



## Program Showcase: Well-Being Strategy

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# THE ARCHITECTURE OF AN INTENTIONAL EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING STRATEGY



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There has been unprecedented demand for mental health support during the last several years, especially for healthcare employers with clinicians working long hours on the front lines.<sup>1</sup> With less time for self-care and family, anxiety about the future, and burnout, employees are reassessing their needs at work, and in many cases, they are asking for more than just better compensation and different job titles.

In fact, up to 55% of employee engagement is driven by nonfinancial recognition, according to recent research that shows employees leave when they do not feel valued by an organization.<sup>2</sup> The same research notes that to retain a competitive advantage in a tight labor market, employers

must invest in professional development and encourage employees to seek help, achieve work-life balance, and build resilience.

It is not enough for organizations to amass well-being benefits, such as employee assistance programs (EAPs), telehealth, virtual behavioral health, and text coaching. They must also communicate intentionally with employees.

The workforce is an organization's structural foundation, and employees rely on managers and organizational leaders to provide a culture of caring that supports their health and well-being.

In an ideal world, the workplace would help employees achieve positive outcomes, such as happiness at work, and benefits should be perceived and used as valuable resources to help with daily living, and mental health/substance use support when needed. At the very least, work should not make employee health and wellness worse.

Organizations that establish a well-being communication strategy with clear, easy-to-locate tools and resources help their employees view these benefits in a more positive light.

## Creating a Culture of Caring

An intentional well-being strategy that aligns with the company's mission, culture, policies, and procedures provides employees with a clear understanding of the resources available to support their well-being. Here are five steps to creating a culture of caring:

1. **Ensure a team approach.** A cross-divisional team that includes benefits, human resources (HR), total rewards, communications (internal or external), and well-being teams will encourage thoughtful analysis and dialogue. A project manager who defines the project milestones and keeps the team on track is essential.
2. **Start with the end in mind.** Ensure you have a true understanding of the problem at hand before coming up with solutions or a long-term strategy. For instance, if the end goal is to get all team members to read information provided, consider a variety of delivery options, such as an online benefit hub, emails, text messages, and benefits guides for information about how to access well-being resources. To make sure the end goal is clear before you take any action, consider the following:
  - Ask employees via anonymous survey what they want or need to support them in their everyday lives.
  - Listen to requests that your benefits/HR team and benefits broker receive from employees who are trying to locate benefit information, understand their well-being benefits, or access services when they need support. For example, an annual report that includes key performance indicators helps measure feedback, shares questions, and helps spot gaps in understanding.

- Consider evidence-based indices to gather data on how employees feel about the work they do, the culture of the workplace, and their benefits. Harvard University's expanded Human Flourishing Program<sup>2</sup> and the Well-Being Assessment from the Institute for Healthcare Improvement<sup>3</sup> provide templates with questions that can be adjusted as needed. These questions can be folded into a larger survey that captures engagement as well as diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB); well-being; and benefits. If you ask for feedback (in a survey), be prepared to follow up and report your findings, as well as your next steps to address issues identified.
  - Capture exit interview feedback, which can point to specific areas of improvement (for example, the perception that certain benefits are not available).
3. **Don't spend all your money on high-end finishes.** Reserve some of the annual budget to support a communication and engagement strategy. This can be a blueprint for your team that you might need to adjust based on feedback. Break this work down into a few simple steps:
- **Planning:** As a team, define the time frame and key milestones for your strategy. For example, align benefit changes or additions with the open enrollment period.
  - **Development and implementation:** Select the content; decide when it will be made available; and choose the format, channels, and tools to disseminate information. This can include email drip campaigns, updates on mobile apps, webinars, navigation-enhanced guides, newsletters, podcasts, and one-on-one meetings. Make sure the tone and transparency of the communications align with your organization.
  - **Measurement and evaluation:** Is your well-being strategy helping your population? This should be tracked, evaluated, and modified when needed, as noted below.

Organizations that do not have dedicated marketing and communication teams to develop employee benefits and benefits guides can consider external communication firms. Well-being vendors (such as EAPs) may also have marketing materials, portals, mobile apps, and services, but the resources might not be used by employees without easy-to-access, comprehensive communications that are updated regularly to reflect changes.

For example, in 2020, a large employer was looking for a list of businesses to assist clinicians with services such as grocery shopping, childcare searches, tutors, and other personal needs during the height of the pandemic.

This employer has robust mental health benefits, in-the-moment EAP support, and leave policies to care for the health of its employees or their family members. Yet employees could not find the resources available when they needed them due to the stress caused by long hours working in constant crisis mode.

After gathering a cross-divisional team to discuss and review the data from an employee survey and from leadership, the employer developed a communication guide that focused solely on well-being resources that the organization offered. Once completed, leadership received positive feedback. The organization continues to update and republish the document annually as a 15-page, navigation-enhanced guide with links to vendor-specific

information.

4. **Align vendors and internal teams on benefits** so when they speak with employees during times of need, they know what information to share about available resources (such as EAP, virtual/text coaching, and therapy). Benefits change often and vendors regularly enhance their programs with new tools to help engage employees so it is important that your leadership, managers, supervisors, employee relations, and benefits teams are well-versed in the programs and how to access information. Identify vendors that can comfortably cross-promote resources (EAP, disability and life insurance vendors, employee leave teams, retirement plans, medical/mental health plans); introduce them to the resources that promote well-being; and provide them with guides that support the resources. Hold regularly-scheduled, 30-minute training opportunities to keep everyone up to date on benefits.
5. **Make it easy for employees to find the information they need quickly.** Deploy mobile apps that support well-being (EAPs, text coaching, and telehealth) to company-issued phones. A well-designed employee portal or benefit hub that offers single sign-on to a health plan and EAP will influence engagement along with relevant, timely well-being content that aligns with a well-being strategy. Themed guides, like the well-being resource referenced earlier, can be helpful here.

Next, establish a method to gauge success for your well-being strategy. Set clear and trackable goals that gauge a baseline for the communication strategy. Following are some key performance indicators (KPIs) to consider:

- **Reach:** Measure how many employees (unique users) access communications (email open rates, click-through rates, logins, meeting attendance, document downloads, and webinar attendance).
- **Engagement:** Determine how your employees interact with communications.
- **Outcomes:** Track participation across various touchpoints that tie back to a well-being strategy. EAP vendors provide detailed utilization that can be used as a comparative tool when evaluating efficacy of certain campaigns (such as email, push, or web).
- **Turnover:** Align with HR teams on exit interview questions that are specific to benefits and for candidates who do not accept positions.

The strategy team should review data analytics annually and compare the data with utilization and engagement information provided by vendors, as well as data gathered from organizational surveys measuring engagement, DEIB, well-being, and benefits.

It is not enough for organizations to amass a library of well-being benefits. Employers should begin with intention and forethought, proceed with careful planning, and assess success to ensure employees are benefitting from carefully curated and accessible resources that differentiate your organization from others.

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