



Creating a Culture of Health

By Jeff Sauter, MA and Mark D. Sauter, author, *Bringing Meaning into Monday™*

“Rising healthcare costs and the worsening status of employee health are threatening corporate viability and making the healthcare system unsustainable.”

- *Leading by Example* published 2007,
U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Partnership for Prevention

According to the Center for Disease Control more than 50% of the two trillion dollars spent annually on healthcare is avoidable if preventative steps are taken. This is not a recent issue nor can it be completely addressed with the simplistic answer of “watch what you eat and exercise more.”

Stress, a precursor to chronic conditions, such as hypertension, obesity and depression, accounts for 60-90% of doctor visits and, to a degree, is a symptom of a larger societal problem – workplace discontent. This larger problem, in addition to impacting health care costs, simultaneously affects productivity, creativity and absenteeism, all bottom-line challenges facing many of today’s employers.

Realizing this, employers are beginning to acknowledge the importance of work-life quality. Creating a sense of community, shared responsibility, and ownership of corporate success are elements associated with a healthy lifestyle and have a measurable effect on the viability of organizational success.

The role of culture

The National Institute of Occupational Safety (NIOSH), in January 2005, published a report entitled *Examining the Value of Integrating Occupational Health and Safety and Health Promotion Programs in the Workplace*. This report cited four “categories of interventions” necessary to create healthy organizations:

1. Care Management
2. Health Promotion and Disease Prevention
3. Workplace Environment (e.g., safety)
4. Corporate Culture

Significant attention is being directed across all four categories; nonetheless – culture – tends to be the least understood. NIOSH examined the importance of socially responsible organizational values, workplace stress and work-life balance, and organizational efforts to improve work climate, morale and employee attitudes. They define a healthy culture as an organization that clearly articulates the importance of *individual contributions to organizational success*, and

the *value of human capital in achieving organizational goals*. An organization possessing these values will be most successful in putting in place an integrated model of health, safety and productivity management.

Leaders play an important role in achieving this vision. They must provide innovative structures that support cooperation and emphasize individual productivity and organizational competitiveness. In today’s interconnected and ever-changing economy a healthy and productive workplace culture *must* be dynamic – one that is resilient and capable of assessing and responding to the evolving needs and priorities of customers and/or fellow coworkers.

Many of today’s organizations tend to be hierarchical, even bureaucratic. Inconsistent planning processes and/or historic work practices are frequently out of sync with daily realities. Conflicting or misinterpreted agendas negatively impact work-life quality, which, in turn, yields a compliant workforce versus an empowered and impassioned one. As a result, the relationship and emotional stress caused at work will directly affect a person’s overall health and quality of life inside *and* outside of work.

Therefore, in order to enable a vibrant, productive and healthy workplace, organizational leaders must structurally align individual agendas and work practices around the ever-changing needs and priorities of those they serve (i.e., their customers and coworkers). While improving productivity, creativity and relationship quality, a work culture that emphasizes value creation and delivery will also result in a greater sense of unity and shared purpose – in a word, engagement. Employees will have greater visibility as to how they individually *and* collectively contribute value to the lives of others, which in turn provides them the intrinsic motivation to maintain the quality of theirs. *Bringing Meaning into Monday™* offers a process that can help leaders achieve it.

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Jeff Sauter, with over 30 years of experience in the fitness industry and behavioral psychology, focuses on the alignment of workplace culture and integration of community resources in order to promote and support healthier and more sustainable lifestyles.