



Designing a Corporate Wellness Program that Works

By: Dave Drap President WellnessIQ

Corporate Wellness programs have been around for many years. There has also been a long standing debate as to if these types of programs work. This is a similar question that could be posed to Corporate America if performance reviews, ongoing training programs, employee assistance programs, or social interaction programs for employee morale are effective for both the employee and the bottom line of the employer. The overall answer is that some of these types of programs are successful while others ultimately fail. No surprise the key components include the design and execution of the program.

How to create a wellness program that works? What can employers and consultants do to avoid some of the missteps that have been made in the past in designing a program that turned out to be ineffective and costly? WellnessIQ has done a significant amount of research, case studies, and monitoring of higher performing employer groups to share the following building blocks for a successful program.

The common elements of unsuccessful programs include:

One and done wellness programs. Our definition of a one and done wellness program is tied around an employer group only offering a Health Risk Assessment and then tying in an incentive around the completion of the Assessment.

Short Term Wellness Campaigns. These types of wellness themed challenges like a biggest loser themed challenge are in the sporadic or randomized wellness category and are rarely effective.

Carrier Wellness, sending employees to health plan websites and hope for the best.

Offering Incentives to programs that are not integrated. Long term behavior change should be the main area of focus and incentive design should be both relevant and achievable in the overall company wellness objectives.

So what is the best way to identify and implement an effective wellness program? An effective wellness program is an all- inclusive customized approach to include strategy, implementation and management of the programs offered to the employees and families of an employer.

Build a culture and strategy of employee population health and wellness. A healthy company culture is built over time intentionally and from the inside out. Most wellness vendor options that we represent have expanded their focus to a strategy of total employee wellbeing. Areas of focus include: emotional, financial, physical, social, and career health.



A commitment from Leadership. Most company objectives and projects require a commitment from leadership and this is no different when implementing a wellness program. Helping to establish a healthy work environment that can be included in a company vision or mission statement can be a very effective way to both promote engagement and see long term results.

Making sure incentives are smart and relevant. It is very difficult to simply pay employees to change habits that they have been practicing all of their lives. There is strong evidence that by providing a proper incentive that is relevant to specific employee populations increases participation and engagement rates significantly. The goal is to “raise the bar” over time from an incentive perspective and trying to move an employee population from being rewarded by simply participating to moving in to behavior change rewards programs. Employees will feel better about themselves with this small step based approach and it is an effective way of moving larger populations in to healthier categories.

Spread the word with multiple options. Wellness platforms today offer multiple ways to communicate with employees via email, push notification, having space on a wellness or health portal to communicate, to hard copy posters in break rooms. In addition, creating or having a wellness committee to further spread the excitement and information of wellness initiatives can be extremely effective too. Employees that have an interest on any level in wellness are wonderful ambassadors to these types of services because they are passionate about them and are willing to help in any way needed.

Measuring the right metrics and results. Evaluating a program short, medium, and long term is very important in maintaining accountability for a wellness program. In order to do this well, an evaluation plan needs to be developed at the start of the overall wellness program so there is some level of baseline data that is established. Return on Investment (ROI), Value on Investment (VOI), tracking absenteeism, employee work production, and overall employee engagement can all be tracked on some level. By setting up the evaluation process in the beginning the wellness program provider can begin collecting and aggregating these data points.

Where to start? Wellness programs can be an enormous undertaking for both the Consultant and the Human Resource department of the employer. The good news is in many cases it comes down to who are the members of your wellness team. There are hundreds of wellness offerings across the country and it is important to know what resources are able to be leveraged for your customer. WellnessIQ is a general agency for wellness services with a consultant-centric approach. We design, develop, implement, and service programs based on a portfolio of wellness offerings selected to cover a wide-span of customer goals and needs. We work within a good, better, best approach model for both budget and service needs and recommend an incremental approach to the build-out of each customer program.