

# 7 creative ways to **boost** workforce well-being



# Nearly nine in ten professionals said their work-related stress had increased over the past five years. What's surprising? That number was reported before the global pandemic and economic uncertainties of 2020 and 2021.

Now, employees in the U.S. and Canada report the highest levels of daily stress in the world,<sup>1</sup> and three in four are experiencing symptoms of burnout, such as exhaustion, detachment from work, and reduced work performance.<sup>2</sup>

Increased stress and burnout are driving forces behind the record number of employees who left their jobs in 2021 seeking better work-life balance. As they evaluate new job opportunities, 62 percent of employees say well-being support at work is a top priority.<sup>3</sup> And the definition of what employees expect from employers has broadened to include physical, mental, social, and financial health, both on and off the job.

Employers recognize the important role they can play in holistic well-being—and the effect enhanced well-being can have on employee engagement, productivity, and retention. Today, 83 percent of employers say they have a responsibility for their employees' health and well-being.<sup>4</sup> Employee benefits and wellness programs continue to be the cornerstones of how employers address well-being needs. At the same time, employers are also thinking outside the box to implement initiatives that provide added support and emphasize their commitment to employee wellness.

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# 7 ways to boost workforce well-being

## / 01 flex workplace flexibility

For many people, the way they approach their workday changed with work-from-home requirements during the pandemic. Whether employees love or hate working remotely, nine in ten want flexibility in when and where they work.<sup>5</sup> Even employees in jobs that require them to be onsite see value in having increased flexibility to balance non-work responsibilities, such as picking up their kids after school, stepping away for a doctor's appointment, or fitting in a visit to the gym.

When possible, consider giving employees options to define their work schedule, such as choosing work-from-home days in a hybrid environment or flexible work hours that accommodate school drop-offs or breaks for exercise.

**42%**

of employees with caregiving responsibilities say they need increased flexibility from their employers.<sup>6</sup>

**Flexibility is key to attracting and retaining employees with caregiving responsibilities.**

## / 02

### set—and respect— work-life boundaries

Technology makes it possible for people to work nearly anywhere, anytime. But that doesn't mean they should. Time away from work, including unplugging during vacation time, has a measurable impact on well-being. According to research, physical well-being, quality of sleep, and mood all show improvement in the days and months following a short vacation.<sup>7</sup> But Americans regularly leave a portion of their vacation days unused each year.<sup>8</sup>

Company leadership can play a significant role in helping employees establish better boundaries so that work doesn't creep into their off-hours or, worse, vacation time. Start by letting your team know when you're unavailable (except for emergencies) during off-hours. Then, unplug. Don't respond to or send emails during that time. Take a similar approach to vacation time by encouraging employees to use available vacation days and making it clear they're not expected to check in while they're away.



## / 03

### dial back on distractions

The modern work environment is a paradox. Tools like instant messaging, collaboration software, email, and video conferencing increase efficiencies, but they can reduce the time employees have to focus on their work. On average, American office workers check their communication tools every six minutes and spend more than three hours each day managing and responding to their work email.<sup>9</sup>

Help employees reduce the distractions by designating blocks of time for focused work at the team or company level. For example, establish regular meeting-free days when everyone turns off instant messages, takes a break from email, and spends uninterrupted time diving into focused work.

#### Zoom fatigue is real. Use video conferencing strategically.

Our brains work harder to decode facial expressions and pick up non-verbal cues during a video conference compared to in-person interactions. Plus, being "on camera" can add stress. So when it's not essential, give employees the option to turn their cameras off.

#### Explore creative solutions for time off that work for both your business and your employees.

Turn traditionally slow business periods during the summer or between Christmas and New Year's into all-company vacation weeks or surprise employees with an extra vacation day.



## / 04 support self-care

Self-care means making time to do things that improve physical and mental health. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines it as the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent disease, and cope with illness and disability. In other words, self-care can range from regular health check-ups and physical fitness routines to spa days and meditation. And while self-care solutions vary from person to person, regular self-care practices can help reduce stress and burnout, boosting heart health, mood, and self-confidence.

Employers can help by fostering a culture of self-care. Optimize holistic workplace wellness programs to meet the diverse needs of employees at different points in their wellness journeys. Look for solutions that can be easily integrated into real life through apps, tracking tools, and online coaching and communities. Then, craft an ongoing employee communications strategy focused on driving awareness, participation, and recognition.

**Workplace wellness programs inspire busy employees to make time for self-care.**

# 64%

of Americans say they don't have time to take care of themselves.<sup>10</sup> Build well-being into your company culture with wellness programs that offer easy and convenient anytime access to resources, tools, and support to help employees tackle their personal wellness goals.

## / 05 step up to challenges

Adopting healthy habits takes time and commitment. An extensive study conducted at the University College London found that it takes anywhere from 18 to 254 days to form a new habit and an average of 66 days for the behavior to become automatic.<sup>11</sup> Having a supportive community to share the ups and downs along the way can help.

Workplace challenges can be a fun way to support healthy habits, build camaraderie, and spark a little friendly competition. Tailor challenges for different employee populations and make it easy for people—and their families—to participate. Fitness challenges, such as steps per day or daily workouts, are popular options. But you can also expand the scope to include healthy lunch, water consumption, and sleep tracking challenges.

**Not sure what type of challenge to sponsor? Ask your employees.**

Take a grassroots approach to determine the right challenges for your workforce. Create a wellness team with representation from across the organization to collect and evaluate ideas. Then, survey employees to gauge interest. Finally, make the challenge fun for participants from start to finish with a kick-off event, recognition of milestone achievements, and a celebration at the end.



## / 06 make a difference

Volunteering does more than give back to the community. Research shows that volunteering reduces stress, increases positive feelings, and provides a sense of purpose—all of which contribute to well-being.<sup>12</sup> Looking ahead, Gen Z employees are particularly passionate about making the world a better place and put high value on working for organizations that help them make a difference.

Providing employees with opportunities to give back can take many forms. Volunteering as a group can double as a team-building event. And supporting individual volunteer efforts through a Volunteer Time Off (VTO) program shows employees you care about their causes. Back it all up with matching gift programs to add to employee donations. Explore the options that best fit your workforce and check in with employees regularly to stay aligned with current interests.

### ▶ Volunteering delivers a boost to employee recruiting and retention.

Today's workforce actively seeks employers that line up with their values and support their efforts to give back. Sixty-one percent of millennials say a company's commitment to the community is a factor in their decision to accept a job. And millennials who actively participate in company-sponsored volunteer activities are more likely to feel "very loyal" to their employer.<sup>13</sup>

**6 in 10** millennials say a company's commitment to the community factors into their decision to accept a job.



## / 07 practice gratitude

Cultivating gratitude has wide-ranging effects on well-being, with researchers pointing to its positive impacts on stress relief, sleep quality, and relationship satisfaction.<sup>14</sup> In a work environment, people can express gratitude by recognizing and appreciating coworkers for who they are, in addition to what they do. A gratitude-infused workplace culture helps people work together and enriches their sense of community.

Leaders can practice gratitude by noticing and recognizing employee accomplishments, big and small. A shout-out in a meeting or a handwritten note are simple things that make a big difference in how employees feel about themselves and their work. Create an environment that encourages and enables employees to express their thanks and appreciation for their colleagues. Set aside time in team meetings for employees to acknowledge each other's contributions and don't miss a chance to celebrate the wins along the way.



**9 in 10**

employees who feel valued by their employer are motivated to do their best.

only **2 in 10**

plan to look for a new job in the year ahead.<sup>15</sup>

### ▶ Gratitude hits the bottom line.

Expressing sincere gratitude for each employee's contribution is a low-cost, highly effective way to enhance productivity, increase engagement, and build loyalty.



# take a fresh look at your wellness program

By applying a little creativity to their wellness programs, employers can spark increased employee engagement, reduced stress, and improved health outcomes. Most importantly, thoughtful program enhancements that support holistic wellness help employers demonstrate how much they care about their employees' well-being.

WW Health Solutions partners with companies of all sizes to deliver weight-loss and wellness programs that achieve wellness goals for both employees and the business. Based on the #1 doctor-recommended weight-loss program,<sup>16</sup> our solutions are backed by behavior change science, the latest nutritional research, and innovative digital technology, all designed to make healthier habits easier to build and sustain.



**Learn more at [WW.com/HR](https://www.weightwatchers.com/HR)**

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