Work shouldn't kill:
Why SAP SuccessFactors is getting serious about health & wellbeing
Steven T. Hunt, Ph.D.
Click to follow my posts: www.linkedin.com/in/steventhunt

Ask yourself this question: am I happy?   How you answered that question probably depends on how you answer the following three questions:
- Am I currently healthy and feeling good mentally and physically?
- Do I have meaningful, positive relationships with my friends and family?
- Am I spending my days doing things I enjoy?

For most people, happiness in life depends largely on three things: health, social relationships, and work. What we often fail to realize is how much work influences the other two.   The quality of our work life directly and significantly impacts our health and the quality of our social relationships (Hammer & Zimmerman, 2011).

Over 70% of US employees cite work as a major cause of life stress (Sonnentag & Frese, 2012).   This stress negatively affects employees' health and the quality of their family relationships. It also costs companies a lot of money. One study found health care costs of employees engaging in workplace health programs where 29% lower compared to other employees in the same company (Goetzel et al., 1998).   But work isn't just about doom and gloom!   Research also indicates that satisfying, fulfilling work positively impacts our happiness, health and perhaps even the length of our lives (Cohen, 2003; Humphrey et al., 2007).   If we want to be happier and healthier (and who doesn't want that?), then we need to get serious about creating healthier work environments.

When we hear the term "healthy workplace" we often think about things associated with physical health such as safe work practices, ergonomically correct office furniture, nutritious cafeteria food, and on-site fitness centers.   While these are valuable, they are not the primary factors that impact employee health in most jobs. The main things that make work unhealthy are things that cause mental and physical stress.   These are often things that many employees assume are "just a regular part of work" such as:
- ✓ Poor quality relationships with managers or co-workers
- ✓ Working with customers or coworkers who are frequently upset, angry or abusive
- ✓ Concerns over employment security and access to career opportunities
- ✓ Working long and/or irregular hours
- ✓ Intrusion of work activities into off-work hours such as e-mails and phone calls
- ✓ Lack of clear job goals and role ambiguity
- ✓ Performing monotonous and highly repetitive tasks
- ✓ Being assigned tasks or goals that seem unattainable given existing resources and time
- ✓ Frequent organizational restructuring and job reassignments

Many people will look at this list and say "that sounds a lot like my current job". Sadly, they are probably right. Almost as sad is the fact that these work characteristics aren't just unhealthy for employees, they also undermine business productivity.   Stressed out employees are unhealthy employees, and unhealthy employees are not fully productive employees (Moreau et al., 2004). They also are unhappy employees. And at some point unhappy employees that can quit will quit. The first to go are usually the highly skilled, high performing employees that have the most career opportunities elsewhere – or in other words, the employees you can least afford to lose.

So what can we do to create healthier workplaces?   This question is consuming a lot of our mental energy at SAP SuccessFactors. The good news is we have three things in our favor. First, companies are showing increased appreciation toward the value of a healthy, thriving workforce.   The motivation is there to change. Second, we have a wealth of occupational health and safety research expertise to draw upon.   We have the knowledge of what to change. Third, we have fully integrated human capital management technology that enables us to influence how work is structured and how employees are managed at every phase of the employment lifecycle.   In sum, we have the tools necessary to apply our knowledge to create the change we desire. And this is what we are doing. Over the coming months we will be sharing information about how HCM technology can be used to improve workforce health and wellbeing. We hope you will join us in sharing your ideas, thoughts and suggestions.

Work shouldn't kill and people should be happy. We have the ability to create healthier work environments which create happier people. Let's do it.

To hear more from me on health and well-being in the workplace, check out the latest video in the "Firing Line with Bill Kutik®" series here: https://www.successfactors.com/en_us/lp/firing-line-interview-series.html?TAG=steven-hunt.html.