



Dr. Judd Allen

Worksite Wellness Breakout 3: "Reaching Home: How to Engage Employees in Creating a Healthy Household Culture"

Bringing Wellness Home

Today's household has a different dynamic than the traditional family unit in the center of wellness programs built in this industry's primary stages. We are in a period of gender role fluidity where women are no longer the sole decision-maker for the health of the entire family. Multi-generational households with and without children are common. Other households may be comprised of several single, non-related individuals.

These micro-cultures have an important influence on how we live. Judd Allen, Ph.D., has spent a lifetime working to ensure employees can bring their wellness home to a supportive, healthy environment.

Recent international polls have found that most organizational leaders believe that creating a healthy culture is their top priority. It is Dr. Allen's hope that corporate leaders understand how these new cultural priorities must be expanded beyond the corporate walls to include those within the walls of the employee's household as well.

Employee wellness, when effective, includes all dependents who are covered under their benefit policies. Many employers utilize third-party wellness providers who create technology-based questionnaires, games, and services that can be accessed offsite.

It could be as simple as inviting housemates to attend all wellness programs and/or to view online program recordings. Employers can communicate success stories that tell how housemates achieved wellness together.

Develop a buddy system. Employees should be

encouraged to pair up with housemates as well as coworkers in their pursuit of personal wellness goals. Wellness professionals can teach important peer support skills such as how to help someone: (1) set lifestyle goals, (2) interview a good role model, (3) eliminate perceived barriers to change, (4) locate supportive environments for that lifestyle goal, (5) work through setbacks, and (6) track and celebrate success. These are simpler and practical forms of wellness coaching techniques that housemates can develop for more effective peer support.

Assist with household makeovers. Sometimes wellness program goals have an obvious link with the home environment. For example, Union Pacific Railroad recognized that it would have to involve the entire household in its efforts to tackle fatigue issues for shift workers. They addressed this problem by allowing employees to invite company experts into their homes to help them remodel their bedrooms to better support daytime sleep. Union Pacific also worked to educate family members about sleep hygiene and how they could champion one another's sleep needs. Some companies could help set up the kitchen cupboard for portion control and healthier eating options, or equip households with fitness resources.

Use wellness activities to strengthen household relationships. It is easy to see how a family outing or fitness activity could bring people closer together. Household traditions can be established or revised to better reflect a wellness philosophy. Wellness is an opportunity for kindness. Mutual support can build

trust and openness.

It is important to keep in mind that household cultures are already at work in influencing your employees' lifestyles. The overarching goal is to increase awareness of these influences and to help your employees shape these sub-cultures. This is not a one-size-fits-all approach – each household is unique and housemates have a variety of personal wellness goals. Unfortunately, most of these goals are unsuccessful due to lack of support. We need to help employees create environments that no longer undermine but instead support personal wellness.

At first glance you might think that it will be difficult to extend your wellness program to include households, as you may already be stretched by the challenges of creating a culture of health at the workplace. What employees really need is for you to empower them to understand and shape their home environments. You may quickly find that households have fewer barriers to change than work settings. Your employees may have early successes and new understandings that will be valuable in the workplace environment. Your goal may be to help them bring wellness home, but they may reciprocate by bringing wellness to work.

A legacy of building cultures

Robert Allen, Ph.D., formed a company in the 1950s to assist clients in the creation of supportive environments. In the 1970s, they were among the first to develop worksite wellness programs. Many of those early programs used support groups to promote wellness. For example, at Johnson and Johnson, Dr. Robert Allen's company organized support groups around wellness, created running clubs, and built wellness-focused teams. What they soon found, however, is that many of these group activities became impractical in modern work environments.

Most contemporary wellness programs are almost always comprised of individualized programming tools.

Dr. Judd Allen has found that the current wellness toolkit of personal assessments, coaching, and incentive programs do not adequately address culture.

Dr. Allen expanded his father's legacy by focusing their company on helping others

build wellness cultures at the center of their health-promoting efforts. He defines culture as a complex web of social influences with six primary cultural elements. In the typical workplace, sub-cultures are formed around shifts, job responsibilities, work locations and the like. Most individuals are influenced by multiple subcultures including the subculture formed at home.

6 Primary Cultural Elements:

1. Leadership Support
2. Shared Values
3. Norms
4. Informal and Formal Policies and Procedures
5. Peer Support
6. Social Climate

Benefits of Healthy Cultures

Dr. Allen recognizes that most wellness professionals are more comfortable working with individuals than with cultures. He believes that much more can be achieved by combining the personal approach with a cultural approach. Dr. Allen notes that a healthy culture helps "reach the hard to reach, prevents migration to new unhealthy practices, increases lifestyle change success rates, and enhances morale and teamwork." If we work together, our need for each other will no longer be an obstacle to overcome, but rather a virtue to be celebrated. 🌟

All Xchange attendees will receive a complimentary digital copy of Dr. Allen's book, Kitchen Table Talks for Wellness.

Written by Mary Ellen Rose

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