

5 Tools, 20 Ideas for making workplace wellness social

Once you subscribe to the idea that social conversation can help build your culture of health, the follow-up question is, “How?” Here are 5 tools and 20 ideas to get you started.

1 BLOGS

Unlike formal corporate communication, successful blogs are candid and personal. They're a conversation stream that builds relationships and trust. They're low (no) cost; if public, they can be accessed by all family members. And they're very democratic: They can be written by someone within your HR department, by health partners and by employees—or by all three.

Ideas:

1. Write blog posts that explain new, underused or misunderstood benefits and services.
2. Ask a leader to blog on his or her health efforts—employees aren't the only ones who struggle, and what a powerful and relatable way to highlight a leader's support for the program.
3. Interview experts from your health partner organizations about conditions and health risks unique to your workforce. Invite individuals to ask their own questions or respond to yours.
4. Host a video interview with an employee or an expert (internally or externally) on a subject and invite comment.
5. Embed a widget that calculates food alternatives for your vending machine and cafeteria options or more generally.

2 TWITTER

Twitter is an underrated, multipurpose employee health and wellness communication tool. It can function as a public forum, a customer service center, a ready resource and a referral directory. For individuals, Twitter makes getting answers as easy as shooting off a 140-character message, and its convenience and accessibility can't be beat.

Ideas:

6. Add Twitter to your communication strategy for health challenges and observances, annual enrollment and other deadline-driven health events.
7. Link to the company's or health partners' online articles and tools with tweeted teaser headlines. Connect employees to these same partners by creating Twitter lists by topic (e.g., general health, health care reform, financial security).
8. Inspire routine exchanges and camaraderie through tweeted questions about fitting in exercise at work, making healthy food choices, reducing stress and so forth.
9. Respond to direct questions or “overheard” misunderstandings (migrating to offline or other platforms when the conversation requires it).
10. Conduct regular tweet chats as a virtual, boundaryless and interactive version of the “brown bag” seminar.

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3 PODCASTS

Podcasts serve as both “on-the-go” kernels of information and acknowledgment of different learning styles.

Ideas:

11. Use podcasts to dissect a condition, ways to approach a behavior change or how to plan for retirement, and to explain new services.
12. Profile individuals, a department and businesses—bright spots that can be learned from and replicated elsewhere.
13. Using products like blogtalkradio, host a live radio show for a more lively discussion about health, work flexibility, stress management and other hot topics.

4 FORUMS

Forums are online discussion boards with a give-and-take between comments and responses that simulates real conversation. They're often moderated.

Ideas:

14. Establish forums for HR, employee wellness champions and managers to help those pivotal linchpins get and share tested advice and innovative practices.
15. Create forums around company-provided services so employees can review and rate them, helping to direct other employees to valued solutions. (Aside: These provide great input for vendor selection and contract negotiations.)

5 SOCIAL NETWORKS

Networks have to be the most untapped tool in Corporate America's current approach to workplace wellness. As with Facebook, social networks offer individuals a way to connect through time, geography and organizational boundaries. Other networks or networks “plus,” such as Qwitter and TuDiabetes, create communities for individuals seeking guidance and encouragement on a specific topic.

Ideas:

16. Link your employees to existing networks simply by educating them about what's available.
17. Include health communities, whether disease- or lifestyle-related, in existing company social networks so employees can meet up, share triumphs and seek advice. And let employees create their own.
18. Use a Facebook group to reach beyond the office walls to create awareness, involvement and enthusiasm with family members, potential recruits and the general public.
19. Expand to challenge-oriented social tools, like Shape Up the Nation or Get Up and Move.
20. Incorporate a data-tracking element to see individual and collective progress toward goals.

Why bother?

Are you unconvinced about taking workplace wellness social? Or trying to convince someone else? These five reasons may help. They're covered in-depth in a companion piece, *5 reasons to take employee wellness social*.

- It's where we spend our time.
- Social networks influence our behavior.
- Engaged health consumers take charge.
- Social networks amp up trusted peer-to-peer communication.
- Companies can eavesdrop their way to better program design and communication.

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