesting that people go for a walk to stay active and improve mental well-being may be insensitive or unrealistic to workers who live in unsafe neighborhoods. It's important to consider the backgrounds of employees in all areas of an operation to ensure a communications plan will allow the employer to effectively reach everyone.

bio



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It's also important to develop messages specifically for various levels of leaders—from senior leaders to managers/supervisors to wellness champions—that acknowledge the unique role they play in supporting their own health as well as the health of their team.

## 10. Support Employee Wellness Champions or Ambassadors With Tools and Resources

Many organizations establish wellness champion or ambassador networks to promote local-level awareness of well-being offerings, but this strategy is more effective when champions or ambassadors are given ongoing training, resources and information. Best-in-class employers regularly convene these individuals to celebrate their successes, discuss lessons learned, and recognize and reward exemplary efforts. Some organizations even invest in dedicated online platforms to promote communication and information sharing among champions and ambassadors at various company locations.

## Conclusion

Employers increasingly are investing in workplace well-being, and they are looking for ways to move the needle and realize demonstrable outcomes. Many best practices have been identified related to designing and implementing effective, evidence-based programs. This latest research augments best practice information by identifying the culture of health practices that must accompany comprehensive programs to yield optimal outcomes. Although there is no quick fix or one-size-fits-all solution to maximizing employee well-being initiatives, employers that take advantage of proven strategies can create well-being initiatives that get them further, faster. **6**