

Putting Wellness in its Place

A holistic approach to workplace wellness is important to put wellness firmly in its place - right at the core of your company strategy.

John Wanamaker opened the world's first department store in Philadelphia in 1876. Many marketing professionals regard him as the father of modern advertising, and he is credited with the famous quote, "One half of my advertising budget is wasted. The trouble is, I don't know which half."

HR professionals are facing a similar issue today with regard to workplace wellness. Identifying and addressing specific needs, evaluating returns and demonstrating the bottom line value of programmes and initiatives are all key challenges.

HR professionals and business leaders have long understood the importance of taking an investment approach to the management of human capital.

Asset management and return on investment are much discussed topics and we are all familiar with the mantra about people being our most valuable asset. We are also familiar with the issue of some business leaders paying lip service to that particular mantra.

In order to ensure your investment in workplace wellness returns value to individuals, teams and the organisation as a whole, it needs to be tackled from a holistic stand point. To ensure that your workplace wellness programme makes a positive contribution to the goals of your business, it needs to be tackled in a strategic fashion. Consequently, workplace wellness programmes need to address not only physical needs, but emotional and socio-cultural needs too.

Workplace wellness programmes should be proactive, integrated, targeted, evaluated, measured and managed. A programme should take a 'needs analysis' approach and be integral to the operation of the business, not a series of one-off initiatives to address specific problems.

Workplace wellness programmes should be driven by clear objectives and should produce tailored reports for consumption by key stakeholders.

Currently, many New Zealand companies offer an array of initiatives to improve the individual wellbeing of their staff. These initiatives include flu jabs, gym memberships, free or subsidised healthy food, physical health checks, stress workshops and employee assistance programmes offering psychological and emotional support.

This emphasis on individual wellbeing, both physical and psychological, is one major element of workplace wellness. The other factor to consider is the workplace environment itself. Many organisations have a broad range of policy-driven initiatives to create a healthy working environment. Examples include work/life balance policies, flexitime, and family-friendly workplace policies.

However, while these initiatives address some employee needs and the workplace environment, and make some contribution to the overall wellness of the workplace, opportunities are being lost in terms of maximising value and return on investment. A holistic, integrated and targeted approach can help to seize that opportunity.

So, how can HR professionals make the step forward from an initiatives approach to the implementation of a holistic integrated workplace wellness programme? By putting workplace wellness in its proper place - at the very core of the company strategy.

To do this, HR professionals must convince the rest of the organisational leadership team that "our people are our most valuable asset", but they know that already, don't they? Don't they?