No Easy Solutions

Cynthia Smith

Schröder offers as a definition, key issues and some helpful hints in her article "Workplace Health: A Practitioner's Perspective". My bedtime readings of late are not unlike most managers. I feel I need to know the five disciplines and the seven habits of highly effective people; I consult Drucker and Blanchard to give me tools to develop a healthy organization and a group of leaders. I believe, like Laurie, that this is where solutions must start. "Healthy companies must invest in, manage and develop human assets to reach the goal of organizational health. Organizational health must be the central (and clearly stated, my additional goal of all work organizations)." A healthy company has a clear mission, a shared vision, and employees that contribute to the development of the organization's values. These values should include: open communication and dialogue; ongoing support for learning; facilitating family/work-life balance (see Tony Hudson's article "Finding the Balance between Job and Home"); creating meaningful work; and ensuring an equitable and fair work environment. Individually focused lifestyle programs have their place, including programs that address active living and shiftwork issues (see the two articles on shiftwork in Alberta). They help empower the individual to be able to exercise self-care and get healthier to actively participate in their employ. As employees, supervisors, board members and volunteers, we all struggle with how to make the work environment a better place. Please share with us what you have found to help in your experience. We will share your insights in future issues.

References

Encouraging a Healthy Workplace

My approach to healthy living isn’t going to raise too many eyebrows; I like to keep things simple. For me, that means starting each and every day with a good breakfast. Before I let any family members escape the house, they absolutely must eat something; even if it’s only a bit of bread and cheese. Many of my employees, of course, don’t stop for breakfast, so we always put our something for them at coffee time, whether it’s toast and jam or some leftover pancakes. Since a lot of the work at the greenhouse is fairly physical, it’s important that they be fuelled up. One final tip: eat lots of vegetables!

Lori Hale
Holst Greenhouses & Gardens Ltd.
and Chancellor at University of Alberta
Are You Active Enough to Benefit Your Health?

If you are not sure, you’re probably doing activities in the light to moderate range on the chart. You need to work towards 60 minutes of activities a day in periods of at least 10 minutes each. It’s really pretty easy. Remember, every little bit counts!

Activities you can do at work:
- Take stretch breaks during meetings.
- Have a “walking” meeting – grab your colleague and discuss business while taking a walk.
- Take the stairs. Pretend the elevator is out of service.
- Post a notice near the entrance to the stairs suggesting people take the stairs and have them sign it when they do to encourage others to follow their lead.
- Replace your coffee break with a walking/wheeling break.
- Contract your stomach and back muscles while sitting in your chair or on the bus.
- Take a brisk walk before lunch for about 10 minutes.
- Try to make active living one of the goals of your work team.
- Roll your shoulders and stretch your neck when sitting in front of the computer.

Time needed depends on effort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Light Effort</th>
<th>Light Effort</th>
<th>Moderate Effort</th>
<th>Vigorous Effort</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60 minutes</td>
<td>30-60 minutes</td>
<td>20-30 minutes</td>
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| Activities you can do on the way:
- Walk, cycle, in-line skate, or wheel to work.
- Get off the bus two stops early and walk home.
- Leave the car in a parking lot 10 minutes from work and walk the rest of the way.
- Take your bike to work – you’ll save on gas as well as help to protect the environment and your health.
- If your job involves a lot of driving, plan several short stops in your day. Get out of the car and walk for 10 minutes or more whenever you can.

Excerpts from Canada’s Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Activity Living. To obtain your copy, contact your local Be Fit for Life Centre or the ACFWB.
1. What is your understanding of workplace health in Canada?

Workplace health is a very broad issue. Various models exist to provide definition, however, the ones that I feel are best include all elements of our being and the environments with which we exist both on and off the job. As workplace health practitioners, we need to facilitate interventions that address not only the symptoms, but also the underlying reasons as to why employees are not well.

My perspective on workplace health comes from a great deal of self-study on workplace health promotion programs in other countries, largely US-based; and corporate health promotion experience working with a wide variety of industries and at different levels within organizations. As a consultant in the workplace health field, my work largely draws from knowledge and experience obtained involving preventative health practices, behavior change psychology, injury prevention, injury rehabilitation, associated sciences, and business.

Workplace health encompasses a healthy mind, body and spirit. Broken down further, this definition involves working towards a higher level of well-being and balance within seven broad dimensions: physical, emotional, social, spiritual, intellectual, occupational, and the environment. These dimensions are a modification of a model originated by the National Wellness Institute in Wisconsin.

With this definition, the intention is not for workplace health practitioners to attempt to do it all themselves. Rather, the best approach is to team with the appropriate resources internal and external to the workplace towards enhancing wellness within each dimension, and balance between each. Combining efforts on the area where the greatest needs exist.

"Total Health Team" is a new concept successfully being used by some workplaces today. Participation may include senior management, human resources (HR), wellness/health promotion, occupational health/medical, safety, employee assistance programs (EAP), disability, and external resources as needed. This team works to jointly set and achieve workplace health goals, create greater efficiencies, and achieve a higher level of results within the broad perspective of workplace wellness.

Health Canada’s Corporate Health Model encompasses the environment, health practices and personal resources. What I like about this model is the way it highlights the importance of making improvements within the attributes of the organization itself - its structure, policies and procedures, and its culture and environment as a whole.

2. What are the key issues facing workers in Canada today?

• Stress due to restructuring, change, fear of layoffs, work overload and pressure to do more with less, and pressure to perform well and be highly productive under these circumstances.

• Struggle to maintain balance in life - between work, family, time for self, and other obligations within the community.

• Job dissatisfaction - either due to issues within the two points above, or employees just not happy with the occupation they are currently in. It has recently been reported that up to 50% of Canadians dislike their jobs. Level of job satisfaction is known as the greatest predictor for job performance and return to work following injury.

• Lack of sleep - the average person gets only 7 hrs & 20 mins sleep/night. Latest research supports the need for up to 10 hrs/night (including naps).

• Aging workforce - and associated increase in health risks and musculo-skeletal related problems.

• Sedentary and repetitive work - technology and computerization continues to create more jobs which are sedentary and/or repetitive, contributing to increasing health risks and injuries.

3. From your experience, what is the direction we ought to head to foster workplace health in Canada?

Organizations will continue to be challenged to become more even streamlin/efficient, cost-effective and productive. To foster workplace health in the future, we need to expect that the issues workplaces face today will become the norm, not the exception. As Workplace Health practitioners, we will need to take a broad perspective in helping organizations and their employees to survive, be successful, and remain healthy.

To facilitate workplace health for the future:

• Align the workplace health goals with the goals of the organization and specific site being served, targeting interventions at the biggest issues that they face.

• Keep abreast of the changing business climate/issuses facing the organization.

• Foster the power of teamwork - encourage maximum input and participation at all levels of the workplace. Site Leadership, Workplace Health/Wellness Committees, Safety Committees, and front line employees. Spend lots of time on the front lines with employees.

• Encourage development of a Total Health Team - a multi-departmental group formed to join and set and achieve workplace health goals, create greater efficiencies, and achieve a higher level of results.

• Develop strategic alliances/partnerships with individuals/groups outside of the organization that have skills and expertise that your organization needs or could benefit from.

• Be flexible to change and grow as a workplace health practitioner - including gain new knowledge, skills, changing roles, etc. as needed by the organization(s) that you serve.

• Continually strive for greater program and cost efficiencies - Organizations will be looking for innovative options of implementing quality programs at reduced costs.

• Continually evaluate program effectiveness & communicate results - there will be an even stronger demand from organizations to quantify & communicate results.

• Strive for and publish research-based results - the demand for research-based information pertaining to workplace health will increase.

More than 90% of North American workers are dissatisfied with their jobs, polls show.

Eighty per cent would willingly take lower pay if it meant more time with their families.

Edmonton Journal, Aug 2, 1998

Encouraging a Healthy Workplace

I work in an office tower and our offices are spread out over 13 floors. If I have to meet with someone several floors away, I make the point of walking there. Often the tendency in the rushed work day is to make a telephone call or send an e-mail, but it’s important to our working health to meet with your colleagues face-to-face too. This way, I get a break from my office routine, make person-to-person contact and get exercise at the same time.

Laurie Schroeder, BPE, PFLC
Workplace Health Consultant
Laurie Schroeder is a workplace health consultant, currently working with Johnson & Johnson Health Care Systems on their global contract with Owens Corning Inc. Most of Laurie’s work has been with medium to large-sized organizations such as Fordson Canada, Canso Cancer Institute, Workers’ Compensation Rehabilitation Center, and the Canadian Railways. Laurie’s goal is to facilitate optimum health, happiness, performance and results among employees and the organizations they work for.
You Can Lead a Clydesdale to the Gym
but You Can’t Make it do the Mambo

John Spence, Senior Research Associate

The majority of the population in any industrialized nation spends approximately two-thirds of its lifetime in school and then the workplace. The most salient barrier to physical activity participation is time, with work-related constraints being a big chunk of that time (Spence, 1998). Therefore, along with the community and schools, workplaces ought to be the most efficient settings for providing/targeting physical activity programming. But, as our society has become increasingly mechanized, and more recently computerized, there is little time for sedentary activity in the workplace. Heavy machinery is replacing the arms and backs of the human machine and what was once considered manual labor is now computer-controlled. As a result, the working population is expending so much less energy than it did at the turn of the century, which is significant less than our hunter and gatherer ancestors, and therefore may not be accruing some of the health benefits associated with hard physical labor. As a result, there is some discussion in the literature on the need for increased physical activity opportunities available to all segments of the population, including the establishment of corporate fitness programs. After 25 years, we need to assess the effectiveness of workplace exercise programs across different outcomes. According to Shephard (1996, 1998), short-term benefits such as reduced absenteeism, a low rate of employee turnover, increased productivity (e.g., 4-5%), and reduced health care costs (e.g., $100-$400 per year) can occur with successful exercise programs in the workplace. Cost-benefit analyses suggest that these benefits may result in savings as much as $500-$700 per worker per year. Also, as a result of continued participation, enhanced physical fitness and psychological well-being have been reported. From the perspective of companies in Alberta, the top three perceived benefits of physical activity programs are the workplace are improved programs that typically involve getting people into an aerobic program where they exercise in a sterile environment dressed up like Peter Pan. We have got to get away from the “if we build it, they will come” mentality.

Of course it is nice to have proper exercise facilities, but it is even more important to create an environment where physical activity is valued. If exercise is looked upon as work, then people won’t participate. Some suggestions toward creating a positive atmosphere are: employee participation in charity events such as the Terry Fox Run; renting gym space on a regular basis allowing employees to pay and prepare for corporate challenges and sports events; encouraging walking and cycling to work; sponsorship talks by knowledgeable individuals on topics such as proper running technique, Tai Chi, and safe fellwalking. At a minimum, showers and lockers should be provided.

Senior citizens in Canada are living and contributing to the workforce in record numbers. The 1996 census counted 3.5 million people aged 65 and over, accounting for 12.2% of the population, compared to just over 8% in 1971. There were 787,700 people, 80 years and over, working in 1996, a 19.3% increase from the previous census. Two-thirds of this age group were women.

For more information from Statistics Canada, visit www.statcan.ca.

The Costco Connection, Nov/Dec 1998

References

Raymond Bogen, director of home office research for International Data Corp, estimates the number of people telecommuting at least part-time is growing rapidly, rising from 4.2 million in 1991 to about 9.1 million at the end of last year. By the turn of the century, there will be nearly 11 million.

Edmonton Journal, Nov. 12, 1998
The workforce is increasingly changing to meet the needs of our 24-hour society. At any time of the day, we have access to amenities: industrial plants are operating and emergency services are available. Although this is a convenience to the consumer, it may be a high cost to the shiftworker.

There are over 3 million shiftworkers in Canada (Statistics Canada, 1995). "Shifting to Wellness" defines shiftwork as any type of work completed outside the regular hours of 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday to Friday (i.e., food services, medical services, emergency aid, protective services, trades, etc.).

The impact of working irregular hours has been researched at length, and through a community initiative, "Shifting to Wellness" was created. This training program was originally developed for local shiftworkers who were having difficulty coping with this demanding work style. Keyano College Lifestyle Services Fort McMurray now offers "Shifting to Wellness" training for companies, individual shiftworkers, and family members throughout Canada.

The program has gained national recognition through presentations at national conferences such as the 3rd annual Health, Work and Wellness Conference in Whistler, BC, and through the launch of a new web site in fall of 1998.

"Shifting to Wellness" examines ways to improve or enhance our health when working extended hours. Quality sleep is imperative to a healthy lifestyle. "Shifting to Wellness" addresses the role of sleep, and how our biological clocks affect our ability to carry out our daily routine. Wellness is promoted through time and stress management, healthy food choices, active living, and safety and alertness both on and off the job. Strong family and social support systems can also buffer some of the disruption and negative feelings that may accompany a stressful workload. It is vital to incorporate the family unit into the equation, as wellness extends far beyond the company walls.

Employee wellness is the key to effective productivity in any organization. It is not uncommon to find shiftworker employee absenteeism associated with stress, fatigue, injury and illness. Educating the workforce, providing employee assistance programs and learning positive coping strategies can help combat the negative effects of working shifts. An increased awareness of what shiftwork is and an understanding of the challenges it presents can lead to a healthier, more productive workforce. With the continuing growth of 24-hour operations, shiftwork awareness initiatives should be embraced.

For more information, contact Alison Nichols, B.Sc., R.D., "Shifting to Wellness Coordinator, Keyano College Lifestyle Services, Box #10, 8115 Franklin Ave, Fort McMurray, AB T9J 2H7, Ph: (403) 791-8516, Fax: (403) 791-8555, E-mail: alison.nichols@keyanoc.ab.ca, Web: www.keyanoc.ab.ca/lifestyle/shifffwell.html

Encouraging a Healthy Workplace

My noon hour walk is critical to my sense of well-being. In a deadline busy job like journalism, I need to get out of the office and have a brisk walk—not a stroll—at noon. It's a good time to notice new things around town. It's also free, and unlike going to a gym, you don't need all the extra time for a shower and doing your hair afterwards. Walking before eating also reduces my appetite so I don't eat so much.

Carol Farnall
Publisher of Barrhead Leader
From the Resource Library
Tracy C. Kitagawa

University of Calgary
Self-Directed Learning and Wellness Benefit
A new benefit to enhance learning and wellness was recently negotiated with members of the support staff union. The Self-Directed Learning and Wellness Benefit will provide each staff member with a fund based on 0.5% of their annual earnings. A staff member can use the fund at their discretion for the purpose of attending a conference, enrolling in a health-related or fitness program, using a recreational facility or a variety of other expenses related to learning and/or wellness. This new benefit recognizes the fundamental concept of shared responsibility between U of C and the staff member for successful outcomes, increased levels of wellness and personal and organizational effectiveness.
Jennoic McDonald, Ph. 403-220-5934, Email: jmacneil@ucw.ucalgary.ca

Employee Workplace Wellness in Calgary
The Health Promotion Research Group (HPRG) at the University of Calgary (led by Dr. Andree Vollman and Dr. Billie Thurston) is working with the Wellness Office of the Calgary Regional Health Authority in its plans and develops an expanded region-wide employee workplace wellness program. The role of HPRG is to do the evaluative assessment for the program.
Andree Vollman, Ph. 403-220-8053, Email: avollman@ucw.ucalgary.ca

Wellness in Strathcona County
Over 200 Strathcona County employees have signed up for their new wellness incentive program called WISE (Wellness in Strathcona Employees). Points are accumulated for practicing all sorts of healthy lifestyle habits from exercise and nutrition to volunteering and nourishing your spiritual well-being. Prizes are given out to staff as they reach monthly goals. For details, Personnel Services, Employee and Family Assistance, Ph. 403-449-9606. Email: mcaulay@strathcounty.ca

A federal task force says fear and uncertainty characterize the workplace in Canada. Fear is the common factor among older workers, who are terrified they’ll lose their jobs. Uncertainty plagues young job-seekers, who are so discouraged they’re afraid to plan futures or families. The six-member commission released seven recommendations, emphasizing the need for training and re-training.
CBC News, July 5, 1997

WellSpring

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CBC News, July 5, 1997
Reflections on the Health, Work and Wellness Conference ‘98

Whistler, BC, September 27 to 30, 1998

Marie S. Carlson

Just how much fun can you have at a conference? If its held in Whistler, the opportunities for active living are endless. In one day I witnessed all, and participated in three (you guess which) of the following outdoor pursuits: hanging gliding, windsurfing, golf, mountain biking, walking, hiking, blading, running and swimming; plus I had an encounter with a bear, but I didn’t digest! Here are the short bits: over 500 delegates and 3 days of thought-provoking plenaries, a poetic keynote, cogent concurrents, one zany debate, tellusious trade show exhibits, typical case studies and terrible conference centre food (though the restaurants were otherwise superb). Organizers succeeded in offering a range of topics addressing the personal and organizational dimensions of workplace health.

Finding a Workable Balance Between Job and Home

Tony Hudson, Acting Executive Director
Alberta Division, Canadian Mental Health Association

"Busy, busy, busy." After, "I'm fine," this the most common response to a casual greeting in both our work and social lives. Many Canadians are reporting that they see working harder than ever. A University of Saskatchewan report noted that about 20% of Canadians work more than 60 hours a week. At the same time, many of us are having a hard time coping with family responsibilities. The sandwich generation, with aging parents and young children are sometimes racing from the day care centre to the long term care facility. Workers in this situation have a dramatically higher rate of absenteeism.

Working harder and facing often intense family pressures makes striking a reasonable balance between work and family a challenging task. How are we doing? There is strong evidence to suggest that Canadians are having a difficult time maintaining this balance. A 1997 survey indicated that 22% of Canadians identified balancing work and family as major cause of stress. (Workplace 2000, Angus Reid Group)

Women are very susceptible to experiencing stress over work and family issues. They often find themselves having two full time jobs: their paid work, and unpaid family and household duties at home. Many women remain concentrated in jobs that pay poorly, are unstable, and offer little opportunity for advancement. These types of situations are directly connected with a high risk of stress related problems. Until home responsibilities are more equally shared, women will continue to suffer more stresses than men.

New technologies, which have spread from the workplace to the home, are having an impact on the work/family balancing act. A parent may be able to attend a child’s school or recreational activity, but the cell phone, and therefore the office, comes along too. You may be able to stay at home when your child is ill, using e-mail and fax links to your office however, you may end up feeling that you have not done a good enough job both as parent and employee. The boundaries between work and home are blurred beyond recognition.

What can we do to improve our ability to balance work and home? Some suggestions:
- Don't take on more than you can handle at work.
- Develop effective time management skills, make lists and establish priorities (and stick to them)
- Have a mental health break. Take five minutes out of your day to rest, dream, or think about nothing.
- Let your supervisor know if you are experiencing conflicts between work and family concerns.
- Write family activities into your day timer.
- Lower your housekeeping standards.
- Use up overtime hours on vacation days.

Progressive workplaces are also starting to see that they have a role in reducing work and family conflicts. Employers can support a healthy balance by:
- Providing Employee Assistance Programs
- Promoting flexible hours
- Giving employees information about health promotion events and services.
- Allowing employees to telecommute.
- Considering job sharing, leaves of absence, and other policies, which promote a good balance between work and family life.

Alberta is fortunate in having a high rate of employment. However, this comes at a cost. Albertans tend also to experience high rates of stress. Developing a workable balance between family and work will continue to challenge us all. Workers and the workplace have a contribution to make.

Encouraging a Healthy Workplace

To keep healthy at work, I...

Phone my kids;
Tell a joke;
Take a walk.

Howard Supers,
MAA Edmonton Glencora

strategies at both the personal and structural (i.e. institutional and societal) levels if we are to achieve genuine health and wellness at work. We know that people who don't smoke, who eat well and exercise regularly feel better, report fewer absences, make fewer medical claims, and/or return to work sooner than those with unhealthy lifestyles. We also know that hierarchy is toxic; that workplaces/policies which foster participation, equity and control (i.e. power over the work, time, resources, etc.) are far healthier environments than their less democratic counterparts. But it’s time to move beyond the individual vs. structural standoff! What the workplace needs now is a sustained discussion linking the two; a richer debate about the factors which enable and constrain our health promoting efforts at both levels, within a search for common ground.

Don Grant, a participant from the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations, captured the mood with this insightful summary:
"Rather than pit the two perspectives or approaches, we need a meaningful conversation about the role of shared risk and shared responsibility in creating conditions of opportunity to increase health and well-being for all." We need to create the kind of conditions at work, home and in society where the best health choices and practices are the easiest to make.

Now there's a topic of conversation for the next Health, Work and Wellness Conference®.

Reference
Balancing Work and Faculty Task Force Report University of Saskatchewan, 1998