

Businessinfo

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WELCOME BACK

HOW LEXMARK'S NEW ALL-IN-ONES
RESTORE THE APPEAL OF INKJET
TECHNOLOGY FOR SMALL BUSINESSES

CAN YOUR BOSS TELL YOU TO LOSE WEIGHT?

JEFF ARCHER, DIRECTOR OF THE TONIC, EXPLAINS HOW PROPERLY TARGETED WELLBEING INITIATIVES CAN INSPIRE YOUR STAFF AND TRANSFORM YOUR ORGANISATION

Many people were shocked recently to read about Whole Foods CEO John Mackey suggesting staff should be offered larger in-store discounts for losing weight, quitting smoking or reducing their blood pressure or cholesterol levels. After all, is it the boss's place to tell staff how they should look and how they should live their lives?

No one likes to feel overweight or unhealthy, but equally, no one likes to be told what to do, and individual motivation to make changes with health and wellbeing can be a complex area. It's astute for any business to offer support in this area though ideas have to be carefully pitched to staff. The right initiatives with the right promotion can positively change a company culture forever, but choose your approach carefully or you run the risk of alienating and de-motivating many members of the organisation.

So what exactly is the role of wellbeing initiatives in business? Are they an integral part of company culture and strategy or are they just a perk? Are we heading towards a time when they become compulsory and results get recorded and analysed? And what exactly constitutes successful wellbeing initiatives and how do you measure what's having a positive impact? Finally, what's the right way to sell wellbeing to staff and how do you get people excited about it?

Engaging staff is always a hot topic and implementing the right wellness initiatives can be a powerful weapon for reducing absence, increasing productivity and getting the best results from everyone in the business. Here are the essentials you must know about successful wellbeing at work.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Success with wellbeing is all about the 'take up' of initiatives and positive behaviour change, so take time to research the wellbeing initiatives your staff would most like to see and then set up the most popular options. Arranging a corporate gym membership will have limited impact if no one in your organi-

DID YOU KNOW?

A RECENT STUDY BY UNILEVER CONCLUDED THAT STAFF WHO TOOK PART IN SPECIFIC WELLBEING INITIATIVES WERE 8.5% MORE EFFICIENT AT WORK AND LESS LIKELY TO TAKE TIME OFF

THE 2008 REPORT BUILDING THE CASE FOR WELLNESS BY PWC HIGHLIGHTED A RETURN ON INVESTMENT OF UP TO £84.9 POUNDS FOR EVERY £1 SPENT ON TARGETED WELLBEING INITIATIVES.



sation is a fan of going to the gym. More popular options could be a running club, yoga/relaxation sessions, a football tournament or guidance on healthy eating for those with busy schedules.

Knowing what staff want will help you

target your wellbeing budget so that even if you opt for more expensive options, such as short programmes of individual lifestyle or performance coaching, you know that you'll get an enthusiastic reception for these initiatives. Some initial research followed by regular ►

FIT FOR WORK

One of the major causes of ill health in offices is back pain from working at a computer screen. Despite the wealth of advice on adopting the right posture for screen work, it is all too easy to revert to bad habits when you are tired or concentrating on another task. To counter this effect, there is a growing market for interactive aids that automatically alert you when your shoulders start to droop. Many of these rely on webcams for visual evidence. However, a new solution developed by Memphis-based neurologist Moacir Schnapp, M.D. takes a different approach. Instead of looking for visual clues, iPosture senses when the body slouches and vibrates until the user corrects his or her posture. Users are advised to wear the 1-inch unit for four hours a day for the first two to four weeks, after which they should start to correct their posture automatically (though it is recommended that they continue to use the device two to three times per week). The iPosture costs £54.99 and can be worn as a pendant, clipped to clothing or applied directly to the skin. www.iPostureDirect.co.uk



In these days of tight budgets and growing health awareness, team-building is more likely to take place on the sports field than in the local pub, according to a new survey commissioned by sports and hobbies website Clubbz.com.

Its study of 396 British companies found that two out of five UK companies have set up after work sports clubs as a means for employees to bond outside office hours. In more than half of cases respondents said clubs were set up because running around a field is cheaper than a round of drinks; other motivations were to encourage employees to get fitter (19%) and to socialise with colleagues (11%). www.clubbz.com

Context

Staff wellbeing key to public sector productivity

Improving employee wellbeing is not just the preserve of private sector organisations, but a critical element in the fight against absenteeism in the National Health Service (NHS), which currently stands at 10.3 million working days per year.

The recently published *NHS Health and Well-being Interim Review* argues that improving the health of the NHS's 1.4 million employees could cut the number of days lost through sickness by one third, saving the taxpayer £555 million and benefiting patient care.

Dr Steven Boorman, who led the review, said: "By putting staff health and well-being at the heart of how the NHS operates we will not only help improve the working lives of 1.4 million people, but evidence suggests we will make significant savings and improve outcomes for patients."

Among his recommendations, Dr Boorman calls for a cultural transformation to promote better understanding of health and well-being throughout the NHS, including better provision of counselling, health checks and advice about healthy eating and giving up smoking.

The publication of the *NHS Health and Wellbeing Interim Review* comes as new research reveals a growing disparity between the number of sick days taken by workers in the public and private sectors.

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's annual *Absence Management Survey* shows that last year absence levels in the private sector fell from 7.2 to 6.4 days per employee per year, whereas in the public sector they fell only slightly, from 9.8 to 9.7 days.

The gap between public and private sector absence now stands at 3.3 days per employee per year, up from 2.6 days 12 months ago.

The CIPD argues that closing this gap could lower the total number of working days lost by 20 million each year, cutting the annual cost of public sector absence from £4.5 billion to £3.8 billion.

In order to do this, Ben Willmott, senior public policy advisor at the CIPD, argues that public sector organisations need to look at management practices.

He said: "There is a fundamental difference in management culture and practice between the sectors. The public sector is more likely to provide leave for family circumstances, provide access to occupational health services, counselling services and physiotherapy. But



they are less likely than their private sector counterparts to discipline or dismiss employees for absence-related reasons. Public sector employers are also less likely to restrict pay to help manage absence, and continue to pay occupational sick pay for longer to those on long-term sick leave.

"Effective absence management involves finding a balance between providing support to help employees with health problems stay in and return to work and taking consistent and firm action against employees that try to take advantage of organisations' occupational sick pay schemes. Some public sector employers have not got this balance right."

Commenting on the *NHS Health and Wellbeing Review* specifically, he said: "It is important that Dr Steve Boorman's interim report embraces how people are managed by line managers and supervisors. There is no point in providing employees with subsidised gym membership or advice on healthy eating and exercise if they dread coming to work because they have received inadequate training, they are bullied by their manager or they are drowning under their workload. Employees who are under stress because of excessive workloads or long hours are more likely to eat less healthily, take less exercise and smoke and drink more."

www.cipd.co.uk

WATER WELLPOINT HAS BEEN PROMOTING ITS HEALTH KIOSKS ON THE NHS HEALTH & WELLBEING ROADSHOW, WHICH TOURED STRATEGIC HEALTH AUTHORITIES (SHA) IN ENGLAND AND WALES AS PART OF DR BOORMAN'S REVIEW. THE INTERACTIVE KIOSKS GIVE EMPLOYEES A QUICK AND EASY WAY TO MEASURE THEIR WEIGHT, HYDRATION QUOTA, BODY MASS INDEX, BODY FAT CONTENT, HEART RATE AND BLOOD PRESSURE, PROVIDING EARLY WARNING OF POTENTIAL PROBLEMS AND HIGHLIGHTING AREAS INDIVIDUALS CAN WORK ON TO IMPROVE THEIR HEALTH.

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review will ensure that you're only running initiatives that work and that earn you a solid return on your investment.

ENGAGE IN FRIENDLY COMPETITION

Group wellbeing initiatives work brilliantly. Team fitness challenges, pedometer competitions and regular fitness check-ups coupled with advice on making simple changes get people buzzing and help them view work in a slightly different way. The majority of staff think that work is something that gets in the way of staying healthy. Give them the opportunity to improve their health within office hours and have a bit of fun along the way and they'll be much more enthusiastic in the office, not to mention more loyal as a result.

COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND CONSISTENTLY

Staff should know that your wellbeing initiatives are about helping them feel better. You may be setting out to reduce absence or improve productivity but what staff look at first is how any new initiatives will benefit them. Be clear that you want to offer something that is about them as individuals, not just as employees. You want to provide an environment where they can make choices and changes that will benefit them, their families and their friends as they become healthier, more energetic and more positive people.

Consider how the Whole Foods approach of 'bribing' staff to stay in shape would be received by your people and formulate your communications according to how you think your staff will react best. Remember, when it comes to wellbeing, carrot is much more effective than stick.

Jeff Archer is director of The Tonic, which specialises in designing and delivering wellbeing programmes for businesses of all sizes. www.the-tonic.com

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THE TONIC IS OFFERING FREE TELEPHONE CONSULTATIONS TO THREE BUSINESS INFO READERS. FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN, EMAIL JEFF ARCHER (JEFF@THE-TONIC.COM) WITH YOUR COMPANY NAME, CONTACT DETAILS AND WHAT YOU'D LIKE TO ACHIEVE FROM A WELLBEING INITIATIVE.