



WHAT ROLE DO EMPLOYERS PLAY IN WORK LIFE BALANCE?

by Ian Hope

INVESTMENT IN EMPLOYEE WELLNESS WILL HELP THE BOTTOM LINE FOR BUSINESSES

As I have stated previously, employees have their own responsibilities to maintain their own work-life balance. But the ability of the workplace to support and enhance the employee's health and wellness can have a huge impact on not only on the employee, but also on the financial health and success of the business! But let's now consider what employers can do to stimulate greater health and well being within their workplaces.

Strong and dynamic organizations usually have healthy and well-balanced employees. Healthy employees have more energy to expend on their work, experience less absenteeism due to illness and medical appointments and are generally involved in fewer accidents, both on the job and at home.

Although the bottom line benefits of investing in the health of employees are in themselves clearly impressive, great employers also show concern for this workplace characteristic as they value their employees and see how their investments in health and wellness contribute to the lives and futures of their employees. ►

“Progressive employers have made health and wellness an integral part of their HR program.”

Whenever I approach ideas for making a better workplace, I always like to start with suggesting this—ask the employees. No different than other workplace attributes, it's always a great idea to ask the employees themselves what they would like to see in terms of health and wellness supports. Proactive employers go a step further by forming a Workplace Enhancement Committee composed mainly of staff representatives; within this committee, health and the workplace environment would be included on each month's meeting agenda. This committee's role would be to foster discussion, gather ideas and make recommendations.

Next, provide employees with information on health issues and on negative and unsafe behaviors so that they understand the consequences. This could include providing pamphlets, videos or even speakers on health subjects. Include family members in these presentations where possible as the employees will benefit from support at home... and recognizing that they are impacted by situations where family members are also exposed to the risks.

The provision of health and wellness information is such an important corporate activity these days that many progressive employers have made health and wellness an integral part of their human resources program and have assigned staff to seek out useful and important information and programs for staff members.

As far as improving the safety and health culture in the workplace, there are almost limitless initiatives that the employer



might consider as they try to draw a focus on what the employees themselves most need and value!

For example, arrange a referral program for staff members and their family members who may need special help from professionals with health issues—and make it easy for them to confidentially access these services. There are also a few 'quick wins' that all workplaces can and should do. Since the perception of a healthy workplace is also important, keep work areas clean, neat and tidy. An unkempt workplace tolerates hazards, encourages carelessness about sanitation and the spreading of bacteria and disease as well as unsafe practices.

Further, the cleanliness of bathrooms supports our need for personal hygiene. Despite this, the conditions in workplace washrooms and change rooms are too often abhorrent. So encourage good personal hygiene for everyone and ensure that facilities are cleaned thoroughly and regularly.

Cleanliness and sterility in all areas where food is kept and prepared is also critical to employee health. No one likes the feeling of opening up a microwave to warm your lunch, shuddering when you look inside and then deciding that, 'gulp... no, cold will do just fine today'. Clean up of all kitchen appliances and areas must be well controlled on a roster basis or better still, assigned as a specific job responsibility.

Lastly, consider have health professionals come in to administer inoculations during the flu season for staff who choose this precaution. As always, happy thoughts to you! ♦

TOP TIPS FOR EMPLOYERS

- Set up flexible health and wellness accounts for employees allowing them to expend a certain amount each year on health and wellness initiatives of their own choosing.
- Encourage and promote exercise and physical activities; if possible provide showers for those who jog or walk to work, or who exercise at lunchtime.
- Often there are staff members who are trained in facilitating workout regimens (example aerobics). Ask if they would volunteer to facilitate a lunch time workout program. Or, allow a willing staff member to take training so they can facilitate.
- Work with your staff to make the workplace smoke free. This could include smoke cessation programs and supports.
- Also work with staff in developing policies and programs to deal with alcohol and drug abuse issues, sexual and other forms of harassment as well as bullying and violence in the workplace.



IAN HOPE | BCOMM, CMA, CFLT, CFCST |

Ian Hope is a management consultant, certified facilitator, speaker, and writer, who trains others in people and leadership skills that are highly valued in today's workplaces. www.ianhope.com