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EDITOR'S DESK GORD DELAMONT

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**