

# Works of wellness

**By helping companies find payoffs in improving employee health, Employee Wellness Solutions Network helps define an entire industry**

TEN YEARS AGO, when Meaghan and Garth Jansen hung out their shingle as Employee Wellness Solutions, they not only had to sell their services to local businesses, they first had to sell the whole concept of workplace wellness. “There wasn’t the understanding of the link between wellness and productivity, and we had to explain to employers why it was important,” says Garth Jansen.

Beginning with their first client, the law firm of Harrison Pensa, the couple steadily built their business. This year Meaghan was named one of London’s 20 under 40, an award that recognizes London’s accomplished and influential industry leaders who are under the age of 40. For the Jansens, the award is a validation that what they have spent the past decade building from the ground up is working.

Today, Employee Wellness Solutions Network operates in 55 cities, delivering wellness programs and services to workplaces in Ontario, all four Maritime provinces and two U.S. states. Clients range from manufacturing and warehousing operations to social services and professional offices.

From early on, the Jansens focused on building relationships with insurance companies as a referral source. Insurers are in a prime position to educate their business clients about the value of workplace wellness and the fact that having a healthy workforce could result in reduced premiums.

“Companies are seeing tangible results and are including this as part of their strategic planning,” says Jansen. “What Employee Wellness Solutions offers is not a standalone product—there is a direct tie to higher employee satisfaction and productivity and lower absenteeism, as well as short- and long-term disabilities.”

Where employee assistance programs of the past may have focused on treatment, today’s wellness solutions encompass more preventative and healthy lifestyle components. EWS offers a whole toolbox of options: awareness campaigns around healthy lifestyle topics; group learning; individual counseling; and support for everything from meal planning and quitting smoking to weight loss and stress management. The company boasts a high engagement rate, with 75% to 80% of employees in large companies and 90% to 95% in smaller organizations participating in programs.



FROM LEFT Amway Canada's Tracy Castillo with Garth and Meaghan Jansen

The vast majority of the company's work is done on site and in person. Depending on the employer, EWS might be there monthly or weekly, and in some cases, daily.

"Some awareness programs are web-based and are designed to enhance our onsite programs and services," says Jansen. "And we have also added a virtual component out of necessity—for example, for a company that has a sales force that work out of their homes or are spread out geographically across different cities. Now when we develop new resources, we ask ourselves, 'How could we offer this virtually if the need arises?' We have some lunch-and-learns, for example, that can be delivered virtually to employees in remote locations."

Whether a company has 10 employees or 1,000, they have access to exactly the same resources. "All of our programs are customizable to fit the workforce," says Jansen.

All program development and design is done in London, with services being delivered by wellness consultants who live and work in clients' local markets. The Jansens do visit all workplaces in person at least twice a year, but as the firm has grown, they have had to shift part of their focus to recruiting, training and placing wellness consultants that are the best fit with client needs.

To mark its 10-year anniversary, EWS introduced a Kids Wellness Bursary this year. The Jansens say they have fond childhood memories created through their involvement in sports teams, and the bursary, which pays the team registration fee for successful applicants, is their way of encouraging a new generation of kids to get active—a key part of a healthy lifestyle. **Ω KYM WOLFE**

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## Wellness matters

**Need a 2014 resolution?  
How about a healthier workplace**



MEAGHAN JANSEN, one of our 2013 20 Under 40 award winners and co-founder of the 10-year-old Employee Wellness Solutions Network (see *Works of Wellness*, page 20), recently noted that, as a pioneer in the corporate wellness industry, the first five years of business were more about educating than supplying. "We had to try and carve our way into a brick wall, so to speak"

It's an ongoing process. While many business owners and managers understand the impact their top talent has on the success and prosperity of their organizations, that top talent is often lumped into organizational charts along with processes and policies, and treated like machinery that should perform based on the right input, conditions and settings.

Similarly, employees themselves often assume working longer hours, multi-tasking and neglecting their own needs results in outstanding output and recognition.

With sedentary jobs, lousy diets, never-ending stressors and misconceptions about performance, it's no surprise Canadians aren't putting their health first. Statistics Canada data shows 59% of Canadian adults are either overweight or obese, while additional data from Public Health Canada states 45% of Canadian adults have three or more health risk factors that will increase their chances of being afflicted with chronic conditions like hypertension or type 2 diabetes.

The reality is that health and optimal performance are inherently intertwined. After all, without health, performance is questionable.

According to a recent survey conducted by global professional services firm Towers Watson, a majority (76%) of Canadian organizations are planning to increase their support for

workforce health programs over the next two years. Which is a good thing, because that same survey says Canadian companies have some work to do. While 43% of Canadian respondents are focused on a workplace culture where employees are responsible for their health and understand its importance, only 10% report having a formal health strategy and just 13% report having effectively communicated that strategy.

It does appear, however, that change is on the horizon. A decent chunk of respondents (18%) are planning to implement formal plans with defined goals, and an additional 25% are planning to communicate and deliver the value behind the strategy over the next three years.

Of course, calculating the return on investment for wellness programming is an essential element since it allows an organization to determine the financial benefits of the investments and can help sustain health and wellness programs in the face of competing organizational priorities. Employers are still at the infancy stage when it comes to evaluating wellness programs, but the early data is encouraging. Towers Watson research shows that companies with the most effective health and productivity programs have an average of 1.4% lower medical trend per year than competitors and 27% higher workforce productivity.

Organizations have many reasons to assist their employees in their health matters—be it to reduce sick leave and direct healthcare costs or simply to benefit from a lively work environment where employees are performing at their best and maximizing their capability. Caring for workers' health is not only the right thing to do, it makes good business sense.

From everyone here at *Business London*, our very best wishes for a wonderful holiday season and a prosperous (and healthy!) 2014. **Ω**