

Social Support



You believe that employee health and wellness is a stewardship issue and you've done some organizational self-examination, and you've asked some questions about how the workplace environment impacts employee health. Now let's focus on another important influencing factor when it comes to employee health and wellness. Let's get social! As we assume that the majority of employees in our workplace want to take actions that will help them to live a healthy lifestyle, let's go back to this important reminder:

*"It is unreasonable to expect that people will change their behavior easily when so many forces in the social, cultural, and physical environment conspire against such change."
("The Future of the Public's Health in the 21st Century," Institute of Medicine)*

The purpose of looking for opportunities to create social connections around employee wellness at your workplace is to fully leverage what we all know to be true: We are designed to live and thrive in community.

*Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor:
If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.
But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.
Ecclesiastes 4:9-10*

King Solomon reminds us that not everything we do is going to automatically be easy or immediately successful. Most of the positive changes we make in our lives come about by going through a learning process that takes time. For most everyone, especially employees balancing the demands of work, ministry, and home, the process of making lasting and positive changes in their health habits is not linear nor lightning fast. Having supportive social connections helps employees to keep going in the right direction even as they learn by trial and error.

*Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."
1 Corinthians 15:33*

As Paul instructs the Corinthian church, he quotes this proverb by the Greek poet Menander. He reminds them, and us, that we can easily be led away from what we know to be good, and true by the influence of others. Likewise, we can greatly benefit from the influence of others, especially when it comes to health practices. Research has shown that health habits are contagious, and our health choices are influenced by the behavior of others in eating well, maintaining a healthy body weight, exercising, and avoiding smoking and excessive alcohol use.

Creating opportunities for social connections is an important supportive strategy for positively impacting employee health and wellness. There are three primary ways that leaders can help employees leverage social connections in the interest of healthy living:

1. Help employees find others with similar needs and interests
2. Help employees share their ideas and experiences to inspire each other
3. Help employees endeavor together towards a common goal

Here are descriptions of each of these social connection strategies along with some ideas on how to create opportunities for each one in your workplace.

Social Connection Strategy	Opportunities
<p>Employee Needs/Interests - Like-minded employees naturally support each other if they can find each other.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct an employee wellness interest/needs survey and find resources for workplace support groups around interests and needs that appeal to many. 2. Utilize an internal or external social media platform where employees can join and talk within groups about their health/wellness interests/needs.
<p>Employee Experiences - Employees find support when they learn from and are inspired by positive experiences shared by others.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask each employee to identify the dimension of wellness (physical, intellectual, social, vocational, financial, spiritual, mental/emotional, environmental) that they would consider to be their greatest strength. Ask them to identify themselves by their wellness strength to fellow employees (sign on their desk/bulletin board or add it to their internal email signature) to help employees identify who might be a source of ideas, inspiration, and support in their workplace. 2. Create a Wellness Wisdom Testimonial Contest where employees can submit and share their wellness success strategies and stories with others in the workplace.
<p>Employee Group Endeavors- Employees naturally support each other when they work together to achieve a common goal.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a “Know and Be Known” initiative where employees are paired with a different partner each week for at least one 10-minute walking break. 2. Create an employee event with a specific health-related goal, such as a whole grain potluck where employees work together to try out some new healthy ideas and options.

Creating opportunities for social connections among employees is an important component of any successful wellness endeavor. It's important to remember that we're all in this together. Wellness is not just about me. Wellness begins with "we."

Sources:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK221239/>

<https://www.berkeleywellness.com/self-care/preventive-care/article/good-habits-are-contagious>