Transforming Employee Assistance Programs

This guide will educate Human Resource professionals on the different aspects of workplace well-being, how programs are seen from the perspective of an employee, potential solutions to common well-being challenges, and how you can better serve clients.

The Challenge of Effective EAPs

Do you offer Employee Assistance Programs that include Well-being? If you don’t, you should be.

While the existence of an EAP does not automatically make a good employer, it is a common factor in many top-of-the-line organizations. According to a recent Aberdeen study, top-performing companies are 61% more likely to offer well-being programs and resources to their employees. Of those companies that do, the study reports that employees are more engaged and perform better than those that do not.

But not all EAPs and well-being programs are created equal. In fact, there are many documented examples of free or low-cost programs that don’t actually provide useful assistance. Reasons range from a limited range of benefits that don’t interest or apply to the employees, to well-being “coaches” whose only purpose is to funnel calls—and costs—to the insurance advisors.

Hardly the kind of program you would recommend to your employees.
So what makes a good employee well-being program?

The benefits can be categorized along two different lines:

- Health and Well-being
- Workplace Well-being

Let’s examine each in detail.

**Health & Well-being**

There are two vital components to an employee’s health in the workplace: stress management and physical well-being.

**Stress Management**

According to a study conducted for The Marlin Company, 80% of employees feel stress on the job, with nearly half of those stressed needing help in learning how to manage stress and 42% claiming their co-workers need such help.

Combining these statistics with those found by the UK Health and Safety Executive that show 35% of all work-related sickness and 43% of all working days lost can be traced back to stress, it’s obvious that a business needs to provide easy and convenient access to counseling and coaching.

The problem is the stigma associated with “asking for help.” Employees sometimes perceive the need for counseling as a weakness and don’t want others to know that they are receiving counseling. Others avoid counseling out of a need for privacy, afraid that anything they say would be leaked to their manager or peers.

Therefore, an ideal solution would be a private channel for employees to seek guidance and receive counseling. Modern technology offers a multitude of ways to connect conveniently and privately with well-being and stress management experts. Live chat support, email counseling, telephone crisis support, webinars and video conferencing sessions all combine the benefits of one-on-one coaching and privacy.
Physical Well-being

Numerous studies demonstrate the negative effects of prolonged sitting and the damage computer use does to wrists and eyes. However, a sedentary lifestyle can be alleviated by proper exercise and nutrition. Many EAPs and well-being plans do have programs that address this, but without the proper motivation, these programs go unused.

Gamifying the well-being experience is an effective tactic for companies like Fitbit, and translates well to workplace well-being programs. By consolidating the well-being program into an app, LifeWorks can leverage the same challenges and fitness trackers to encourage employees to adopt a healthier lifestyle.

The app also provides easy access to curated exercise and nutrition resources such as articles and reports, tentpole content such as webinars, and personalized advice in the form of one-to-one well-being coaching. Such convenience lowers the barrier for entry and increases the likelihood of an employee adopting well-being as a lifestyle.

Workplace Well-being

While stress is most certainly one of the leading causes of workplace illness, the factors behind that stress are not easily resolved by most well-being programs. After all, employee assistance programs can’t be expected to help you deal with your co-workers.

Or can they?

Lack of recognition is an invisible poison within a team; after all, if a person isn’t noticed enough to be given recognition in the first place, the manager probably isn’t paying enough attention to know there is a problem.

Peer-reviews and recognition programs are an effective way to address this, as peers are more likely to see their co-worker’s efforts than their managers, and they will hand out recognition freely. However, the more process-based a recognition program is, the less likely it will be utilized. Not everyone is willing to be put on the spot in a team sit-down meeting (assuming the team holds those in the first place), and rushing through all the “thank-you’s” cheapens the experience.

This is where taking a cue from social media can prove valuable. The LifeWorks app contains a Social Recognition module where employees are empowered to publicly recognize their peers for their contributions in the office. The feedback is in real-time, and the recognized employee can feel instant gratification seeing their contributions appreciated by the rest of the team. In addition, these recognitions are tracked and can be analyzed by managers to discover under-rated team members.
We at LifeWorks also recognize that making more workplace connections can be valuable from a career and job satisfaction standpoint. Forging closer ties with co-workers leads to better coordination between team members and team cohesion. LifeWorks allows companies to set up private, company-wide social networks, complete with a team directory that encourages engagement between employees and promotes more interaction.

**In Conclusion**

Well-being programs are more than a line item on a contract; these initiatives have real and powerful effects on an employee’s physical and mental state. HR professionals must keep this in mind when putting together proposals for business clients. Innovative and effective well-being programs deliver higher employee satisfaction and value than low-cost and low-quality programs that employees never use.

Employee well-being isn’t a line item. It’s a responsibility.

To find out more about Innovations in Employee Well-being contact us at inquiries@lifeworks.com