

WELLNESS

5 ways to assess a wellness program's ROI

Is content current, relevant, and used by employees of all demographics? Are employees noticeably more energetic and productive?

By Anna Mittag

Believe it or not, 2017 is already coming to a close. For many businesses, year-end is just around the corner, which means it's time for reviews.

Assessing the success or failure of any initiative can be complex, and corporate wellness programs are no exception. Even if everything seems perfect on paper, human resources may still be left wondering: Is this program really working?

Numbers only paint part of the picture

Of course, there are metrics such as usage rates and changes in absenteeism that can be used to calculate the effectiveness of a wellness program, but employers shouldn't stop there.

Those figures are great for getting a sense of which aspects are popular and which need to be changed or scrapped altogether, but they don't explain why.

To fully understand and evaluate the worth of a wellness program, it's essential to look well beyond numbers and claims.

Here are five simple ways to tell if your program is on the right track:

Is program content current and relevant?

It is no longer simply enough to provide dental and vision coverage and call it a day. If an employer wants to attract, retain and support star talent, the program needs to be competitive and comprehensive.

Particularly with depression be-

ing the leading cause of disability worldwide, it's time for employers to start offering detailed resources on mental health.

In addition, they need to publicly recognize that mental health isn't just about depression, stress and anxiety, but also includes more sensitive subjects such as addiction, sexual violence and suicide.

Employers shouldn't shy away from these tough issues. They should give staff the resources they need to cope and heal if they are facing such challenges.

Is the program being used by employees of all demographics?

There should be cause for concern if a corporate wellness program is being used exclusively by men, new mothers or interns at a specific branch. A company-wide initiative needs to address the needs of everyone at the organization, regardless of their background.

This doesn't mean the program should be watered down to appeal to the greatest common denominator.

In fact, it's about striving for the opposite. The better a program's content is tailored for specific audiences, the more effective it'll be.

Think about how to offer all employees the same level of support and access, regardless of level, shift or location.

Are employees accessing the program in interesting, innovative ways?

Employee buy-in is key, and one of the best ways to ensure the sustainability of a wellness program is to make it easy for your workforce to access company well-being resources whenever they need them most.

Don't assume staff members are most likely to use the program during their lunch break; they might prefer accessing resources during their commute or at home after work.

So ask them what they need. Employers might think employees prefer to read PDFs when in reality they're more comfortable watching videos or listening to podcasts.

Ideally, the program should come in a number of different formats to appeal to the unique preferences of staff.

Are employees noticeably more energetic and productive?

Make a habit of checking in with employees to see how they're doing: Are they getting their work done faster? Are they collaborating better with each other? Perhaps they're more creative, or contribute more during meetings?

These are all indications that the wellness program is working as hoped.

Healthy employees have more energy, and are therefore more likely to work quickly and efficiently.

Is the program scaling organically?

The ability to scale is particularly important for larger organizations, es-

pecially if staff members are spread over wide geographical distances.

If a program can scale well, it'll cost far less to distribute than a program that doesn't. Moreover, it means employees can share helpful resources with the people they care about.

The health of employees hinges on the well-being of those around them. Problems such as illness, divorce or financial troubles can ripple through a family and have a considerable impact on employee well-being and productivity.

By enabling staff to share the program with their loved ones, employers can effectively improve more lives without significant added effort.

There's no such thing as too much data

At the end of the day, the purpose of a corporate wellness program is to help employees thrive.

With that goal in mind, it's important for employers to collect as much information as possible and to learn what changes, if any, are required to best serve the workforce.

If the amount of effort required for this data collection is a concern, rest assured that there are many ways of automating the process.

User feedback and anonymous tracking links are only two of several options.

Just remember to balance the objective of gaining valuable insights with respecting the privacy of employees.

If employers don't check back with their workforces regularly, the program will not succeed. Employee well-being simply isn't a set-it-and-forget-it kind of thing.

Several variables are continuously dynamic, such as staff, their needs and priorities, and the resources and support that are (or aren't) available to them in their respective communities.

A wellness program should be

responsive to factors such as this. It should adapt to fill in the gaps so it actually helps people, rather than being reduced to redundancy.

Advocating for the health of employees can also have a positive effect on a company's bottom line.

It's an accepted fact that organizations that offer exceptional wellness benefits consistently experience reduced turnover and improved employee engagement.

People are less likely to quit when they feel valued by their employer and fulfilled by their jobs, and one of the main ways employers can show this dedication is through comprehensive benefits and fully developed wellness programs.

Competition for talent is becoming increasingly fierce, prompting companies to find creative ways of standing out from the competition.

Wellness programs are now a

bona fide human resources strategy, and with the right approach, yours can truly make a difference in so many lives.

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