



HERO Members Only Think Tank

Monday, June 7th, 2021

A Virtual HERO Think Tank AND DO Tank!



The War on Truth: The employer's role in plugging the disinformation rabbit hole.

“The Guardians and the War on Truth” was how TIME magazine, in 2018, characterized the journalists they named collectively as their “Person of the Year.” TIME argued that trust in government would erode if facts lost their place as foundational elements in decision-making. In 2021, in the midst of a historic pandemic, misinformation about the effectiveness of COVID-19 mitigating measures is ten times more prevalent than accurate, science-based information. The polarizing treatment of facts has been cast by many as a prime reason behind millions of preventable deaths. According to an ISD study of internet posts in 2020, 34 known **“disinformation-hosting websites** gathered the staggeringly high volume of **80 million interactions** on public Facebook.” This **compares to the 6.2 million Facebook** posts linking to credible health information sites like WHO or the CDC. Though clearly outgunned by misanthrope bloggers, WHO has been “working 24 hours a day to identify the most prevalent rumors that can potentially harm the public’s health, such as false prevention measures or cures. These myths are then refuted with evidence-based information.” <https://www.facebook.com/WHO/>)

As a leader in translating evidence to inform practice, HERO adheres to a basic science tenet: conclusions should be based in facts. Though the most recent anti-vaxxer movement is perhaps the most pernicious example today of disinformation run amok, threats to employee health literacy have been commonplace in the health promotion field for years. Quackery about nutrition, myths about drugs, unproven remedies for fitness and weight loss, hucksters peddling alternative medicine, and conspiracy theories about healthcare practices all pose costly setbacks to the nation’s workforce. This think tank challenges HERO members to consider their roles as

guardians against the growing assaults on science. In an era where the majority of Americans get health information via social media, our profession must systematically develop and advance initiatives where facts matter.

Evidence shows that education is necessary but insufficient in countering disinformation. Overcoming resistance to persuasion relates more to understanding motivational interviewing principles than to embarking in fact checking. And when purveyors of falsehoods have such unfettered channels as they do today, we need to reassess our role in persuasive and truth activism alongside our usual work of communication and education.

The Rabbit Hole Think Tank Objectives:

1. Information vs Persuasion. What roles are health coaches (motivational interviewing) and health promotion leaders playing in addressing health literacy?
2. Change happens at the speed of trust. Privacy, the use of incentives, and communications with employees about personal health information.
3. Vaccine hesitancy and politicized mask wearing. The employer's role in requiring, incentivizing, or persuading relative to evidence-based mitigation guidelines.
4. Carbs vs Fats. Describe workplace based food policies and other exemplary cases of employers informing healthy food choices and improving nutrition literacy.
5. Fitness Fads. Long slow pace vs short intense bouts? Bowflex or body vibrators? Best practices in employee fitness promotion.
6. HR as PR. The employer's role in calling out fake news and disinformation.
7. "Reasonably Designed Programs" and the contemporary VOI business case for investing in employee well-being.

Being truth guardians in an era of rampant misinformation and at a time where people are retreating to media echo chambers that suit their favored views means that employers and health promotion professionals must curate more than the facts as they are made available. We also need to place the facts we know alongside things we don't know or are only beginning to understand and build trust through humility and authentic leadership.

Recommended Readings:

Paul E. Terry, PhD, "Untangling Truth, Facts, and Opinions: Why Simple Tenets of Science Have Become Uneasy," *American Journal of Health Promotion*. First Published February 19, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890117119831864>

The Science of Changing Someone's Mind

Adam Grant, "The Science of Reasoning with Unreasonable People," *The New York Times*, January 31, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/31/opinion/change-someones-mind.html>

Vaccine Hesitancy and Motivational Interviewing

William J. McGuire, "Some Contemporary Approaches," in *Advances of Experimental Psychology*, Volume 1, 191 – 229. Academic Press: 1964. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0065260108600520>

Paul E. Terry, PhD, "Being Safe versus Being Safer: Mask Guidance and Hard-Earned Lessons from the AIDS Pandemic," *American Journal of Health Promotion*. First Published April 22, 2020.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0890117120922037>

Facebook and the Surveillance Society

The Other Coup. <https://nyti.ms/3iZZdx1>

Ramez Kouzy, Joseph Abi Jaoude, Molly B. El Alam, et al, "Coronavirus Goes Viral: Quantifying the COVID-19 Misinformation Epidemic on Twitter," *Cureus Journal of Medical Science*. March 2020.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339923047_Coronavirus_Goes_Viral_Quantifying_the_COVID-19_Misinformation_Epidemic_on_Twitter

"COVID-19 disinformation briefing No.3: Far-right exploitation of COVID-19," Institute for Strategic Dialogue. <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/COVID-19-Briefing-03-Institute-for-Strategic-Dialogue-12th-May-2020.pdf>