

Workplace Health

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Congratulations!

Congratulations to **Jenny O'Reilly**! She won our monthly GAC Survey draw for a \$50 gift certificate!

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Workplace Health

It's a new year - a time when many of us focus on improving our overall health and well-being. >From a workplace perspective, this often means that employees will seek opportunities for better work-life balance, stress management, and diet and exercise regimes. This month's newsletter explores two key components of creating a healthy workplace - managing stress and implementing wellness programs.

Workplace Stress

We all experience some level of stress at work. In fact, stress can often be a strong motivator to complete tasks and take action. The challenge is when our workplace stress negatively impacts our health. There are physical, mental and emotional consequences of stress, such as worry, anxiety, fear, tension, insomnia, and weight gain. The cost to employers is significant (\$200-\$300 billion) in loss of productivity, increased workers' compensation claims, absenteeism, increased health care costs and turnover (Atkinson).

One contributor to stress in the workplace is when employees are in a role that doesn't align to their skills and interests. This situation can cause anxiety about performance, fear of job loss and disengagement. It's important to note, however, that while a job that may be stressful to one employee, it could be highly desired by another. If managers focus on placing employees in roles where they can excel and maximize their strengths, stress can be reduced. In conjunction, managers should also adjust their management style to ensure that the work environment is as engaging and motivating as possible. For example, an employee who enjoys working independently (typical of Gen Xers) would find a micromanager to be a key stressor. Conversely, employees who seek more guidance and attention (often Gen Ys) could feel stressed if their manager takes a 'sink or swim' approach, and doesn't provide sufficient coaching and direction.

Creating a fun work environment is one of the quickest ways to alleviate workplace stress. Activities that bring colleagues together, such as group charity events, or onsite activities that are fun and frivolous (a Wii competition, anyone?), can boost employee engagement, and act as a pressure valve during stressful times. Doing something unexpected can break tension in the workplace.

Setting realistic objectives for how to reduce and manage workplace stress is also very important. It is impossible to eliminate all workplace stress - nor should that be the goal. The objective for HR teams and leaders is to acknowledge stressful situations, to openly communicate how the organization is planning to support employees in managing their stress, and to create a work environment that is fun and team focused.

n-gen's Book



Loyalty Unplugged: How to Get, Keep & Grow All Four Generations tackles the why, what, and how-to, from a generational perspective, in all people practice areas.

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About n-gen

We have worked with 10 of the 14 Canadian Fortune 500 companies, as selected by Forbes magazine in 2008.

We have trained over 8000 people through our various workshops.

We have delivered keynote presentations to more than 18,000 individuals.

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Workplace Wellness Programs

Workplace wellness is inherently connected to an organization's "financial wellness". Recent research illustrates that companies with wellness programs have better attendance, lower medical and workers compensation costs, and more productive employees. This makes sense, since employees who adopt a healthy lifestyle tend to be sick less often, and more resilient to physical and mental stressors. In fact, studies have indicated that up to 75 percent of illness is due to lifestyle-related causes (Rosenfeld).

It is therefore in an organization's best interest to have a wellness program in place. An effective program can greatly assist employees in adopting and maintaining healthy lifestyles. Some larger organizations have elaborate programs in place (on-site massage, free gym memberships), but it's important to recognize that an effective wellness program doesn't necessarily require a large financial investment.

A basic program should focus on the two tried and true fundamentals:

1. Healthy Diet and Nutrition

This information can often be obtained from community health and government organizations. Employers should provide education about the importance of good nutrition, as this is the most cost-effective way to improve health.

2. Physical Exercise

Walking or other low-impact aerobic exercise programs can be organized before and after work or during breaks. Walking provides an opportunity to focus mentally before the workday, or to reduce stress after work and during breaks.

For wellness programs to thrive, it is crucial to establish a solid wellness infrastructure. This includes senior-level support and a wellness team to promote and administer the program. It also includes execution and a dedicated budget.

Implementing a workplace wellness program creates a win-win situation. It sends a message to employees that your organization cares about their well-being, and as employees become healthier and happy, so does your bottom line.

Newsletter Sources:

When Stress Won't Go Away, 12/1/2000, William Atkinson (SHRM)
Making Work Fun: How HR Can (and Should) Take the Lead, 4/1/2001, Jennifer Vigran (SHRM)
Workplace Wellness: Take It Up a Notch, 11/12/2007, Rosenfeld (SHRM)
Wellness Programs Help Companies Feel Better, 8/1/2006, John Smoyer (SHRM)

GAC Survey Results

We want to thank everyone for participating in our first Generational Advisory Council Survey. We also want to congratulate **Jenny O'Reilly**, who won our monthly draw for a \$50 gift certificate!

This month's survey focused on the topic of workplace wellness. We had a terrific response, and some very insightful comments. In some instances, we saw generational differences, but for the most part all cohorts were in agreement.

GAC Survey Results, continued...

79% of respondents said that the most important element for creating a healthy workplace is a workplace culture that promotes a work-life balance. A distant second (10%) said that the most important element was a nice environment to work in. Surprisingly, no one responded that having access to healthy foods was important.

We were pleased to see that no respondents strongly disagreed with the statement: "I believe my current employer provides a healthy workplace." The majority (74%) agreed or strongly agreed with this, which means that our GAC members' employers are doing a good job at creating a healthy workplace. It's also important to mention that the majority of respondents (91%) believed that creating a healthy workplace is a shared responsibility between employee and employer. 74% believed that their employer is holding up their end of the bargain...the question is: Are you doing your part individually to cultivate a healthy workplace?

Interestingly, we saw some generational differences where it came to the question: What ONE activity would improve your health and your workplace culture? 29% (comprised of Gen X and Gen Y exclusively) said they would like to see reduced work-week hours. The second most popular answer was 'fitness breaks throughout the day'. 21% of respondents - mostly Gen X - selected this answer. 31% of respondents indicated 'other' and listed their own ideas. Of this group, almost one third - all Gen X respondents - said they'd like to see greater flexibility in their work hours (i.e. work from home, compressed work week). Our favourite idea came from both a Baby Boomer and a Gen Xer, who said that they would like their employers to provide quiet rooms for mid-day naps. Sounds like a idea great to us!

Here are some highlights from respondents' comments:

"While it's harder for smaller businesses to spend money providing a healthy workplace environment, there are many things that they can do that don't cost money, such as providing flexible work hours so that employees can take an extended lunch break to go to the gym."

"For me there is nothing more valuable than extra, flexible time."

"It's very hard to get people interested in their wellbeing when it involves a change to their lifestyle. People don't change habits of a lifetime easily."

"Often, there are many temptations at work: leftover food from meetings, Halloween candy, etc. This should not be allowed. Any excess should be donated to shelters. The last thing people need to do at work is eat more when they sit all day."

"Work/life balance has been identified by our associates as a high importance and an opportunity for improvement. We are a 24/7 operation and employ a very diverse workforce which makes creating the balance and culture of engagement and health a real challenge."

Thanks again to those who participated in our survey. It's not too late to sign up! If you would like to join our GAC, please contact Tracy Yan at tyan@ngenperformance.com, and provide your name, email address, and generational cohort. **Please note that all survey responses will be kept confidential.** Your name is only used to identify you for our monthly \$50 gift certificate draw.