

Managing corporate wellness

By Lesanne Brooke

Leaders, managers and human resource professionals recognise the need for wellness programmes to maintain effectiveness through times of change. Why and how do we ensure that the feel-good factor is integrated and sustained?

This is a changing world and the instability translates in ways that directly affect workplace behaviour. Concerns about financial security, job security and physical security create an underlying tension and affect relationships at work and at home. This affects performance.

Corporate wellness programmes are necessarily responding to the need for stress and tension management. The success of workplace wellness programmes can be found in global research statistics: less absenteeism and improved productivity are major motivators as wellness stakes its valid claim to budget resources.

The real aim of wellness programmes

From an organisational perspective, the deeper meaning of corporate wellness is the ability to maintain or gain market presence through challenging times.

Direct stressors like redundancies, experience of crime or family problems; day-to-day details like traffic, technology break downs, tensions between colleagues, negative media headlines etc. create under-functioning, short-fused, problem-prone employees.

Lacking outlets and coping skills for dealing with such common stress, the problem is compounded over and over again. Burnout, illness, addiction, conflict, inefficiency and depression bloom. Out with talented skills-expression and in with repetitive crisis management.

The aim of wellness programmes is to support adaptable, vital, fully-functioning employees. Fierce competition in a fast-changing world demands this priority. The actual outcomes required are not just stress management and happy employees, but qualities that shape corporate competence, stabilise employers through rocky economies and maintain the competitive edge.

Balancing the heightened stress and many factors of change-realities is the foundation of true workplace health.

The deeper motivation for corporate wellness:

- stable employees expressing their unique talents
- lateral thinking
- clear vision
- cohesive team relationships
- dynamic problem solving abilities
- leadership confidence and stamina
- dependability
- follow-through
- flexibility}

How to make programmes meaningful

After an initial focus on exercise programmes and general health check-ups, the wellness concept has developed into a more holistic approach. Relaxation spaces and treatments have been added, environments have been greened. As we have seen, true wellness needs to support people to manage their stress and stressors in ways that enhance their performance, behaviours and interpersonal skills.

Physical fitness plays a vital role in improving stamina and health; spa treatments and fun days bring release, but the effects are not sustainable without emotional fitness. Emotional fitness (or EQ) builds coping skills, resistance and core well-being. Counselling and leadership coaching programmes have been added to the support that physical programmes offer.

Sustainability comes when corporate wellness programmes nurture and validate the vital qualities eroded by stress, trauma and tension.



In essence the focus of wellness must include:

- A healthy environment
- Inter-personal communication
- Fitness and relaxation
- Support and validation
- Healthy coping skills and skills enhancement

When is a deeper investment into wellness required?

Traumatic group experiences

If there has been a traumatic event that affects the team, a period of sustained tension or big company changes, denial and unhealthy coping skills may create a group ethos of limited functioning and de-motivated thinking.

Individuals may deal with some of these issues privately, but the group dynamic will over-run positive changes and limit outcomes. In such a case, functional wellness can only be restored with an intervention that goes beneath the overlay of resistance and entrenched behaviour.

Personal trauma

This also applies to individuals who have experienced a private trauma and feel unable to release the effect of this on their behaviours. Sometimes this can be in spite of counselling, because there is an unconscious physical resistance, or the person may resist talking to anyone because they find it too painful to deal with memories or patterns.

Again, this would require a specific, gentle intervention, preferably in the context of ongoing counselling support.

A need for change

Wellness enhances and restores creativity. An organisation may require a shift in focus, leading-edge thinking and dynamic problem solving. In this instance, conventional thinking patterns and behaviours need to be suspended to allow for change and insights. Specific interventions can greatly contribute to opening people's minds and releasing in-the-box attitudes.

Interventions to break through blocks and habitual ways

Creative interventions allow break-through to come naturally, by suspending conventional reality and allowing for safe release of whatever has caused the restriction. Such interventions do not need to name, analyse or re-experience negative memories, patterns or traumas.

Through individual coaching, or group workshops, facilitated break-through experiences can really make the difference and create effective overall corporate wellness. When done in a group, the enjoyment and bonding increase the effects and create a sense of effortless, supported change.

With careful crafting of individual and group dynamics, processes could include cross-over activities between brain hemispheres, creative non-competitive activities that allow for spontaneous play and go beneath the protective shield of logic and specific exercises to free core-held resistance.

Some people find this unusual for their 'work-self', so it must be contextualised in a way that feels comfortable. Rather than presenting it as an intervention, it is better perceived as an unusual way to encourage creative thinking or inter-personal dynamics.

Back-to-basics methodology

Encouraging a new perspective

As we know, the right-brain is the infinite, creative brain, whereas the left brain is the focussed, detailed brain which maintains rational, workplace functioning. It can only respond from a finite, known set of information.

Simple techniques for making the left brain safe, whilst opening to right brain consciousness, allow for significant insights, releases and creative patterning. (Suspending logic for creative problem-solving can be done through puzzles and multi-sensory activities.) 'Returning' to left

brain thinking means a new (now known) data-pattern and therefore allows for different behaviours.

When specifically facilitated, change takes place without challenging the established coping reality of the individual. This makes it particularly effective. Such techniques open the mind; enhance well-being, release traumas and change behaviours. Participants usually report renewed vigour and focus and find that the changes are easily incorporated in both the short and long term.

Physical release

Tension, trauma and rigid thinking patterns are also held in the body. Cellular and muscle memory is usually unreachable by analysing and talking. Specific muscles and nerves hold these patterns and left-brain thinking bypasses them. Exercise can relieve the muscles without reaching the core where body memories are stored. There may be temporary release, but triggers will activate the body memory and old patterns will 'habitualise' the response.

A series of exercises called Trauma or Tension Release Exercises (TRE) are specifically designed to centre and relax the body at the precise place of physical response. These exercises induce gentle vibrations that ease old stress-based chemicals out of the muscles and tone the central nervous system releasing limiting body-memories. This enables almost effortless change.

In the context of a wellness intervention, these exercises shift group dynamics as well as individual behaviour patterns. When these techniques are combined with skills building, the overall effect translates directly to the desired outcomes for both employee and employer.

Commit to the principle of true wellness

Valuing the way in which the wellness budget is spent requires a creative, holistic approach and the intention for positive change. Seemingly simple interventions make a significant contribution to the successful, long term outcomes of corporate wellness programmes when part of a considered approach to managing people.

Investing in employees and their well-being brings results and sustainable results will encourage genuine valuing of the wellness programme and its corporate role.

Managing wellness well is genuinely win-win!

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Put a little snap into your message!

Add some humour to your communications -
magazines, brochures, advertising or presentations
Quick and snappy cartoons, illustrations or
graphics can whip up a little fun and create impact

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