EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Incentivizing Corporate Wellness

Nearly every large employer offers some type of wellness program, but if your team feels you've "been there, done that," maybe it's time to revisit your definition of wellness. With the expansion of mindfulness, meditation, and yoga in the west, modern wellness applications are so much more than just eating veggies and stepping on a scale.

Corporate wellness is an eight billion dollar industry in the United States, and the projections for the next five years are even bigger. The time is now to get on board! Whether you're opting for a traditional program incentivizing weight loss or ways to quit smoking, or if you're revamping to focus more on holistic wellbeing, corporate wellness benefits both the employer and the employee.

Benefits to Employers

When employees are allowed to make wellness a priority, the result is reduced healthcare costs for employers. A study from the University of Louisville found that every dollar invested in a wellness program amounted to $7 in healthcare savings. Can't argue with that!

Another savings area is the amount of out-of-office time you'll be reducing when employees feel motivated to tackle a healthier lifestyle. Once your team sees a reduction in the amount of sick days, absences, doctor appointments, and even short- or long-term leave, it will become clear that your program is worth investing in.

Defining Wellness Beyond the Carrot

In today's world, health and wellness means thinking beyond just losing weight and exercising more. Research shows that when employees experience wellness in an integrated sense — spiritually, financially, intellectually, and socially — companies see a spike in productivity that moves the bottom line. It is important to understand that these aspects are connected.

A holistic wellness program that examines a number of areas helps to address the root cause of health problems rather than just the symptoms. For example, many employers may offer stress management programs leading to less workplace friction, but in the long-term additionally reduce hypertension and heart disease. A holistic and comprehensive program with an eye to the long game helps your staff address improved performance and overall wellbeing.

We all know the hardest part is getting employees invested and participating. Below we'll look at a few thought-starters for getting your staff motivated to take better care of themselves, and aim for higher performance.

HSA/FSA/HRA Contributions

Get your employees excited about your program with tangible rewards such as monthly premium discounts or contributions to their health savings accounts (HSAs) or health reimbursement arrangement (HRAs).

A way to do this is through a tiered and interactive program. To get started, employers offer to partially or totally fund their employees' HSAs – but with a catch. For example, in the first year, an employer might credit the account by $500. Then, the following year, the employer might require employees to complete a health risk assessment to receive the next level of $1,000 contribution. Then in the third year, the employer might bump up the requirements by including biometric testing or some other type of wellness indicator to receive the $1,500 credit.

Premium Reductions

Everyone knows health insurance can be costly. Why not incentivize your team with discounts applied directly to their premium for health and wellness? Simple benchmark ideas are passing biometric standards for blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose, or body mass index (BMI). When employees see the reduction in their costs month over month they will be more motivated to continue on the journey toward a healthier lifestyle.

Read more:
In U.S., Engaged Employees Exercise More, Eat Healthier.
Every dollar invested in a wellness program amounted to $7 in healthcare savings.

HR TRENDS

Addressing Marijuana Usage and Testing

Recreational cannabis legalization is rolling out across the United States, and many employers are faced with a big, hazy question: how should they address drug testing in the workplace? Eleven states have legalized recreational marijuana and 33 others have legalized medical marijuana. It's safe to say that in the next few months or years this topic will hit nearly every employer nationally.

Your leadership team may have questions as you unpack this issue. How is cannabis influencing safety and productivity on the job? Is your company at risk for a lawsuit if medical marijuana use doesn't align with the organization's zero-tolerance drug policy? How can you develop a defensible policy that is logical and effective?

It's understandable to feel overwhelmed by these questions, but it is important to know that you have options for ways to structure your company's policy on cannabis usage outside of the work environment. We will weigh the pros and cons of pre-employment testing, random testing, selective testing, and not testing at all.

Pre-Employment Testing

Most corporations that rely on manual labor for profit, such as transportation or advanced manufacturing, require a drug screening prior to hire and then routinely afterward. Historically, testing positive for a drug in any category (amphetamines, opiates, narcotics, hallucinogens) has been grounds for termination or retraction of a job offer.

However, these zero-tolerance policies as a barrier to entry are becoming tricky. With the onset of cannabis legalization, many state and local jurisdictions are implementing anti-discrimination laws that protect employees who might test positive for marijuana in mandatory employer screenings. Under these laws, a person could file a hefty lawsuit resulting in expensive settlements for corporations that deny a job offer to a medicinal or recreational cannabis user. Because of this legal risk, many employers are slashing the upfront drug testing to attract and successfully onboard more people, and avoid lawsuits.

Random Testing

It is common sense that employees shouldn't be impaired while on the job, especially in manual labor operations. However, it is nearly impossible to determine whether someone is high at work with a drug test, because cannabis can remain in the system for up to 30 days or more following even a single usage. The majority of court cases indicate that employers can't fire someone for using marijuana when they aren't on the clock. Because of this, more employers will need to use observation and performance review tactics to make termination decisions, and then be prepared to face any legal repercussions the employee may initiate.

For many employers, the risk of not testing is far greater than the implications of hazardous workplace accidents as a result of cannabis impairment. For example, Uber uses routine, random drug screenings to ensure the safety of its independent drivers and their passengers. It is up to each organization to weigh the risks involved in safety, legal, and productivity loss when determining if a random test initiative is the right fit.

No Testing/Selective Panel Testing

If your business or organization does not use manual labor to produce revenue, an option is to forgo testing entirely. For example, in offices and other professional environments the risk of workplace accidents due to impairment is much lower.

Due to legalization and shifting cultural perceptions, many employer policies treat cannabis usage in an employee's personal life as a non-issue, comparing it to alcohol. Many millennials say they prefer to marijuana weed than to drink alcohol, and as that generation ages into corporate leadership roles, their attitudes will begin driving corporate policy.

If your team shares a relaxed perspective on cannabis, but is not quite ready to forgo drug testing entirely, a great option is a selective panel test. These do not test for THC (the active ingredient in cannabis), but can register other illegal substances. Selective panels are *available to an employer in up to 14 criteria.* This option can ensure workplace safety and productivity without getting into the stickiness of cannabis use.

Read more:
[Why drug testing at work 'is the new don't ask, don't tell'](#)
[All You Need To Know About Drug Testing In Uber and Transportation Services](#)
[Why millennials prefer cannabis to booze: 'Zero enjoyment out of drinking'](#)
[Drug Test Panels](#)

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Fighting Unconscious Bias In the Workplace

We are all familiar with overt biases in the workplace. From off-color jokes to discriminatory hiring practices, the experience of conscious bias is an unfortunate reality for many women and men at all levels of corporate hierarchy.

But what about unconscious bias? These are the covert thoughts we wouldn't necessarily share with our social circles due to increasing awareness around political correctness. But implicit bias can have devastating, insidious consequences.

"It's natural for most scientists to be men, women are better suited for social professions."

"Maybe if poor people would spend less money on frivolous things they wouldn't need food stamps."

Everyone has hidden, unconscious biases. In fact, our brains are hardwired to act on these. Biases are located in the brain's amygdala, which governs fear or the "fight or flight" reaction. Due to the high volume of choices we face every day, unconscious bias can be difficult to mitigate. If we had to weigh each decision against our implicit bias, the brain would undoubtedly be overloaded, triggering that "fight or flight" response.

The dark side of this hardwiring is that we often default to acting on stereotypes, whether or not we consciously believe them. There are several ways thought leaders in psychology and organizational leadership recommend addressing unconscious and implicit bias in the workplace.

1. Transparency

A felt sense of transparency is critical in the workplace for everyone's success. [Research shows](#) that employees are more successful when they are assured that fair and thoughtful decisions are made by leadership teams, and that those decisions are well communicated. Keeping important operational secrets that may involve levels of bias have [lasting and often irreparable consequences](#) on corporate reputation when and if they are exposed. Making actionable choices to become more transparent leads to greater levels of employee happiness, longevity, and higher performance.

When fostering a culture of transparency, it is helpful to have a diverse team overseeing hiring and operational determinations rather than one that is homogenous. The former is more likely to catch implicit biases before they negatively impact decision making.

2. Proactive Training

To build upon point one, transparency needs to be met with action. Starbucks' implicit bias training is a great example of this in action at a corporate level. When the global coffee giant faced negative press following the inappropriate arrest of two black men at one location, their response was to initiate employee unconscious bias training sessions. Its training program was revolutionary because it initiated prescriptive rules around what is otherwise a subjective and difficult area to address.

3. Understand the Larger Scope

Unconscious and implicit bias does not operate in a vacuum. Each person's actions in the professional world have a ripple effect that creates either positive or negative momentum. On a larger scale, implicit bias moves people, policies, and legislation in very big ways. This is something to be taken seriously and to be treated as on ongoing conversation rather than a temporary fix. Company culture consultants recommend auditing the hiring process and corporate leadership decisions quarterly at a minimum. As new people join the team, each person can provide fresh insight on how to evaluate and address implicit bias for collective success.

Read more:
10 Things Transparency Can Do For Your Company
Building world-class ethics and compliance programs: Making a good program great Five ingredients for your program
Starbucks, Police And Mayor Respond To Controversial Arrest Of 2 Black Men In Philly
Watch the Starbucks anti-bias training video
Here Is Why Organisations Need to be Conscious Of Unconscious Bias

PRODUCTIVITY

Expansion of the Remote Workforce

According to one Cision study, more than 50% of the working works from home at least half of the week. Remote work is exploding in popularity, expanding by 91% over the last ten years and 159% over the last 12 years.

Thanks to ever-evolving digital and cloud-based technology, employees can essentially carry out their tasks from anywhere in the world. Working remotely is no longer seen as a privilege or something proprietary to the world of progressive startups.

Many people (particularly millennials) in leadership roles are taking note of the many benefits of remote work. Office professionals believe taking a break from the physical office space significantly increases productivity, work-life balance, and overall quality of life. Below are tips for envisioning a productive work-remote cadence.

Debunking the Myths

The common platitude among leadership teams opposed to remote work is that it doesn't encourage productivity. Too often, managers think of their employees abusing work-from-home by sprawling out on their couches binge-watching Netflix, or spending the day at the pool.

One longitudinal study from Stanford University found that this belief is actually the opposite of the truth; working remotely actually increased productivity by 13% where companies allowed it. Additionally, it aided employee retention and overall satisfaction.

When workers are absolved from distractions such as chatting, gossip, excessive meetings, breaks, etcetera, they are free to do more deep work. Deep work is essential for professionals who make a living by solving problems strategically and thinking critically. To do this a calming, distraction-free environment is essential.

Foster a Culture of Trust and Accountability

It is up to managers to set the tone for trust and transparency in the workplace. When your leadership team is creating a work-remote policy, simple checks and balances will go a long way to giving everyone peace of mind. Initiating an "always-reachable" policy is an easy way to make sure deadlines are met and employees are moving the needle on important tasks.

Requiring everyone to be online via Gchat, Slack, Google Hangouts, Skype, or other software during their regularly scheduled hours is a great first step. If everyone knows the expectation is to be reachable and on-call, there is less room for policy abuse. Similarly, if your team finds that the policies *are* abused, you should establish corrective action, such as a rollback of work-remote privileges.

Think of Work-From-Home as Fiscally Responsible

Beyond productivity and performance, remote work has a beneficial financial component. According to one study, remote workers can save about $7,000 a year on average. These savings come from reducing or eliminating the cost of gas, car maintenance, public transit, professional attire, meals, and child care.

And the benefits aren't just for the employee. For employers, the money saved includes office overhead costs, such as rent, property taxes, utility bills, supplies, corporate lunches, and other expensed items. Because work remote is shown to reduce personnel turnover, the cost saved for the employer extends to include time and money spent advertising, recruiting, and training employees.

Read more:
The End of the Traditional 9-5? IWG New Study Finds 70 Per Cent of Us Skip the Office to Work Elsewhere
Why Working From Home Is a "Future-looking Technology"
2019 Remote IT Workers Stats: 10 Facts Companies Should Know

EMPLOYER WEBINAR

What Employers Need to Know about Open Enrollment

Tuesday, October 8, 2019 • 2:00 p.m. ET / 11:00 a.m. PT

This webinar will discuss how employers should prepare for open enrollment by:

- Providing an overview of notices that employers should provide to employees during open enrollment, such as the Medicare creditable coverage disclosure
- Describing the requirements for electronic delivery of participant materials
- Explaining the differences between making a change to the plan as part of open enrollment versus making a change to the plan mid-year
- Describing how applicable large employers would offer coverage when they use the look-back measurement method
- Describing general updates that employers should make to plan documents and handbooks before the start of the plan year
- Briefly describing the types of non-discrimination testing that employers should perform before the start of the plan year
- Describing open enrollment best practices

This 60-minute intermediate level webinar will help employers plan for open enrollment.

Registration

Register here for the webinar. The presentation will be posted on the *UBA website* the afternoon before the webinar.

About the Presenter

Chelsea Deppert is an associate in the Atlanta office of Fisher Phillips. She provides practical guidance to employers on the technical aspects of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) and other state and federal laws impacting the design, implementation and ongoing compliance of employee benefit plans and programs. She advises clients with respect to all aspects of employee benefits, including retirement plans, health and other welfare benefit plans.

Certification

This webinar has been submitted to the *Human Resource Certification Institute* and the *Society for Human Resource Management* to qualify for 1 recertification credit hour.