

• What's the Hard Return on Employee Wellness Programmes?

Workplace Wellness: an organised, employer-sponsored programme that is designed to support employees (and, sometimes, their families) as they adopt and sustain behaviours that reduce health risks, improve quality of life, enhance personal effectiveness and benefit the organisation's bottom line.

Employee wellness programmes have often been viewed as a nice extra, not a strategic imperative. However, the data show otherwise. The ROI on comprehensive, well-run employee wellness programmes can be as high as 6 to1.

The most successful programmes have six essential pillars:

1. Multilevel Leadership

Creating a culture of health takes passionate, persistent and persuasive leadership at all levels – from the C-suite to middle managers to the people who have 'wellness' in their job descriptions.

2. Alignment

A wellness programme should be a natural extension of a firm's identity and aspiration. Don't forget that a cultural shift takes time.

3. Scope, Relevance and Quality

Wellness programmes must be comprehensive, engaging and just plain excellent. Otherwise, employees won't participate.

4. Accessibility

Aim to make low- or no-cost services a priority. True on-site integration is essential because convenience matters.

5. Partnership

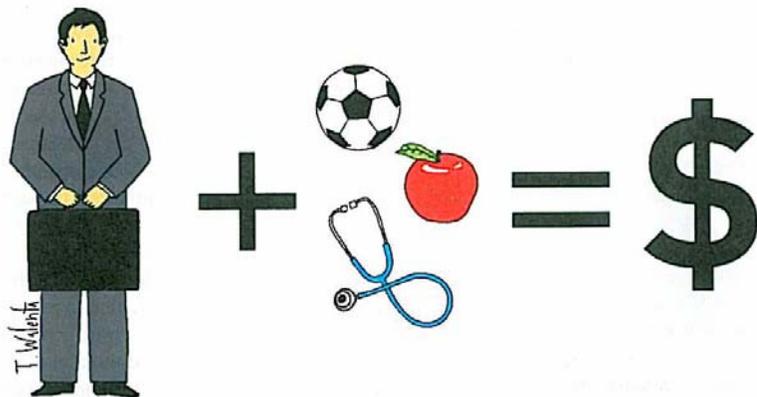
Active, ongoing collaboration with internal and external partners, including vendors, can provide a programme with some of its essential components and many of its desirable enhancements.

6. Communications

Wellness is not just a mission – it's a message. How you deliver it can make all the difference. Sensitivity, creativity and media diversity are the cornerstones.

Outcomes:

- *Lower costs:* the savings on health care costs alone make for an impressive ROI.
- *Greater productivity:* participants in wellness programmes are absent less often and perform better at work than their non participant counterparts.
- *Higher morale:* employee pride, trust and commitment increase, contributing to a vigorous organisation.



Health care is a monumental issue for employers and too much is at stake to be reactive. It's time for companies to play offence rather than defence. A veritable payback isn't certain and the journey can be arduous. But what is the alternative?

Source: Leonard L. Berry, Ann M. Mirabito, and William B. Baun, *What's the Hard Return on Employee Wellness Programs?*, Harvard Business Review, December 2010.