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A 20/20 Vision for Collective Well-being



REWRITING THE SCRIPT: FROM PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO COLLECTIVE WELL-BEING

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By overdelivering on the message “Take personal responsibility for your health and wellness,” has the bigger picture been overlooked? Arguably, many workplace wellness programs continue to put the onus of responsibility on the individual (individual health risk assessments, biometric screenings, individual incentives, individual habit formation techniques) and have not focused enough on addressing the **context within which the individual operates and makes their “personal” choices.**¹ The rise in so-called “deaths of despair” (from drugs, alcohol and suicide)² and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color³ have highlighted the need to revisit the personal responsibility narrative and put a more collective one into practice. Specific to the workplace, a survey by Gallup revealed that the top five reasons related to employee burnout have more to do with the workplace itself and less to do with choices made by the individual.⁴ Furthermore, areas of worklife, including workload, control, reward, community, fairness and values, have been shown to significantly impact health outcomes.⁵ As Nicholas Kristof, *New York Times* columnist, explains in his recent book *Tightrope*, “We need to move from pointing fingers to offering helping hands.” This article shares the story of how Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Dakota (BCBSND) and Motion Infusion are “rewriting the script” to move from a conversation just about personal responsibility to one that also focuses on changing operational norms to better support collective action.

A key goal for 2020 and beyond is to create a Community of Well-being at

BCBSND. As voiced by CEO Dan Conrad, the pursuit of well-being needs to be a collective one: “I’d like to purposefully include an open invitation to discuss the idea of well-being with your colleagues, leaders and teams. What might we do differently as a community? What might you do differently as a team?” To create a community within and to serve as a beacon for others, BCBSND has adopted the Motion Infusion Four Levels Model:

Motion Infusion Four Levels Model



This article shares the journey to translate this vision into action, including recent adaptations in the wake of COVID, financial distress and calls for social justice. We will review the research – including data from an internal survey – that highlights organizational barriers, such as uneven levels of managerial support and uneven levels of perceived organizational support that impede individual engagement with well-being. We will discuss how we are activating managers to advance team-based well-being at work, integrating well-being efforts with leadership development, coordinating between community outreach and wellness to better address social determinants of health in communities,

empowering wellness champions across the state to launch “collective well-being” initiatives within their own organizations and tying all of these efforts to a message of helping every individual to become their best self. The hope is that our story can serve as a model for others to learn from and apply toward their own well-being efforts.

The following are our top 5 lessons learned:

1. Activate leaders on all levels, especially managers.

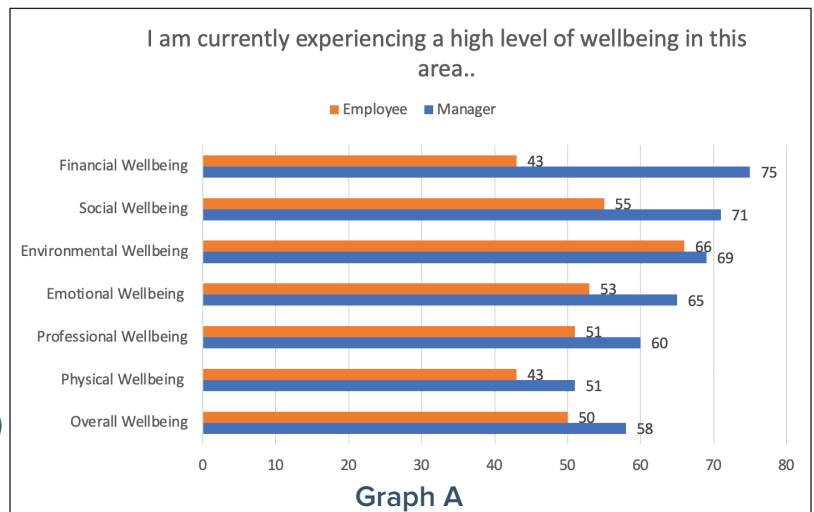
Managers are uniquely positioned to influence the health and well-being of their team members – for better or worse. According to longstanding Gallup research, the manager likely accounts for up to 70% of the variance of their team members’ engagement with both their work and their well-being. As shared in both the 2016 and 2017 HERO Forum Proceedings, data collected and analyzed by Pro-Change Behavior Systems about the impact of Motion Infusion’s “Managers on the Move” (MOTM) workshops indicate that managers have the potential to serve as “multipliers of wellbeing” for their team members.

In keeping with these findings and leveraging the positive impact of the workshop, BCBSND had planned three MOTM workshops for their managers. However, due to COVID, the in-person workshops were cancelled and have now been repurposed into a three-part MOTM series consisting of a hybrid of in-person and virtually delivered components.

To begin this work, BCBSND conducted a survey in March of 2020 to get a baseline

on the level of well-being amongst employees at BCBSND, the extent to which managers and leaders were engaged with well-being and actively supporting their team members in well-being, and a measure of overall levels of perceived organizational support for well-being at BCBSND.

As evidenced in Graph A, managers reported higher levels of well-being compared with employees in every domain of well-being measured (physical, emotional, social, financial, professional and environmental). In particular, it was striking that what came out highest for managers came out lowest for employees. That is, only 43% of employees reported having a high level of financial well-being, whereas 75% of managers reported having a high level of well-being in this area.



Another key issue that arose was a notable “knowing and doing” gap. Nearly all employees and managers reported valuing well-being, but many reported having difficulty putting knowledge into action, as noted in sample comments below.

“Personal well-being is important to me.” But... “Being able to live all aspects of well-being is easier said than done.”

Invoking a recent survey by Gallup which identified top drivers of employee burnout such as work overload, we asked managers to consider barriers that might be getting in the way of both managers and employees engaging with their well-being at work. This conversation took place during the MOTM Part 1 session.

Sparked by both COVID as well as recent calls for social justice following the killing of George Floyd, the focus of the first workshop was to encourage every manager to create a safe harbor as a place to begin having more honest discussions, including around race. During the workshop itself, managers were called to Move, Build, Awaken. That is: move with your team (movement, even virtually, primes us to connect with others!); build psychological safety within your team (so that team members can feel safe speaking up and taking interpersonal risks); and awaken compassion (to create a foundation whereby team members will more likely feel safe confiding in one another and with their boss). Following the workshop, the managers were encouraged to facilitate a “safe harbor” discussion with their team in which they discussed prompts such as the following:

- When do you recall realizing that the world is not fair?
- What can you do to make our schools, our parks, our stores, our restaurants, our workplaces as welcoming and as inclusive as they can be?
- What kind of country do we want to live in?
- Who do we want to be?

Managers were also encouraged to

References

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engage in a dialogue with team members about the survey questions, exploring questions such as the following (which were earlier discussed by managers and leaders during MOTM Part 1 session):

- Are there barriers “conspiring” against the pursuit of health & well-being for us in the BCBSND Community? If so, what are they?
- What is one thing we might do differently as a BCBSND Community to better promote well-being?
- What is one thing we might do differently as a team (to enhance well-being)?

At BCBSND, well-being and living a life well lived is more than just getting enough exercise and eating right. It’s about doing what inspires each individual to become their best self. This multidimensional approach to well-being is longstanding at BCBSND and is embodied in its BlueElements model, organized around 6 dimensions: Physical, Social, Emotional, Financial, Professional and Environmental.

BCBSND BlueElements of Well-being



Conclusion

It is a guide for all of us—as individuals, business owners, community members and leaders—to better navigate and collectively create cultures where positive individual choices to be well can be buoyed by the supportive spheres of influence that surround us all.