

# Lessons Learned from the MDH Work Well Pilot

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## 1. Support employees' best intentions.

I've come to believe that the role of a worksite wellness program is to provide a work environment where those who are trying to make a healthy change or sustain a healthy lifestyle are supported by what they see, hear, smell, taste and feel at work.

## 2. K.I.S.S.

Keep it simple, Sweetheart. Eating healthy, exercising or relaxing at work is not an employee's "job". Make it easy for your co-workers to be healthy and support their primary objective of "doing a good job".

## 3. Invite every employee to participate.

Your target market is every employee. Design programs that will touch each employee every few months or over the year.

Your biggest health care expense today is your employees with acute or chronic illness. However, a large majority of next year's high risk population will come from those that are in your low and moderate risk population this year. (Est. 59% - Dr. Raj Lakhpal, HealthAtoZ) Your biggest cost savings over time will come from keeping your healthy employees healthy.

## 4. It takes a village.

A wellness program needs buy-in from all levels of the organization, from the Commissioner to division directors to supervisors to employees.

Work Well was able to successfully create buy-in through its organizational structure:

- Operations Committee of content experts
- Wellness Champion Committee of one employee (and one alternate) from each division
- Steering Committee of Division Directors or Assistant Directors (and one alternate) and Assistant Commissioner. This committee therefore includes representatives from finance, facilities, human resources, the Commissioner's office and DOER.

Prevent burn-out by using people's time well, keeping the (volunteer) opportunities fun, and building in a succession plan for committee members to turn over. For example, each Wellness Champion has an alternate who can fill in at meetings or program support when the Wellness Champion is busy. The alternate will become the Champion after a year or so, and a new alternate will move in.



## **5. Build evaluation into your program.**

You may get by without it at the start, but you will eventually be called upon to defend the effectiveness of your programs. Design ways to count numbers and solicit testimonials.

## **6. Communication is major.**

Communicating health messages through signage, targeted e-mails and intranet news will be a grand part of your program. Learn the guidelines for marketing and communicating to all agency employees. Develop a communications plan. Build a brand identity into your program. What vehicles do you have for communicating to all or subsets of Department employees? What are the guidelines for the intranet, for mailing to other sites?

## **7. Learn the ropes of facilities management.**

Your building will have guidelines and rules about posting materials on walls, about using space for wellness, about donated equipment, based on both appearance and safety considerations. Work with your facilities team to address their concerns and learn what you can and can't do.

## **8. Designate staff time to worksite wellness.**

To sustain your program, a Worksite Wellness Coordinator will need to be identified and funded, at least part time, with access to support staff, and a budget for supplies and expenses.

## **9. Don't re-invent the wheel.**

As much as possible, use existing resources and partners to implement your worksite wellness program.

- Link employees to existing health plan programs and services.
- Implement ready-to-go programs such as: Go Red (American Heart Assoc.), the do. Campaign (Blue Cross Blue Shield of MN) 10,000 Steps (HealthPartners) and Get Fit Twin Cities (Steps to a Healthier MN) and the programs in the Work Well toolkit.)
- Be aware of worksite wellness grants and other funding.

## **10. Be well yourself.**

Every committee member needs to model and champion wellness. Not perfectly. But well. You will be healthier. You will also continue to notice, learn from and appreciate the challenges our environment and our lives present.



I try to be well myself. But also, I try to ask and be aware when implementing Work Well might be causing others stress. That would be ironic, and counterproductive. Let's find support or a better way to do what we're trying to do.

### **11. Invite management on the team.**

And word your invitation strongly, with data on health costs and the return on investment that can be earned through worksite wellness.

Your program can begin with grassroots support and minimum funding. But after a while you will need upper management support to approve policy changes and to give the program roots.

### **12. Consider wellness spaces.**

A designated fitness center created the impression of a commitment to wellness simply by virtue of it's being there. Another model is to create smaller spaces for wellness and fitness, such as unused offices outfitted with a recliner and timer for resting, or simple fitness equipment, such as fitness balls, mats, weights and a DVD player for fitness breaks.

### **13. Don't underestimate the prevalence of stress.**

Our culture is fast moving. Many people are under stress, be it related to work or life outside of work. Worksite wellness programs over time must address stress reduction and depression

### **14. Expect change to be slow but sure.**

Like starting a business, budget your resources and energy for the long hall. And realize that success may not be getting all employees to meet recommended guidelines, but moving a small percent of employees from inactive to modestly active.

Over time, look around at the healthy culture and environment your program is creating. This change may take years to be able to measure, but you can derive a sense of accomplishment in the meantime.

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