The 5 Mistakes HR Managers Make in Workplace Wellness Programs (and How to Fix Them).

Thought: Remember that it is possible to achieve positive ROI in any organisation through a wellness program so if your program isn't doing that, it means that you need to either give it more time, or adjust your approach.

Tip: With all that's been going on these past few years, our health has never been more front of mind, and for good reason.

The penny has dropped that the healthier we are, the more protected we are from diseases of all types, and the better we perform, not to mention the literally infinite other benefits that come with being well.

This realisation has brought with it a surge in demand for workplace health programs, which is fantastic and long overdue, but we have to make sure we're putting resources into the right areas if we actually want to see results.

Here at Kinex Health we create and troubleshoot programs like these everyday, and that means we've seen (and fixed) our fair share of errors.

So, we've summarised the top 5 mistakes HR managers and business leaders make when initiating a wellness program, so you can avoid them and make sure your program is running lean and mean right from the start.

Mistake 1: They don't plan.

'To fail to plan is to plan to fail'. This is true in all things, and a health program is no different.

Having a well-devised plan from which to work is absolutely crucial to getting your program off the ground, and to ensuring it runs smoothly.

Too often we see HR managers just 'winging it' and reacting instead of thinking ahead. This means that your team can't get clear on what the objectives are, there are no measurable outcomes to achieve, and resources therefore get wasted in the wrong places.

To avoid this, make sure your plan has at least these elements to begin with.

- A business case – communicate the value that your program will bring in order to get the higher up's on board and secure your budget.
- Definite outcomes – what do you want your program to ultimately achieve? Where do you see it heading? Have a 'why' for your program and the 'how' becomes much simpler.
- Clear objectives – this is the nitty gritty of the program. Your process. Work backwards from your outcomes to get your daily/weekly/monthly process. What are the things you need to do each day to ensure the program hits it's targets?

It's completely natural, and often necessary, for the plan to change along the way, but you have to have a solid foundation to start with if you're going to be successful.

As Dwight Eisenhower famously said 'Planning is everything. The plan is nothing'.

Mistake 2: They do what everyone else is doing.

It might seem like a good idea to look to what other companies are doing for their employees and try to replicate their results by copying them, but this doesn't always work.

It's fine to be inspired by another organisation's health plan, but what works for one group of people may not necessarily work for another, so we need to be aware of the differences between our people and theirs and instead create something that will address the needs of our staff specifically.

In order to do this we need to do 3 things:

- Discover where the greatest health and productivity issues are within our own people.
- Ask our staff what they would like to see in a health program and what they would engage with.
- Design a program that bridges the gap between what your people need and what they want.

We know the things it takes to be healthy, but not all methods of getting them are the same.

So, speak to your people and find out what they would actually engage with, then design a program that gives them these things whilst making them healthy at the same time.

Mistake 3: They don't get commitment.

For any program to succeed long-term, you need commitment from all levels in the organisation, starting at the top.

Without this, it can be very difficult to maintain enthusiasm and keep the program going, especially during times of budget cuts and economic instability.

This is something we see time and again. The boss signs off on a program because they have seen the business case and know it's the right move. Or they have been pressured into it because that's what everyone else is doing and they don't want to be left behind.

But, if they're not committed to it, if they don't see the true potential of promoting workplace health, other business activities will inevitably get in the way, and the program will fall by the wayside.

If the program is forever taking a back seat to the day to day practices, if employees aren't encouraged to take part, and if the boss isn't seen to be actively participating, inconvenience is mistaken for impracticality and the program starts to suffer.

This is an important point to make, that it's not enough for the boss to be into it, they have to be a part of it. They have to get involved in the lunchtime exercise, be seen doing a meditation session or asking questions in a sleep seminar. Once people see this, their trepidation will vanish and you'll get them coming to you in droves.

If this happens, if the boss truly commits to the program and not only allows but encourages workers to take part, it can be truly transformative.

To get and maintain this level of commitment, we need to do 3 things:

- State the business case clearly and show the higher up's exactly what it will cost, and exactly what they stand to gain, as long as they stay committed to the program.
- Obtain a company-wide directive stating that the health program is a priority and should be treated as such at all levels.
- Get all managers and supervisors to not only help with the program, but to take part in it is well.

Company culture is an elusive thing, and it's something that can not be told, it has to be lived. If the C-suite, managers and supervisors are living a culture of health, this will trickle down throughout the organisation and the benefits will be seen across the whole group.

Always remember, it's better to have commitment rather than resources, but if you have both, you can bring about meaningful change.

Mistake 4: They don't source the right people for the job.

Any HR manager will know that in order to get the job done the best way, you need the best people for the job.

Sometimes those people will already be in your organisation, and sometimes you'll need to bring some in from the outside. The important difference is knowing when to do each.

Your internal people are easy to access, already on the payroll and you know a lot about them already, whereas external people are an additional cost, but they come with additional skills and advantages.

When working out who should run which aspects of your program, remember to do these 4 things:

- Appoint a health program coordinator. This may be yourself or it may be someone else, but this is the person with whom the buck stops, so it's crucial you have someone capable and committed to the program.
- Decide which initiatives you are going to run and come up with a list of the skills/qualifications required to complete them.
- Search internally for people capable of filling the requirements, then decide whether it is worth their time and whether they would be able to handle the extra responsibility.
- Source your external providers from a workplace health organisation, rather than individuals. It typically won't cost you any more and the extra level of service and flexibility you get is well worth it.

The right people can make a health program function like a well oiled machine, so make sure you get this part of the program right and everything else will become much simpler down the line.

Mistake 5: They don't measure ROI.

When asked how much a health program has brought to an organisation, the answer is almost always extremely positive, but almost never quantifiable.

This is because many companies don't actually measure in dollar figures how much a program has impacted them.

For this reason, health programs can often be the things that suffer in times of economic hardships, as they're not seen as 'business critical'. This is a mistake, as the data shows us that health programs can return anywhere from $2-$24 for every $1 spent on them!

To ensure you can justify the spend of your program, make sure you're doing these 3 things:

- Decide what metrics you will use to gauge the success of your program (decreased stress, weight lost, decrease in absenteeism etc) and ensure that you have the baseline data prior to your program commencement.
- Collect the data for the last 3 years on absenteeism, staff turnover and worker's compensation and, if possible, productivity prior to the beginning of your health program as this can be used to ascertain ROI.
- Track your chosen metrics at least every quarter and report on them to the higher ups to show your progress.

Your workplace health program is a business critical function and it should be treated as such.

This means that it should run proactively year-round, and it also means that it should be consistently justified by regular and accurate reporting.

Remember that it is possible to achieve positive ROI in any organisation through a wellness program so if your program isn't doing that, it means that you need to either give it more time, or adjust your approach. It does not mean you should scrap it!

Workplace health and wellness programs are the way of the future.

Discerning employees will look for them and forward thinking companies will have them. It's our job as workplace health professionals and business leaders to ensure that our programs run as efficiently and effectively as possible to ensure that they remain a part of our companies long into the future.

News: Employees who believe their "company makes a positive societal contribution" and who feel "personally committed to achieving the company's vision and strategy" experienced the most joy at work – happiness matters.

Source: Workplace Wellness Weekly

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