Oswald Wellness Playbook

Designing an Effective Wellness Program
We recognize that a strategic design provides the backbone to meeting the objectives and achieving the long and short-term goals of any wellness initiative.
**Introduction**

When the Law Offices of Javitch, Block & Rathbone recognized that their current wellness initiatives were not enough, the idea for a more effectively designed wellness program evolved. They acknowledged that in order to take employee wellness to the next level and achieve health and wellness goals, a strategically designed program needed to develop. Goals, that nearly all wellness programs seek to inherently achieve, can be concisely represented as: improved health, increased productivity at the workplace and positive return on investment.²

Accomplishing such outcomes is driven by a program designed to maximize participation, incorporate effective interventions and yield high initiative completion rates.² Oswald’s experiences have shown that the success of a wellness program is founded in the preliminary stages of the design process. We recognize that a strategic design provides the backbone to meeting the objectives and achieving the long and short-term goals of any wellness initiative. Success also lends itself to a wellness program that has been carefully constructed to fit the culture of an organization.

Oswald’s client interactions have revealed several characteristics that are consistently present in the most successful and compliant programs, regardless of the size of the organization. Research supports our viewpoint in that the most effectively constructed programs incorporate:

1. **Senior leadership support**
2. **Supportive environment**
3. **Wellness Committees**
4. **Positive reinforcement**
5. **Effective communication strategies**
6. **Continuous quality assurance**

When appropriately combined and executed, these six components yield a successful wellness program.
Health management initiatives are only as strong as the leadership supporting them. Obtaining support from senior leaders, such as CEOs and senior management, is the most important facet of establishing an effective wellness program. This support needs to be solidified prior to the commencement of any wellness program planning processes.

Senior leadership buy-in will substantiate the mission of establishing a culture that embraces health and wellness. To most successfully achieve goals such as, improved employee health, disease prevention, increased well-being and decreased employer health care costs, monetary investments must be secured early on. The appropriate funding of a wellness program will provide the necessary resources to create and implement wellness initiatives, enlist the appropriate support and increase the longevity of the program.

When leaders are inactive in the program’s initiatives, there is an implication that health may not be a top priority for the organization. This could lead to negative repercussions, such as low participation rates and employee disinterest and dissatisfaction. Therefore, not only should senior leaders share the vision for the wellness program, as well as, provide financial backing they should also, willingly and visibly make health a top priority in their own lives. This priority should be made apparent through active participation in wellness initiatives and activities. When senior leadership is actively engaged, the importance of the wellness program is revealed and its credibility is enhanced. Furthermore, employee engagement tends to increase when senior leaders are also participating.
Wellness in Action

Primary focus must be placed on obtaining senior leadership support before the commencement of any additional wellness program planning. Senior leadership buy-in provides the financial assistance needed to implement and maintain an effective wellness program. However, support of the program goes far beyond any amount of monetary investment. Senior leaders need to show their support of the program’s goals and objectives by actively engaging in wellness initiatives. For example, the President of Columbia Chemical makes it a point to stay engaged by attending monthly lunch and learns alongside the company’s employees and taking breaks throughout the day to eat a healthy lunch or go for a run. Participation from executive authorities should be visible, enthusiastic and consistent to demonstrate their belief in the program and the importance of wellness to the organization.
The environment, in which employees are surrounded by each day, has the potential to strengthen or weaken a program’s effectiveness. When an employee makes a healthy behavior change, but is surrounded by an unfavorable, unhealthy environment, the likelihood of maintaining that change is essentially diminished. Therefore, a favorable environment must be created in order to transform the workplace into a culture of health and wellness. The worksite must be conducive for employees to make changes as easily as possible. Once a culture of wellness has been established, the wellness program’s effectiveness is essentially enhanced.

To begin to change a current work environment into one more suitable for making lifestyle changes and achieving wellness program objectives, ensuring convenience and providing the appropriate accommodations are essential. Creating a supportive environment can be augmented through the creation of policies. For instance, an organization encouraging employees to consume more healthful and nutritious foods may opt to compose and initiate a Healthy Vending Policy. Likewise, in an effort to decrease the amount of tobacco usage, a Tobacco-Free Hiring or a Tobacco-Free Workplace Policy may be advocated. It is believed that having organizational and environmental policies are of primary importance to establishing a culture that promotes and maintains health and wellness. In addition, a program should be designed so that employees are offered prompt assistance and have easy access to all necessary resources throughout the day. One way to accomplish this is by offering a variety of programs, including those that are telephonic, mail-based and online-based; various options will both enhance convenience and provide an opportunity for employees to select which modalities suit them the best.
Wellness in Action

Oswald firmly believes that you cannot put a changed person, or a person trying to make changes, into a toxic environment. In this case, a toxic environment is one that is unhealthy and unsupportive of wellness initiatives. A workplace should equip employees with the tools necessary to achieve wellness. It should also become an environment in which healthy changes are sustainable and temptations to return to unhealthy behaviors are minimal. We also encourage the establishment of relevant policies to provide clarity and ease with which changes can be achieved. Cohen & Company, an Oswald client, understands that employees must enter a workplace knowing that the availability of healthy options will support their quest to a healthier lifestyle. Their employees are empowered to make healthy choices throughout the day in ways such as, being provided with healthier beverage options, like sugar-free bottled tea, and attending monthly lunch and learns in which wellness videos are shown and healthy lunches are offered.
An employee-driven committee is needed to serve as the governing body of a wellness program. A strong correlation has been revealed between program effectiveness and the existence of a Wellness Committee. Senior leadership, likely the CEO in smaller organizations or a Human Resource representative in larger organizations, should delegate the formation of the committee. This will further promote the importance of wellness throughout the organization, as well as, clearly define the roles and responsibilities of committee members.

A Wellness Committee should be an onsite group whose main goal is organizing and implementing wellness initiatives. A Wellness Committee assumes many responsibilities to ensure that the wellness program is carried out efficiently. Some tasks include: developing vision and mission statements, communicating and promoting a culture of wellness throughout the organization, brainstorming innovative ways to promote participation, actively participating in the program itself and orchestrating monthly committee meetings.
Wellness in Action

A Wellness Committee can only make up the backbone of a wellness program if its importance is substantiated and responsibilities are carried out correctly. Without a committee, crucial responsibilities needed to guide the program are left undelegated. Therefore, Wellness Committee members are instrumental in the successful launch, maintenance and improvement of the program. To further reiterate the importance of each individual committee member, roles and responsibilities should be added to their current job descriptions.

Many Oswald clients have successfully recruited Wellness Committees members that are enhancing and positively impacting their organization’s wellness programs. PCC Airfoils, a larger organization, has a unique Wellness Committee structure. Their committee has one designated Human Resource representative from the company’s six different locations. Monthly teleconferences are scheduled among these six committee members with a goal of maintaining and improving the wellness programs at each respective location. The Wellness Committee at Mason Steel prides itself on being responsive to employee needs. In fact, several healthy changes around the workplace have been adopted (e.g. adding water coolers throughout the building to better promote hydration) based on employee feedback to Wellness Committee members. Additionally, to further enhance interaction with employees, Mason Steel’s Wellness Committee is comprised of representatives from many different strategic areas (e.g. administrative, manufacturing, human resources and sales).
Reinforcement can take a variety of different forms, and as it relates to an effective wellness program design, the incorporation of positive reinforcement is often recommended.\(^1\)\(^,\)\(^2\)\(^,\)\(^5\) It has been repeatedly suggested that an incentivized structure is a leading positive reinforcement technique.\(^1\)\(^,\)\(^2\)\(^,\)\(^5\) When a person receives their first incentive reward, subsequent rewards are generally needed to retain interest and participation.\(^2\) Incentives provide a way to stimulate participation and engage employees\(^3\), however, an incentivized structure may only provide surface level changes.

While we agree that incentives stimulate participation, we also feel it is imperative to create self-reliance, rather than reliance on incentives. Intrinsic motivators, such as feeling supported by peers, enjoyment and feelings of satisfaction should be encouraged as having greater influence than receiving incentives. Employees who are intrinsically motivated will be more apt to proactively adopt lifestyle changes, rather than temporary changes made only for material rewards.
**Wellness in Action**

The use of incentives is an effective way to entice employees to participate in wellness program activities. The most successful wellness programs are those in which participants sustain health and wellness because they are encouraged to focus on enjoyment, satisfaction and other intrinsic motivators, not solely on material incentives. Making lifestyle changes to become healthier should be promoted as the ultimate reward of the wellness program; whereas incentives should be marketed as additional perks for participating.
Communication is a critical component of an effectively designed program.\textsuperscript{5} Additionally, communication strategies have been identified as a best practice.\textsuperscript{2} One main goal of communication is to maximize the number of employees exposed to wellness program information. Employers should consider which strategies are most effective given the culture of the organization. Various channels of communication should be considered including face-to-face conversations,\textsuperscript{5} such as meetings and personal time with wellness coaches.\textsuperscript{3} Traditional communication techniques, such as flyers, newsletters, articles, posters, emails and telephone calls might also be incorporated.\textsuperscript{3} Additionally, promoting program participation may include employees sharing personal health and wellness success stories.\textsuperscript{3} This may serve as a motivational tactic to encourage employees to strive to achieve accomplishments similar to those of their colleagues. Lastly, if an organization is implementing new policies, proper delivery and explanation of policy guidelines will enhance compliance and eliminate confusion.\textsuperscript{3}
Wellness in Action

Understanding the culture of an organization will provide insight into which communication strategies will reach and influence the most employees. Promoting wellness activities using appropriate communication strategies based on an employee population is critical to stimulating engagement. Keep in mind that only using one type of communication method may be insufficient and ineffective; several communicational tactics should be selected in order to reiterate the wellness program’s initiatives and pique employee interest in more ways than one.
Wellness initiatives should be designed with the intention of evaluating outcomes using appropriate metrics. Evaluations do not necessarily need to be formal, but they should be continuous. Regularly monitoring a program will provide opportunities to continue to enhance, improve, or alter the program’s design to obtain maximum effectiveness. Program modifications should be directed to areas that are not producing anticipated results.

The quality of a program is often measured through analyzing participation rates, employee satisfaction, healthcare trends and/or productivity trends. The amount of employee engagement can initially reveal the effectiveness of the program’s strategies. So, in the first year following program implementation, it is most important to focus on assessing participation and satisfaction rates. If employees are not actively engaging in the wellness program’s activities or are not satisfied with the program’s structure, adjustments to certain components (e.g. types of initiatives, availability of resources, accommodations to the workday schedule, etc.) must be made. Measures of productivity, absenteeism, illness and injury reports, and the physical work environment may also assist in the evaluation of a program’s success and effectiveness. As the program progresses, quality assurance should begin to focus on biometric changes (such as blood pressure, cholesterol levels, glucose levels and body mass index) and risk factor reduction. Several years after initial program implementation, analyses of healthcare costs and return on investment will provide tangible evidence of the program’s impact on the company’s bottom line.
Wellness in Action

The effectiveness of a wellness program cannot be measured sporadically—it must be done regularly and continuously. The most important initial program evaluation should focus on the amount of employee participation. Once participation has been maximized, other metrics such as biometric values and healthcare costs can be incorporated into the quality assurance measurements. Evaluating a program is only beneficial if results are used to enhance components of the program that are not yielding the expected results. For instance, if employee participation is lacking, different activities and promotional techniques that better will fit the organization’s culture should be considered.
CONCLUSION

Designing a wellness program does not have to be a daunting task. Based on our experiences, we pinpointed six elements that the most effective programs have in common. In the preliminary design stages, focus should be placed on establishing support from senior leaders, creating an environment that makes it easy for employees to make changes and sustain improved health, forming a diverse Wellness Committee, creating an incentive structure that encourages intrinsic motivators, selecting multiple communication channels, and preparing to measure the effectiveness and quality of the program. Combining these six components and matching them appropriately with your organization’s culture will provide the foundation for an effective wellness program that results in a healthier workforce.
REFERENCES


3. Edington DW, Liveris A. A Roadmap for Improving the Health of Your Employees and Organization, 2009.


osWell Health Management integrates with clients’ current benefits strategy, and provides a team of wellness professionals, to implement and launch corporate wellness initiatives. The goal is to reduce risk, cost, worry and work for clients, making their businesses better with the right health management resources to drive results.

The program offers consulting services, worksite health support and an online resource center, featuring, a Wellness e-Library, monthly newsletters, best practice guidelines and downloadable marketing materials. Through the online resource center clients also have access to osWell University, which serves as a portal for employers to educate themselves on health related topics and offer webinars to their employees. Learn more at www.oswaldcompanies.com/products-services/employee-benefits/oswell or call the osWell Health Management Hotline at 877.746.0026.

Oswald Companies, headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, offers a full range of strategic risk management and insurance services including: employee benefits, property & casualty, retirement plan services, life insurance and personal risk management.