

Small Strategic Steps



You've come a long way! You've examined your beliefs, made some observations about the state of employee health and wellness in your organization, and you've thought about ways to leverage social connections among employees. Now you are ready to move beyond talking to taking action. All the evaluation in the world won't support your employees...

*All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.
Proverbs 14:23*

...unless you use that information gained to begin taking some small strategic steps forward when it comes to employee wellness.

The purpose of deciding on and taking small strategic steps forward in employee health and wellness is to apply all you have learned up to this point in the interest of the health and well-being of your employees.

As you begin this process, here are a few important points to keep in mind:

Stay Employee Focused

It's important to be able to demonstrate that every action step considered is directly tied to what you have learned about your employees' wants, needs, struggles, and strengths. At this point, the temptation comes in to invest in what is popular, current, or what has the loudest advocate within your organization. A few key questions to ask when considering possible suggested action steps are:

1. How does this help our employees be good stewards of their health and health resources?
2. How does this relate to what we know about the health of the overall employee population?
3. How does this relate to what employees have told us about their wants and needs?
4. How does this address a struggle that we know our employees have in maintaining a healthy

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lifestyle while working here? How does this address what employees have told us they find supportive?

5. How does this incorporate opportunities for social connections around health and wellness?

Start Small

While there are many large wellness vendors who offer large and expensive employee wellness services, remember employee wellness programs are most effective when they start small.

Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin...

Zechariah 4:10

When it comes to helping employees adopt and maintain healthy lifestyles, the “go big or go home” philosophy goes against what we know about behavioral science. Healthy changes that stick are adopted one small step at a time over a period of time. Consider the following proverb:

*A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—
and poverty will come on you like a thief and scarcity like an armed man.*

Proverbs 6:10

King Solomon reminds us that small amounts of neglect over time can result in disastrous consequences. We accept this is true, but often forget that the opposite is true as well. Small investments over time can result in large benefits. This is especially true when it comes to making healthy changes in the midst of a busy workplace and life.

Select Behavior-related Steps

Because almost everyone likes to see results, organizations tend to be very outcomes focused when it comes to workplace initiatives. Employee wellness initiatives do produce good outcomes, but when engaging employees, it's best to help them focus on adopting positive *health behaviors* rather than trying to create specific *health outcomes*. From a spiritual perspective, consider the following passage:

He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.”

Mark 4:26-29

Jesus reminds us of who is responsible for what. Man is responsible for doing his part and taking a step of faith by planting a seed. Beyond that, God is responsible for everything that brings about His intended result - the harvest. In the scriptures, we almost never find God asking His people to create an outcome. Instead, He asks His people to obey His commands and directives, respond to His call, and live wisely. In response, God works through the faith and obedience of His people to create outcomes in accordance with His design and purpose.

Before you decide to create an employee wellness program that rewards or penalizes employees for achieving a specific health outcome (such as weight, waist circumference, blood pressure, cholesterol, or blood glucose), ask yourself these questions:

1. Does God hold you responsible for the specific outcomes of your efforts? Or does He hold you responsible for your actions? Which seems fair to you?
2. In your life experience, do your actions always lead to your desired specific outcomes? Are you able to control that? Or are there sometimes forces at work that are outside your control that impact the outcomes of your actions?
3. When it comes to managing your health, do you find that it is an exact science? Do your healthy habits (or lack thereof) always produce consistent, predictable, and measurable health outcomes?
4. What motivates you to do better? Are you motivated when you are rewarded for taking a positive step forward? Or are you motivated when you are rewarded or penalized for an outcome that is not entirely within your control?

Just like the man who plants the seed, the result he sees comes about because of his actions (scattering the seed) as well as factors that he does not control.

Key Point: When you design an employee wellness program with an excessive focus on measuring health outcomes, employees become frustrated and resentful. Why? Because, as humans, we are not in complete control of our health outcomes, despite our best efforts (or lack thereof).

Here's are some examples of how to turn your desired employee health outcome into specific behaviors that can be supported by specific small strategic actions steps:

Desired Health Outcome	Target Behaviors	Small Strategic Steps to Support Employees
Weight Loss	Eat breakfast every day	Offer an assortment of small, healthy breakfast foods in the break room Offer a small amount of flexibility in start times
	Eat nutrient dense foods	Offer healthy snack foods in the break room Create a policy about serving healthier food options at office meetings or events
	Eat moderate portions of food	Cut large portions of food items in half when serving them at office meetings and events
	Navigate difficult food-related situations	Offer a weekly weight loss support group
	Exercise at least 150 minutes/week	Offer flexible work schedules and lunch schedules Offer a gym discount to employees Conduct an employee wellness event or challenge around exercise

	Increase unstructured movement throughout the day	Encourage walking meetings Encourage use of stairs Offer standing desks
	Get 8 hours of sleep each night	Create a policy about work communications after working hours Offer employees an app with exercises to help them wind down before bed

As you begin to take action steps in supporting your employees' health and well-being, remember this proverb:

*Desire without knowledge is not good - how much more will hasty feet miss the way!
Proverbs 19:2*

Before you act on your desires to support employees through wellness initiatives, take the time to think it through and ask yourself these questions:

1. Is the employee support I'm considering directly and demonstrably related to the needs and wants of my employees?
2. Is the employee support I'm considering small enough to be easily adopted?
3. Is the employee support I'm considering related to a target employee behavior as opposed to a desired employee health outcome?

Important: As you begin to create an employee wellness strategy one small step at a time, remember that employers must abide by legal regulations associated with wellness programs. Employee wellness programs must comply with HIPAA, ADA, and GINA regulations, among others. Please consult your legal counsel prior to launching an employee wellness initiative to make sure it is legally compliant.

Sources:

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