



Culture Spotlight: Healthy People, Wellness and Innovation

Posted by Joe Fournier

In 2010, the US Department of Health and Human Services launched [Healthy People 2020](#), the United States' ambitious, yet achievable, ten-year goals for health promotion and disease prevention. Healthy People 2020 speaks to the social determinants of health, which means that social, environmental factors impact the overall health of individuals, populations and communities. Among the leading health indicators under Healthy People 2020 are access to health services, mental health, nutrition, physical activity and obesity, tobacco use, to name a few.



Making the business case for wellness is a hot topic in the board room. Terry Grant, President of KeyBank's Utah Market, explains, "When leadership first begins to consider the wellness of their employees, their initial thoughts are usually centered on physical wellness. However, that is only one aspect as mental and spiritual wellness make the individual whole." Across the many industries, leading organizations are expanding their wellness platforms to engage the entire workforce. Grant notes "Through a creative and integrative lens, managers are now charged to let the employees know we truly care about them. Consistency of word and action matters. The more our people understand that we care deeply about their contributions and well-being, then the more they are willing to engage, build culture and innovate."

Employee-Centered Wellness

Many employers have instituted corporate wellness and well-being programs since Johnson & Johnson launched its [Live for Life](#) initiative in 1979, [a pioneering effort](#) which many believe was the first health improvement initiative to engage a large segment of its employee population and support a corporate culture that encouraged a healthy lifestyle. Over the years, the term "work-life balance" has emerged to describe a lifestyle where people can successfully blend the competing demands of their professional and personal lives. Rather than speak to "work-life balance," I prefer to think of "life balance." It is a better term to describe a lifestyle where people can and do balance varied priorities in their lives with work being a central part of a healthy life.

Savvy employers understand that wellness in life can impact their employees' productivity and organizational profitability by reducing healthcare costs and benefiting their communities. With stress levels increasing in an ever more demanding and time compressed world, many companies have turned to wellness as a solution to stem rising costs and to prevent, delay or manage chronic or debilitating health conditions among their employees. Johnson & Johnson has pursued wellness with a simple goal – to help 100,000+ employees be at their personal best when it comes to their health and well-being by 2020.

The [Mayo Clinic Center for Innovation](#) partnered with [Delos®](#), a firm specializing in wellness real estate, to think "outside the box" on employee wellness. Together, the organizations launched the WELL Living Lab. Set adjacent to Mayo Clinic's Rochester, MN campus, the WELL Living Lab was the first lab exclusively committed to research, development and testing of both new and existing innovations designed to transform the health and well-being of individuals as they live and work within built environments. Since its opening in 2016, the project has attracted 23 alliance member companies to participate in research about stress and resiliency, performance, sleep, comfort and health and well-being. Air quality, sound, lighting, temperature, humidity and elements of nature in indoor spaces at home and in the workplace are just a few aspects of environments that the lab studies.

Creating a Culture for Healthy People

In previous blogs, I've reflected on being a CHRO and the many times over the years when board or executive colleagues have told me that I needed to build a culture of wellness, safety, diversity, collaboration, teamwork, innovation and continuous

improvement. The list goes on and on as the topics are primarily viewed as people strategies. Indeed, shaping a culture where people thrive is a tough task because it hinges on people's core *beliefs*, *behaviors* and *feelings*.

At its core, wellness is about improving people's lives—mentally, physically and professionally. While individual wellness programs focused on fitness, tobacco cessation and healthier food options often garner some success, they are not enough to change a culture or to set the platform required to drive innovation. So how does an executive team tackle the challenge without creating yet another program? I believe a few simple steps can ignite a culture of wellness:

- **Lead by Example** – Culture is shaped every day, every minute, at every interaction. Individually and collectively as leaders, we are responsible for creating positive, safe and inclusive environments where people can thrive. When it comes to wellness, the same principles hold true. Wellness cannot be just one of many programmatic bullet points with key performance indicators placed on the senior or department leader's agenda. More than hearing talking points about wellness, a team must see their leader model healthy behaviors and lifestyles.
- **Ask for Commitment** – I've always believed that the best results occur when employees are involved in developing solutions. When it comes to improving and changing lifestyles that are often rooted in long-term beliefs and routine behaviors, it is important to involve people early on and ask for their commitment. Wellness takes time and dedication; it is fraught with success and failure along the way.
- **Take Care of People** – As a CHRO, my job was putting people first. Taking care of people means empowering and engaging with employees to celebrate their wellness milestones. It goes much deeper than typical employee recognition. It means supporting them through setbacks and learning moments discovered along the road to life balance.
- **Create Healthy Environments** – For a culture of wellness to take hold, leaders must create the environment where it can take root. Yes, this means taking action to offer healthy eating choices in company vending machines and cafeterias, encouraging movement during breaks lunches and meetings and providing incentives and rewards for a change toward healthy behaviors. Additionally, it means ensuring that employee assistance programs, mental health services and emotional support programs are available, accessible and widely communicated to all without stigma.

Shaping culture is not about changing people; it is about meeting people where they are and enabling them to be their very best in life as professionals and people. That said, building a culture of wellness and well-being means establishing a workplace where people can create healthy habits for their own lives.

Wellness Works

For those industries and companies at onset of their wellness journeys, leaders often start with implementing individual programs around tobacco cessation, gym memberships and healthier meals in their cafeterias. For more evolved organizations, additional offerings such as enhanced parental leave policies, energy management courses, mindfulness seminars and pet friendly workplaces are introduced to promote a more holistic and integrated approach to wellness. What is the next frontier for life balance tools? For wellness to be even more successful in the future, it must be treated as more than a series of benefits—it must be part of companies' overall decision making and instilled into their cultures until it becomes part of their DNA.

Terry Grant comments that "A thriving culture results from prioritizing three groups: clients, employees and communities." I strongly believe that a culture of wellness can produce real and sustainable results. In addition to increased productivity and engagement, decreased medical costs and happier and healthier people, embracing wellness serves a more noble purpose of improving people's lives and creating stronger communities. The hallmark of leadership is serving others so they can live their best lives personally and professionally. Being a champion for wellness and lifestyle balance is an outstanding place to start as healthy cultures are ripe for transformative innovation.

As always, free to email me at fournierj@inveniaspartners.com with your thoughts and comments on life balance, wellness, innovation and well-being.