

Speaking the Language of Leadership: Communicating value to the C-suite

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Leadership support and commitment are critical to building and sustaining a worksite's culture of health and wellbeing. Many organizations believe they have leadership commitment with a dedicated budget and some statement of the importance of health and wellbeing, but we can and should go beyond this. To truly engage leaders, we must understand the challenges they face and demonstrate how organizational wellbeing directly impacts the outcomes they care about the most.

In my role as Chief Medical Officer of a Fortune 100 multinational company, we developed a multi-year strategy to make our health risk appraisal data more relevant to the business. We added custom questions that met our expanded definition of health and wellbeing. This included financial health, loneliness, supervisor support, and purpose. These measures helped us show leaders that wellbeing was not separate from business performance. The data demonstrated meaningful relationships between employee wellbeing, productivity, reduced absenteeism, and lower medical spending.

Before seeing these connections, many leaders did not believe they had any impact on these outcomes. However, once they could see their own data compared to other businesses within the organization, they wanted to make improvements. This shifted the role of the team. We were able to continue with our focus on individual health and wellbeing by becoming consultants to business leaders. We could move into that role by bringing them data and measures that meant something to them and solutions to set a path forward

Medicalization of health is our enemy because leaders believe they can't make an impact on clinical conditions. However, by showing leaders their role in health and wellbeing, we were able to show value to the organization. Most leaders have a keen awareness of the pitfalls of a toxic work environment. At best, it contributes to an environment that produces disengagement and stagnant employees. At worst, it contributes to employee distress, turnover, reputational harm, and damage to the business at its core.

Leaders need to understand that supportive work environments where employees can flourish and have a sense of wellbeing will translate into more productive employees at work, lower absence rates, and better performance.

Many will say we don't have access to diagnostic data. That may be true, but it should not discontinue progress by building critical relationships with leaders where they may reach out to wellbeing professionals to address challenges that are related to health and wellbeing issues. You can also begin to find ways to collect important data elements tied to health and wellbeing in order to weave them into the story that resonates with leaders.

It is important to show leaders where you are going and where they fit in by developing a multi-year strategy that you can share with them. Share best practices with leadership that other organizations are using to achieve organizational goals and achieve impact.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR ENGAGING LEADERSHIP

1. Develop and share a definition of organizational health and wellbeing.

One of my favorite articles is from the Harvard Business Review April 8, 2016, titled "*Good Bosses Create More Wellness than Wellness Plans Do*". The article reinforces that the work environment can have a positive or negative impact on overall health and wellbeing. Organizations should measure these workplace factors and, when possible, examine their

relationship to medical, disability, and pharmacy utilization. You will be surprised at the correlations.

2. Establish a strong collaborative relationship with leaders

Find a few champions that will give you critical insights and feedback. Obtain relevant data within their sphere of influence. Avoid referring to medical cost trends because leaders often view these as outside of their sphere of influence. You can use medical, pharmacy, and disability experience for your own internal use, but it is not likely to sway leaders early in your relationship.

3. Develop a strategic plan of health and wellbeing supporting the overall organization

Establishing a culture of health and wellbeing goes beyond a collection of programs. It's the fabric of how work gets done efficiently and should be part of executive measurement. According to Rachel Fellowes, Chief Wellbeing Officer at Aon, wellbeing is a people and performance strategy.

Engaging leadership with relevant and actionable information will improve overall employee and organizational health and wellbeing. Finding the right champion leader will improve the chance it will resonate with other leaders and move your health and wellbeing strategy forward.