

## Building a Healthy and Productive Workplace Community

By Jeff Sauter, past Chairperson of the Dove Healthcare and Affiliates Wellness Committee

Dove Healthcare & Affiliates and other employers are directing substantial effort towards improving workplace wellness in response to rising healthcare costs. Until now, the focus has been placed on *physical* behavior change such as proper nutrition and activity levels, which are tangible and easily understood. Yet costs have continued to rise at better than three times the rate of inflation. The elephant in the room that is not being effectively addressed is the impact of stress on the development of chronic health conditions and its resultant cost. The National Center for Disease Control states that in excess of 70% of healthcare costs are stress related and *preventable*.

The workplace is a breeding ground for stress due to competitive pressures, speed of technology, interpersonal relationships and other dynamics that are a result of a diverse 'captive' community. Today, the challenge is to create a supportive culture that not only addresses the ill-effects of stress on ones' health, but also the simultaneous effect on productivity, teamwork, creativity and absenteeism.

Today's workplaces are living communities with a 'pulse' or energy that when effectively tapped into can be utilized to fulfill individual goals and desires. Regardless of whether the goal is employees looking for a paycheck or promotion, or employers seeking ways to improve innovation and profitability – the diversity of perspectives and interests mirrors that of a larger community in which they live.

People are social creatures, not machines. They require energy, which is fueled by social conditions and feelings of self-worth and validation. The workplace, given the amount of time spent there, can play a significant role in determining one's overall health and happiness – in and outside of work.

At Dove Healthcare & Affiliates we realize that a supportive culture will create a win/win/win – simultaneously improving the health and well-being of our employees, the economic health of the organization and the health impact we have on the extended community. To achieve this, we have been investing in two sides of the same wellness coin –

Side 'one' represents ***individuals*** developing healthier relationships and embracing self-growth. While side 'two' represents ***leadership*** and its influence on the workplace culture.

### Side 'one': Individual Wellness

Wellness is a comprehensive recognition of six dimensions of an individual – physical, vocational, social, psychological, emotional and spiritual. Since 2007 Dove Healthcare & Affiliates has worked towards implementing the components of wellness programming primarily focused on the 'physical,' with additional focus on the 'vocational' dimensions. In continuing its' goal of developing a performance-based culture, the organization will address the four other dimensions of wellness.

In the physical dimension, efforts have been primarily targeted at those on the company sponsored health insurance plan. The core items of annual biometric testing, health-coaching according to health-risk category, exercise challenges and educational presentations as well as financial incentives have all been instituted.

The vocational dimension is addressed across the entire workforce with components such as ongoing training, stipends for continuing education, team building exercises and development of customer service skills. Tying these elements into the overall employee health and well-being aspect is accomplished by an employee health and well-being section of the employee manual, in which 'benefits' are a component.

In the development of the emotional, social and psychological dimensions, interpersonal relationship skills are strengthened as the leadership team continues to create a unified agenda which provides people with a clear sense of direction and intrinsic validation. As our wellness programming matures and continues to become more inclusive, the development of three traits identified by Daniel Goleman in his book *Emotional Intelligence* – self-awareness, self-management and social awareness – will prove essential in building a value-based work

climate aimed not only at serving the needs of others, but also cultivating meaningful social connections and friendships that go beyond the workplace.

The final necessary component of fostering a person's health and well-being is the spiritual dimension. It includes focusing on a person's values and their search for purpose and meaning as it affects each area of their life. People in general seek an increased sense of purpose or meaning – the knowledge that they are making a difference in the lives of others. By emphasizing the delivery of value and service to others, a greater respect and attention to shared and/or higher purpose will result. People will discover creative possibilities and a better respect for diverse contributions within the higher or broader context of how each party contributes value. In addition to influencing organizational performance, the energy and sense-of-connection produced at work will directly influence one's overall health and well-being, in *and* outside of work.

### Side 'two': Leadership and Workplace Culture

In January of 2005, the National Institute of Occupational Safety (NIOSH) published a report aimed at workplace health promotion. This report cited "corporate culture" as one of four categories necessary to create healthy organizations. Rather than defining a healthy culture as one that is 'fit and trim,' NIOSH defined 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.*' In order to achieve this, NIOSH reported, **"leaders must provide innovative structures that support cooperation and emphasize individual productivity and organizational competitiveness."**

Many of today's organizations tend to be hierarchical, even bureaucratic. Inconsistent planning processes or historic work practices are frequently out of sync with daily realities. Conflicting or misinterpreted agendas negatively impact work-life quality, thereby yielding a compliant workforce versus an empowered and impassioned one. No wonder stress is on the increase – more output is expected and fewer resources are provided to employees, negatively affecting their health and quality of life in *and* outside of work.

Dove Healthcare & Affiliates has initiated a process to blend its investment in wellness programming to the metrics that drive organizational performance. From our prior work in the development of a vision, mission and statement of core values we have advanced to identifying critical success factors (CSF's) utilized in ongoing decision-making. Not only will this streamline our administrative and work processes, it will also allow for a consistency of communication across all facilities, departments, committees and staff - all of which help define our culture of effectiveness and empowerment.

The goal of our wellness committee is to internalize these CSF's, not only to be used for top-down decision making, but also from the bottom-up. By emphasizing the value of human capital in the overall success of our organization it will lead to an empowered staff motivated by a *shared* sense of purpose, minimizing divisions or conflicts when people lose sight of the wider goals. Employees will have greater visibility as to how they individually and collectively contribute value to the lives of others, which will provide them with the intrinsic satisfaction to maintain the health and quality of their life.

In the words of our outside wellness vendor, this "leading edge thinking" will result in a healthier *and* more productive work community, addressing the organizational needs of sustainability, profitability and empowerment, as well as the intrinsic needs of the individual, such as relationship, acceptance, safety, trust, belonging and sense of purpose.

At Dove Healthcare & Affiliates, our journey is far from complete, and in many ways we've just begun – eliminating the aforementioned elephant one bite at a time. This two-sided perspective and approach is helping us balance our focus and investments. We will significantly improve the return-on-investment and utilization of 'side one' services the more we correspondingly invest in creating a supportive work culture – one that continually improves organizational results, individual effectiveness, well-being and sense of meaning.

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**Dove Healthcare and Affiliates:** Five separate facilities, 780 employees, certified skilled nursing facility providing both short-term rehabilitation, in-patient and out-patient therapy services and long-term care located in West Central Wisconsin.