



## The Gift of Total Wellbeing: An Emerging Leadership Competency

*Posted by Joseph Fournier*

On Thanksgiving many will gather with friends and loved ones to express thanks and gratitude to one another. Yes, I'm going to watch football, scour the Internet for Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals and have a piece of pie. I'm also planning to reflect and remember that Thanksgiving is about caring for others and turning our gratitude into action. Even if your house is filled with friends and relatives or you are travelling far from home, I hope that you'll look for a way to slowdown just a bit this Thursday.

In today's increasingly complex world, people are expected to respond to emails, texts, phone calls, instant messages and social media while communicating in-person with customers and colleagues at work and managing the many competing demands of their personal lives and families. As leaders, we are expected to manage our own stress while demonstrating that we genuinely care for our people and how they deal with stress. Holidays, vacations and staycations offer a chance to think about the gifts in our lives.

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. In today's complex business climate, encouraging and enabling employees to achieve "work-life balance" is no longer enough. "Putting people first" and "taking care of people" are the new normal; standards on par with real time feedback, compensation reviews, career mobility and development tracks and milestone recognition programs. The evolution of a people-centered perspective is that leaders must now focus on **total wellbeing** for both their companies and employees to be even more successful.

### The Case for Wellbeing

As I have advanced my career and stepped up for new leadership roles, I have listened to many CEOs who believe that it's critical to "put people first" and to "take care of people." Anne Mulcahy, former Xerox Chairman and CEO and Lead Director of [Johnson & Johnson](#), noted, "Employees who believe that management is concerned about them as a whole person – not just an employee – are more productive, more satisfied, more fulfilled. Satisfied employees mean satisfied customers, which leads to profitability." Well said. I agree completely.

Many employers understand that productivity and organizational profitability are closely linked to employee engagement. Savvy leaders take it to the next level as they recognize that employee engagement is tied closely to the total wellbeing of their people. Moreover, with increasing levels of stress and anxiety among workers, many see that total wellbeing can reduce rising costs and prevent, delay and manage chronic or debilitating health conditions among their employees. To be happy, healthy and engaged at work, team members must experience health in their **career, mind and body**. That said, I believe that "**wellbeing**" must soon become a necessary leadership competency in addition to other competencies for effective leaders such as "leads with integrity," "inspires others" and "fosters innovation."

### A New Leadership Pathway

To establish wellbeing as a leadership competency, organizations must integrate it into their everyday thinking and work. Below are some practical tips to consider while building the framework for wellness leadership:

- **Build a Total Wellbeing Learning Curriculum:** Total wellbeing encompasses a holistic approach to wellness - professionally,



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physically and mentally. It goes far beyond programs such as tobacco cessation, exercise and employee assistance and focuses on health in career, mind and body. For leaders, that means learning how to take care of employees through a new lens and innovating through planning, programming and cultural integration. Chief Learning Officers will be called-upon to develop experiential learning programs centered on how to integrate total wellbeing into the daily work of leaders and employees

- **Model Total-Wellbeing Behaviors:** 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 total wellbeing, the same principles hold true. The Board, CEO and senior leaders must lead openly on wellness; it cannot be 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 actively model healthy behaviors tied to career, mind and body.
- **Integrate Total-Wellbeing Thinking into Operating Plans and Programs:** For wellness to be even more successful in the future, it must be view holistically and comprehensively by organizations and their leaders. It must become part of the companies' overall decision making and instilled into their cultures until it becomes part of their DNA. Indeed, Chief People Officers will be asked to benchmark performance as total wellbeing will be measured in new ways such as tracking the financial capability of staff and creating inclusion indexes that correlate to overall organization success.

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. As leaders, it means understanding that total wellbeing is both an individual and institutional journey. Everyone starts from a different place and we each follow a different path to achieve and sustain our wellbeing. For employees to reach their maximum engagement and productivity, leaders must provide the expertise, tools, support and encouragement along the way.

In this season of thanks and giving, how will you care for your people? How will you contribute to their wellness? How will you ensure your own total wellbeing? Take a moment to reflect and relax this week – it is a good place to start the journey.