

At-a-glance: A manager's role in building a culture of health

Management support is critical to the success of health & well-being programs. Management style and perception of management support may be strong influencers on employee program participation. Developing a broad base of managerial support is therefore an important health & well-being engagement strategy.

Why does employee health & well-being matter to managers?

Employees are the most important asset in an organization. Investing in your employees' health & well-being can make a significant difference in job satisfaction and productivity, as well as in the overall profitability of the organization. Participation in health & well-being programs is associated with:¹

- Higher energy and engagement
- Less stress
- Better communication
- Lower health risks
- Improved mental health
- Enjoyable work environment

So, how can you promote a culture of health among the employees in your organization?

Health & well-being program engagement is about more than just showing up at a health screening or other incentivized activity. Engaging employees in health & well-being activities at work involves creating and maintaining a sincere interest in living a healthier life; both at home and at work. Workplace health & well-being programs are only as effective as the proportion of employees who are truly engaged in the program.

What can managers do to help build a culture of health among employees?

A manager is in a unique position to utilize programs, resources, and policies within the organization to create an environment that supports employee health & well-being. Because of this unique position, a manager may act as a cultivator for employee health & well-being.

Managerial actions for creating a supportive health & well-being-focused environment include the following:



Supporting communication



Fostering a culture of health



Leading by example



Supporting communication

Managers can help ensure that their employees receive important messages related to the health & well-being program. Helping to communicate program updates, events, services, and policies to employees builds program awareness and encourages participation. Consider the following methods of supporting health & well-being program communications:

- Forward health & well-being-related communications from HR or well-being committee to your team.
- Include health & well-being topics and program announcements as an ongoing agenda item in your team meetings.
- Remind employees throughout the year of health & well-being programs and incentives that are available.
- Include health & well-being as a part of new-hire orientation.
- Place a well-being-branded pocket folder near your office or workstation. Remember to regularly refresh communication collateral to keep content relevant.
- Encourage your employees to participate in health & well-being programs and worksite events.
- Regularly meet with designated Well-Being Champions for program/event updates.
- Encourage employees to share their success stories with those who administer the health & well-being program.



Fostering a culture of health

A culture of health makes it easier for employees to succeed in improving their well-being. Managers may help influence and create a culture of health through several avenues:²

1. **Schedule flexibility** – Allowing employees to have flexibility over when and where they work
2. **Adequate staffing** – Avoiding long hours and high pressure that may negatively impact an employee's physical and mental health
3. **Work-life balance** – fostering a workplace that encourages time for family and leisure activities
4. **Social climate** – using health and well-being programs to create a sense of community and connection



Leading by example

Regardless of how many programs and policies an organization may implement around health & well-being, employees look to their leaders for cues on how to model their behavior. Consider establishing and following these well-being practices:

Leading by example:

- Participating in worksite health & well-being events and offerings
- Leading Walk-and-Talk meetings, as well as physical activity and stress management breaks
- Ensuring healthy snacks are available at staff meetings and company events
- Sharing with your team how the health & well-being program has positively impacted you (if applicable and if comfortable doing so)

Encouraging employees to:

- Use lunch time to step away from their desk
- Take frequent stretch, walk, and stress management / meditation breaks
- Engage in Walk-and-Talk meetings
- Obtain the recommended 7 – 9 hours of sleep per night
- Use PTO to recharge
- Stay home when sick

Discouraging employees from:

- Using work email during non-work hours
- Skipping lunch breaks or not taking breaks from sitting at their desk

Moreover, building a culture of health and well-being is important for both a manager and the employees. By communicating effectively, leading by example and fostering a culture of health in the workplace, managers play a crucial role in the success of a well-being program.

¹ Kaiser Permanente. <https://healthy.kaiserpermanente.org/health-wellness/healtharticle.why-workplace-wellness-important>. 2023. Accessed June 2023.

² Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2021/10/7-strategies-to-improve-your-employees-health-and-well-being>. October 2021. Accessed June 2023.