

## **Living on WELL Street Blog: "Starting a Wellness Program Without a Clue"**

By Michael White

A common question from anyone involved in worksite wellness for the first time is, "How do we get started?" Having listened to numerous workplaces describe how they got started, I have concluded that there is a simple answer to the question - "Just Do It!" This popular slogan suggests that taking action can bridge the wide gulf that sometimes exists between "thinking" and "doing". Promoting a healthier workplace can be a daunting undertaking. However, organizations that approach it with an "action" mentality are more successful in getting it off the ground and sustaining it.

Individuals who want to improve their health instinctively know the basic first-steps to take - eat healthier and move more", which is a cure for upwards of 75% of the most common and costly chronic health conditions. If we simply adopt healthier behaviors, we reduce health risks, which reduces chronic diseases, which improves health and reduces medical costs. What more could a worksite wellness program hope to accomplish?

No one questions the value of safety programs to eliminate the threat of accidents and illnesses at work. However, the "health" portion of "health and safety" programs seems to get short shrift. How does a job that exposes one to the ill health effects of being sedentary for 8 hours differ from a job that poses the risk of an accident happening? Potential physical harm exists in both situations, however, one is a slow process and the other is immediate. One of the biggest challenges to worksite wellness is that it's a behavior and cultural change process that takes time. Safety standards change behavior immediately. A healthy culture can take years to develop. But, that should not discourage us from beginning a journey that can have a profound immediate impact in the lives of individuals who embrace a healthier lifestyle.

The popular worksite wellness mantras that appear below suggest what we need to focus on.

- **"Culture before health."** - It's not about "fixing" people's bad health. It's about creating an environment where people can thrive in body, mind and spirit.
- **"Make healthy choices the easy choice."** - Make changes in the environment and in guidelines/policies that make health a priority.
- **"Wellness is something we do with and for people. It is not something we do to them."** - Apply, **"People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."** to get desired results.

We can delay taking action until information is gained or funding is secured. Or, we can jump in and start making a difference, and learn what we need to along the way. I recommend the later approach. People's lives are at stake. Just do it!

Live WELL!

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