

THE WELLNESS MATRIX™: **Workplace Wellness that Brings Returns**

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Companies in Atlantic Canada and elsewhere are grappling with the adverse effects of poor employee health **which negatively affects productivity and increases the labour costs per unit of work.** Research has established that employee **productivity** is directly related to employee **wellness**. In turn, employee wellness is directly related to the presence of **lifestyle risk factors** including obesity, inactivity, poor nutrition, depression, smoking, all highly prevalent in **Atlantic Canadian employees.**

Consider the following Atlantic Canada statistics from the database of Creative Wellness Solutions Inc.* (CWS) that consists of over 6,000 employees from 51 organizations who completed worksite health risk assessments including a lifestyle questionnaire and collection of clinical data such as blood pressure, blood cholesterol and glucose, body mass index and waist circumference:

- 70% overweight (BMI \geq 25), 31% obese (BMI \geq 30)
- 49% inactive (<3 times/week)
- 38% elevated cholesterol
- 16% elevated blood pressure
- 20% smokers
- 18% elevated stress

*Makrides L., Sawatzky C., Petrie J., Veinot P., Modifiable Health Risks in Atlantic Canadian Employees, A Five-Year Report. Health Promotion International,(submitted for publication).

Changes in health costs follow changes in health risks – they increase together. When productivity measures are factored in the impact is amplified. However, decreasing employees' health risk can decrease employer costs and improve productivity. Clearly an opportunity exists for employers to invest in the health of their workforce – and their companies – by making workplace wellness a core business strategy. Such strategy not only controls expenses, but also protects, supports and enhances human capital. It is fundamental to a healthy bottom line.

The roadmap to a high performing workplace and workforce starts in the office of the CEO. The challenge to top leadership is to create the vision for the roadmap that will bring about the change that will flow throughout the organization resulting in a healthy and productive workforce. Furthermore, questions related to employee buy-in and participation, assessment of needs, choice of programming and return on investment cloud the issue. And wellness programs are often implemented with no metrics, targets and assessment of outcomes.

The CWS Wellness Matrix™ is designed to overcome many of these issues and to help organizations implement a practical and economical workplace wellness roadmap with measurable targets and outcomes. The Wellness Matrix™ includes components that motivate and engage employees and empowers organizations to implement and evaluate wellness programs and see results. It incorporates the key steps and critical strategies to successful workplace wellness implementation and outlines the methods and wellness

interventions needed to motivate and empower employees to make the necessary lifestyle changes and improve their health. Wellness interventions are provided through the Workplace Health Systems that consist of video presentations, educational modules, wellness challenges, and campaigns and a variety of educational tools and resources all available online. These Systems fit easily in small and large organizations and provide employers with tested tools to do wellness themselves and report the results. A train-the-trainer approach makes implementation easy, cost –effective and sustainable.

The Wellness Matrix™

Steps	Strategies	Methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEO support • The Wellness Team • Benchmarking/Data/HRA • The Action Plan • The Wellness Interventions • Metrics/Evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness • Education • Skill Building • Supportive Environment • Incentives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate • Promote • Multiple Offerings/Times • Make it easy • Make it fun • Create winners • Expect 100% participation
<p>Wellness Interventions The Workplace Health Systems</p>		
<p>How to Use Guides •Flash Presentations •Posters •Handouts •Worksheets •Newletters •Frequently Asked Questions •Wellness Tips •Wellness Challenges •Wellness Competitions •Wellness Activities</p>		

Table 1 gives an example of implementation of the Wellness Matrix™ over a 24-month period aimed at creating a healthy workplace through increased physical activity, better nutrition and decreased obesity rates – the most prevalent lifestyle risk factors facing employers in Atlantic Canada.

As indicated in Table 1, the Wellness Matrix™ is launched with communication from the CEO, and the event is promoted widely throughout the workplace via posters, banners etc. Creation of the Wellness Team follows, as well as a period of data collection through Health Risk Assessments and/or other tools to come up with the benchmarking data and identify employee needs, interests and wants. An Action Plan is developed that includes measurable goals and targets. All these events essentially take up about a 2-3 month period. The various wellness interventions consist of video presentations on specific topics which together with their collateral educational material such as handouts, posters, wellness tips and newsletters change every 1 to 2 months, while stand-alone, fun wellness activities and challenges are launched to further enhance participation, create team building and camaraderie and help employees attain their personal health goals. All wellness events are meant to create winners, so the expected targets are set relatively low initially, increasing gradually. Incentives are effective strategies to reward success in reaching personal as well as organizational goals, as well as creating a supportive environment that further attests to the organization's commitment and engagement in the wellness journey.

The evidence for comprehensive workplace wellness has never been clearer; whether it is higher insurance premiums, absenteeism or overall loss in productivity, employers pay more for unhealthy employees. In these times of economic difficulties it is particularly important for an organization to invest in its people. Human capital is the number one resource for any organization, large or small. Proactive, visionary employers that invest in people through workplace wellness is a good business strategy. It not only sends out an 'I care' message to the employees it creates a high performing workforce and a healthy workplace.

For more information on CWS products and services visit www.wellnessolutions.ca or call (902) 820-3096 or 1-877-480-9355 (toll-free).