Personal and Organizational Wellness

What does it mean to be well? Is it about physical, mental or emotional health? Simply stated it is about striving to achieve on a personal level, a combination of physical activity, healthy eating and sustaining positive relationships with family, friends and colleagues. Within an organization, wellness can be extended to include elements of safety and corporate culture. Ultimately it is about honouring human value, yours and others.

I was recently reminded of this importance of honouring human value at a Workplace Wellness session presented by Dr. Graham Lowe (organized by Southwest Region Workplace Health Network). In the round table discussions that happened throughout the day, common concerns experienced by employees were expressed: increased work related stress, greater employer expectations, uncertainty in the workplace, organizational change, as well as an increase in absenteeism rates.

The audience was a mix of employers, human resource professionals, health promoters as well as employees. What struck me as interesting was not the fact that many present were significantly stressed within their workplace, but rather with how these employees coped with these stressors. I was inspired by the participants’ passion about being open to change, their dedication to their work and to each other, their creativity and their willingness to be engaged.

These employees and leaders understood the importance of the human value and in their workplaces had created ingenious, interactive, fun, unique stress-busting activities which often led to more engagement within each organization. There were numerous ideas: lunch hour yoga, stretch break reminders, noon book club, walking breaks, Friday ice cream treats, Monday meditation, on-site workout rooms, discounts at local gyms - the options seem endless.

Dr. Lowe pointed out that these types of interventions themselves were not the ultimate solution; it was the positive effect that these interventions had on the workplace culture. Wellness in the workplace, as Dr. Lowe described, is shifting from simply being a number of interventions focused on health, nutrition, and exercise to being a culture of wellness; a philosophy and way of conducting business. This shift takes a holistic and systemic approach and includes organizational change. Employers are realizing that workplace wellness not only increases productivity and people’s ability to deal with stress but also supports the employee personally. The increased employee engagement and resulting productivity provides 3 to 6 times returns on the initial investment thereby providing a solid business case for wellness work.

Wellness committees are one of the tools that organizations identified as a means to helping create, maintain and sustain healthy workplace. The power of a wellness committee, or the like, is that the committee holds some of the tension that exists between the employees and their bosses. This tension is released by having staff focus on a common purpose, regardless of their rank, role or position. Like Health and Safety committees, the wellness committee addresses concerns from all employees and management alike and works together toward a common goal. It’s about working together. To be effective, the wellness committee needs to have buy-in from both employers and employees. Support of leadership and management means employees will be able to access the committee, have input and the committee be given the appropriate space, time, and resources. Support and buy-in from employees means that they will participate, help the program to grow and to continue to grow. Combined support from both management and the employees means a safe place is created in which concerns can be shared and addressed appropriately.
How to get started?

Start off by first identifying what is needed. What do employees want or need? Develop a survey for staff to gain ideas and build interest. Keep in mind your organization’s constraints - budget, space, finances, staff availability. The discussion groups at the Workplace Wellness workshop demonstrated to me that staff will come up with creative, economical and engaging activities that are sure to be a hit with fellow workers. My favourite was the Friday ice cream treats. That being said, I have seen other organizations use healthier options such as protein bars and smoothies to engage the workforce.

Another tip is to find champions of wellness. These advocates will be invaluable as the wellness activities unfold. The champions can rally people and resources, making the committee’s job much easier.

The culture of wellness reflects a culture of safety as outlined in the recent National Standards for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace - January 2013. Establishing a wellness committee can be one step in formalizing and implementing these standards in your workplace.

Need help?

Shifting culture is not easy. Lowe encourages engaging resources including EAP service providers. He states “Employee assistance professionals are on the front lines of helping employees deal with the consequences of unhealthy workplaces and can play a pivotal role in finding solutions”. He further states “EAP service providers must cooperate with professionals in workplace health and safety or organizational development to craft comprehensive interventions that improve the health of the entire organization... helping managers to make the link between a healthy work environment and better business results.”

That is exactly what we do here at FSEAP. We help create healthier workplaces by providing interventions as well as proactive tools for the workplace. Standard workshops include practical tips, information and resources on stress reduction, depression, anxiety, resilience building, meditative practices, nutrition, respect in the workplace, compassion fatigue. Other interventions are instrumental in creating a culture of wellness - for example training of wellness champions, workshops on resiliency or on how to support others in times of change. If you need help getting started or need ideas, be sure to give us a call. We’d love to help.

Call us today to get started!

Note:
Dr. Graham Lowe is a well known author and president of The Graham Lowe Group Inc., a workplace consulting and research firm. He speaks internationally and has helped numerous organizations in the private, public and non-profit sectors create healthy and productive work environments. Graham received the 2004 Canadian Workplace Wellness Pioneer Award in recognition of his contribution to creating healthy organizations. For more information about his work, check out www.grahamlowe.ca

Financial Wellness

Do you cringe when you hear the word ‘budget’? Sure, a budget involves a bit of work on your part, but the payoff is financial discipline and peace of mind. Once you get the hang of it, budgeting is easy and can mean a better financial future for yourself and your loved ones.

Think About Your Goals!
Before you start making a budget, take some time to think about your financial goals. Do you need to pay off your debts? Do you want to save to buy a home or begin building your nest egg for retirement? Do you want to go back to school or send your kids to school?

Debt is Manageable - Call today!

For further assistance please contact fseap at 1-877-433-0701.

We offer confidential individual, group, and family counselling to all ages. During business hours counselling is provided in-person. Qualified counsellors can also be reached for phone counselling at the above number 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

REMINDER: Should you need to cancel or rebook your appointment, please provide at least 24 hours’ notice.

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