

# Wellness 101

*Rona Lewis, CEO of PlayMore Corporate Wellbeing*

Back when I was in the corporate world I lived in New York City. This was in the late 80's. We didn't have any kind of "wellness" plan. As a matter of fact, if you used the word "wellness" to my HR person, she would have thought you were one of those New Age people who wanted to go to a retreat for a weekend and study your navel. But that's it. The 80's were the ME decade. People were into working out and wearing headbands and leg warmers to aerobics classes, (Thanks to Olivia Newton John) but there was no such thing as a wellness program at work!

I used to get up at 6am, walk to the gym carrying my work clothes, work out, shower, dress, grab a cab and be at work by 8:30. Luckily, in Manhattan, nothing's that far away. Once I got to the office, I saw the same thing I know you see. People who are stressed and overworked, with poor eating habits who can't seem to balance their time enough to have the wherewithal to take care of themselves.

Being in Human Resources, you're more aware than anyone how important it is to keep your employees healthy and happy. You know that it's not just about the money either-because in the course of wellness programs, all roads lead to money and saving it. When you keep your employees healthy, it increases productivity, cohesiveness and feelings of loyalty. Why? Because these programs are perks they can see and use. It makes them happy their company is taking care of them, while they take care of the company.

Let's go back to that word "wellness." What does it really mean? It's bandied about like everyone knows EXACTLY what the concept is. But do you? What constitutes a true wellness program? Can it really save money? And most of all, can you afford to have one?

The dictionary defines wellness as:

- The quality or state of being healthy in body and mind, especially as the result of deliberate effort. This makes sense on a personal level - we want to eat right and exercise, watch our heart health and blood pressure, make sure our bones and teeth are strong and our stress levels within an acceptable range, right?
- An approach to healthcare that emphasizes preventing illness and prolonging life, as opposed to emphasizing treating diseases.

For companies, this means that by being proactive, you can keep everyone healthy and make it possible for your employees to work for you until they're 132 years old.

Wellness programs are certainly gaining in popularity with both small and large companies. They vary in costs and components from simply getting a corporate membership to a gym chain like 24 hour fitness to having comprehensive one-on-one sessions for everything from exercise to acupuncture.

There have been a myriad of studies to determine if these programs work and if they can actually save money. True, it can be hard to evaluate the impact of mental health. But the general consensus, according to a review article of the Impact of Worksite Wellness Programs published in the American Journal of Managed Care, is that companies can save an average of \$3 for every \$1 spent on a wellness program. Of the 8 studies done on the ROI, some returns were as high as \$6 per dollar.

Employees were twice as likely to exercise, their diets improved-they consumed more fruits and vegetables, ate leaner meats, etc. They also saw improvements in employees BMI, blood pressure and other health markers.

The most popular styles of wellness programs seem to be split between the do-it-yourself model, with educational materials, and hiring experts for individual counseling and coaching. My company helps with that and more, offering elements of play, meditation and lunch and learns where experts from finance to relationships teach and suggest to employees the best ways to manage those aspects of their lives. This makes a wellness program into a wellbeing program, encompassing all aspects of one's life.

Now that we know what wellness programs can BE, how should you go about getting the right one for your company? Here's a brief list of things you'll need to do:

1. Get the big guys (or girls) involved! Getting the C - level support is very necessary for a successful wellness program. When they're around, employees get excited! They're happy to know EVERYONE in the company cares. Employees aren't stupid. They know and feel the difference between true concern and lip service.
2. Create Wellness Ambassadors - They help distribute information and keep the excitement going throughout the organization. Give them official titles and write this responsibility in their job description. It will make them more apt to do it well. Include people at all levels and have them meet weekly or semi-weekly. A small company may not need a whole "team." Just one person may do.
3. Do an informal marketing survey - What do your employees want in a wellness (or wellbeing) program? Do you think it can be done in-house? Should you hire experts to set it up and run it or just help initially?

4. Do you have an operating budget? Make sure what you want can be done with the finances you have available. Creativity is key in getting the biggest bang for your buck. Surprisingly, getting an outside company to help you with this can actually SAVE you money, in more ways than one. How? They'll know from experience what really drives employee engagement that sees results.
5. Carefully Craft An Operating Plan - When you get your marketing survey back, make a step by step plan for what programs you'll offer, when they'll be implemented and then share it with your ambassadors to start generating interest.
6. Get Rockin! With support from the top down, your program should be popular with your employees and you should be getting the feedback you need. After about 90 days....
7. ...Do an evaluation. Did what you offered get your employees engaged? Can you tweak it? Do you need more change? Or even less? How can you make it work for everyone? Do another marketing survey to get specifics from your people. Repeat from Step 1.

Whether you choose to do an in-house program or utilize the expertise of a company that specializes in them, a wellness program when done correctly gives your employees an incredible chance at positive changes in their work and personal lives.

### About PlayMore Corporate Wellbeing:

Rona Lewis is CEO of PlayMore Corporate Wellbeing, a revolutionary corporate wellness company. She is a fitness and lifestyle coach, author and professional speaker. Rona is uniquely qualified to work in the corporate wellness arena. Having been a "suit," herself, (Advertising VP) Rona understands the demands and pressures of corporate life and she truly knows how to work in that environment to promote a healthy lifestyle. She and her team connect to your employees through effective interpersonal communication that combines humor, positive reinforcement and a little tough love. Her unique communication style fosters trust and mutual respect. Whether you choose a short term or long term project, PlayMore's main concern is to help companies continue to prosper by helping their employees develop healthier habits for life. But just as important, Rona and her team of wellness professionals make it all FUN and doable!

Rona and her people work with their corporate clients to customize a health and wellness program to fit time and budget constraints. Programs can include anything from fitness and goal setting, "imagination breaks", nutritional guidance for both employees and the companies themselves (they will assess snacks and meals provided by the company), newsletters, demonstrations and classes for both cooking and exercise to team-building events and wellness weekends where the combination of mental and physical tasks allow everyone the opportunity to do and be their best.

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