Wellness Programs: A Smart Investment into More than Just Health

By Ryan Coles
Edited by Marcel Faggioni

The concept of Employee Wellness and Wellness programs is a relatively modern idea to many organizations. Often times, such programs are seen as “perks” whose sole purpose is to keep employees happy. Many organizations have remarked that offering such a perk is important since, as the old expression goes, “a happy employee is a productive employee”. However, such Wellness Programs are normally seen as being luxuries and are often one of the first items on the chopping block to help save money during times of financial constraint, much like what we are currently experiencing today. But is it right to label such Employee Wellness as being a luxury?

Recent studies point to the opposite, stating that promoting wellness in the workplace may do much more than keep your employees happy; it may save you money.

What are Wellness Programs?

Wellness programs are programs designed to promote and maintain good health and a healthy lifestyle amongst employees. In many organizations, wellness programs are often voluntary and take aim at various areas of individuals’ health including musculoskeletal health, stress and obesity. This can be achieved through things such as subsidized healthy lunches, fitness education, on-site company fitness facilities or gym memberships.

Benefits to Staff

In a recent newspaper article from the Globe & Mail, the Conference Board of Canada identified stress and anxiety has being costly issues to employers in general. According to the journal of Chronic Diseases in Canada, the loss attributed to anxiety and stress in 2005 amounted to approximately $ 30-billion in direct or indirect costs related to mental-health issues. Part of the costs is associated with missed days of work. Stressed workers tend to miss twice the number of work days per year as employees who experience less stress in the workplace.

Wellness Programs are beneficial to all employees as well since everyone has varying degrees of health risks. Such risks can include things such as unhealthy eating, lack of exercise, smoking, drinking, sleep deprivation, stress and even genetic predispositions. Through participation in such programs, employees can see positive changes that will not only help them complete their job responsibilities but will provide them with more energy in their personal lives as well.

Wellness as an Investment

The benefits of Wellness Programs to employees are obvious as it may help them achieve personal fitness goals, allow them to begin or maintain an active lifestyle, and

give them more energy and vigour in general. However, it is now being realized that the benefits of Wellness Programs are not simply limited to the staff but can be felt by the organization as well. Numerous studies point to the fact that Wellness Programs can actually save organizations money. By promoting healthier lifestyles to your staff, organizations can effectively reduce absenteeism and health-care costs. Also, is has been proven that healthier employees are also more productive employees. This means that by investing in the health of your employees, an organization is effectively lowering their costs and increasing productivity.

So while at first glance Wellness Programs may seem like a simple perk, they are in fact a strong investment into the productivity of your workforce. The costs associated with such programs bring about strong returns in the form of a happier and healthier workforce, reduced costs for benefits and increased productivity, all which are certainly welcome in our current economic state.