

## The business strategy behind workplace wellness

By Cathy Kenworthy

When business leaders consider the positive aspects of a workplace wellness program, they often bring up expected reasons: It can keep employees healthy, productive and happy; allow the company to differentiate itself in a highly competitive marketplace for top talent; and limit overall health care costs.

I agree with all three. However, I advise executives to consider workplace wellness in a way that is even more central to their core mission – by putting their people, and the health of their people, at the core of that mission.

I ask them to think about workplace wellness as a business strategy.

Wellness has become a key driver of corporate strategy for many organizations, yielding increased productivity and business performance.

Organizations are recognizing that improving the health, and therefore increasing productivity, of their people will reduce medical claim costs and do much more. Increased effectiveness and efficiency leads to an improved bottom line and sustained competitive advantage. Successful outcomes-based wellness programs measure productivity in addition to focusing on medical cost savings.

For example, an independent study found that participants in Interactive Health's programs returned to work sooner than those who did not participate — 11 days sooner from worker's compensation and 17 days sooner from short-term disability. The implication is simple: by taking a strategic approach to wellness, an organization develops a workforce that is healthier, more productive and more capable of driving value.

An effective business strategy requires the ability to prioritize and manage a small number of factors that will increase the organization's odds of meeting its most important business goals. Here are several tips I often give corporate leaders and

benefits specialists on why the right wellness program is at the core of that business strategy:

- Every company maintains a unique culture. Your wellness program can and should amplify that culture.
- You're looking for innovative solutions to increase the productivity of every individual employee. Your wellness program should offer outcomes-based solutions that are personalized and hold all individuals accountable for their health improvement.
- An agile benefits design, one that keeps up with this time of massive change in health care, is a critical element of your ability to recruit and maintain a talented workforce, while managing costs. A wellness program that is plan agnostic gives you a consistent approach and message to your people, and avoids the confusion of having multiple wellness plans when working with more than one health plan carrier. Whether you work with multiple plans, change health plan carriers, or move to an exchange, putting one consistent wellness program in place enables you to meet your benefits goals – on your terms.

Clearly, it's a time of terrific change in health care. As a leader in your organization, you need to ensure that your company's people strategy is a consistent foundation from which to build. And you know that improving the health, and therefore the productivity, of your people will improve your bottom line.

When you align your wellness program with the business objectives of your organization, you put your people at the center of your business and create a foundation that will endure over the long term to drive the success of your business.

After all, the success of your organization is what's at stake.

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