

Is Your Company Embracing These Employee Well-Being Trends?

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As the competition among employers for top tier talent grows ever fiercer, so does the importance placed on employee benefits. After all, why go with Company A when Company B offers an equal salary but a few extra bells and whistles? Among these benefits is a focus on employee health and well-being. A healthy workforce can mean lower stress and fewer employees calling out sick, which means increased wins for the business overall.

Initiatives that place an emphasis on employee health are needed perhaps more than ever, too. It's reported that 63% of adults in the U.K. are overweight and it's not much better in the United States, amounting to a problem in the billions for healthcare. Employers are taking notice of the need for robust health programs for team members and according to a survey by Society for Human Resource Management, wellness benefits increased more than any other area in 2019.

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Just like fashion, food, and music, wellness trends come and go and some are on the rise more than others (don't expect to see jazzercise classes in the company gym). In fact, it's not so much a new focus on the physical when it comes to employee

well-being, but mental, holistic, and tech approaches to health.

Mental health offerings are increasing

Despite technology making many aspects of our lives easier, people are more stressed today than they were a few decades ago. While this may not seem especially surprising, it has resulted in an increased focus on not just the physical health of employees, but mental health. The trend of employers offering a broader spectrum of mental health services seems to be rising with an 11 percent increase in company mindfulness programs and a 13 percent increase in on-site stress management programs.

The stigma around mental health has shifted dramatically over the last few decades. Whereas mental health issues were at one-time taboo, individuals are encouraged more than ever to seek out mental health resources without fear of judgment. This has led to companies such as American Express taking an active stance with its Healthy Minds program that offers on-site counseling and emotional support services.

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The increase in mental health benefits isn't going unnoticed either. According to a survey published by Aetna, 80 percent of respondents would give higher marks to an employer who offered mental health services over one that did not.

A holistic approach to employee well-being

Another emerging well-being trend that employers would be wise

to take notice of is the holistic approach. With the workforce rapidly changing, employers must look to well-being programs that acknowledge a work/life blend over a work/life balance. What's this mean exactly?

In short, it means employers will need to construct benefits plans that address both mind and body components of an employee's life. Employees are looking to their employers to help with the issues that may be unique to their particular life, such as getting out of debt, legal counsel, or becoming more involved in their community, in addition to mental and physical needs.

"There was this initial focus on health and fitness—physical health," Sarah Sardella, senior director for global benefits at Akamai Technologies told the Society for Human Resource Management. "Now everyone is saying 'What about financial wellness, emotional well-being and mental mindfulness?'" This is especially true when it comes to younger workers with Generation Z and Millennial employees placing higher importance on holistic employer programs than older workers.

Incorporation of tech and artificial intelligence

Don't act too surprised to see tech in the lineup of emerging employee well-being trends. Employees in the workforce today expect their employers to provide them with the latest technological tools and apps to keep their health in check. Whether it's a device such as a Fitbit to ensure they're hitting those daily recommended 10,000 steps or some form of telehealth to communicate with a health professional virtually. For example, the SHRM survey found that company-offered telehealth services for employees increased by 10 percent in 2019 – and this is expected to increase in 2020 and 2021 with Covid.

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Tech is finding its way into employee well-being programs in numerous ways, from virtual clinics to companies such as Apple offering genetic testing to Silicon Valley employees. Not surprisingly, many tech companies are also incorporating AI into these programs to better predict employee needs.

Peer collaboration is key for a productive team, and when employees are stressed, tired, or sick, this lags. Companies are already at work in finding ways to team up AI with HR to help reduce employee burnout. Aside from identifying employee stress, AI is also emerging as a growing resource to better manage healthcare enrollment and aid employees in selecting the optimal healthcare plan. This reduces the likelihood they'll be over-insured, which in turn, can save on company healthcare costs.

The bottom line is that like with any aspect of business, employee health needs are shifting and leaders should keep up with the changes. We're likely to see these trends emerge even stronger in a post-Covid world as a greater focus is placed on keeping the workforce healthy.

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