

Living on WELL Street Blog: "A Culture of Health"

By Michael White

"Make the healthy choice the easy choice!" "Culture before health!" These popular exhortations by worksite wellness leaders draw attention to the need for establishing a work culture that encourages a healthy lifestyle. We spend over half of our waking lives at work. The workplace should be a place that contributes to, rather than detracts from, our health and wellbeing.

Indiana has been a leader in promoting worksite wellness among small and large employers alike. The Indiana Chamber of Commerce recently published a statement, "[It's Good to be Well](#)", that addresses how the culture of a business influences the success of its wellness efforts. The statement concludes with the following:

"Wellness at work is not just a health risk assessment, a biometric screen, a walking program, a weight loss challenge, information on healthy habits or fruit on the break room table. Wellness is a strategic business choice that requires planning, implementation strategies and an understanding about how to incorporate it into the business culture.

Furthermore, it takes time, resources and a dedication to the cause. If your culture identifies that you should base your wellness initiative on budgetary line items and return on investment, consider this: Health care costs currently are shown to be over \$10,000 per employee. If your wellness budget is \$30 per employee (which is 0.3% of the cost you are trying to impact), you should only expect a modest return on investment (ROI). With proper planning and a strategic focus, however, that \$30 per employee spent wisely can provide significant ROI. The question to you is this: What is your health and wellness culture today, and what do you want it to be in five years?"

Corporate culture, in its simplest form, is defined as "the way things are done around here". An employer, serious about promoting a healthy workplace, must influence its culture. It begins with recognition that employees are the company's most valuable assets, and leads to an effort to maximize their health and well-being. When this happens, the potential of the individual employee and the business is maximized. The employer's first step is to make it easier for employees to make good lifestyle choices, and make it more difficult to make bad, or unhealthy choices. Examples might include substituting fruit and whole grains for the morning meeting donuts, or promoting stretch breaks and walking meetings. Small steps, over time, will make a difference in shaping the values of individuals and the business. Gradually, a new culture will evolve with the expectation that a healthy lifestyle and high performance are "the way things are done around here."

Live WELL!

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We Choose Health