



# Five Things You Must Know When Evaluating Worksite Wellbeing Providers

## The Essential Guide for Construction Industry Managers

Managing an effective employee wellbeing program in the construction industry comes with a unique set of challenges. Ninety percent of the population is male, two-thirds of the workforce has moderate- or high-risk health factors, healthcare spending is 65% greater for high-risk than low-risk workers, and job-site safety is directly related to employee wellbeing.

To succeed in this difficult environment, employee wellbeing programs must be customized specifically for the organization, the industry, and the employee risk factors that lead to better health and safety outcomes and greater cost savings. While these programs have become commonplace in the corporate world, construction workers should not be treated as office workers. Instead, trade workers must be supported as “industrial athletes,” not as risks that must be *controlled* from a safety perspective.

These differences make selecting an employee wellbeing provider a more challenging task. Many firms do not embody the core competencies that translate into success in the construction environment. This management brief explains the critical factors that must be considered in choosing an effective employee wellbeing partner.





# What is “employee wellbeing?”



A workplace wellbeing program is much more than an employee perk or benefit program enhancement. It represents a strategic initiative that can generate considerable competitive advantage. Wellbeing has come to embody the whole individual's health. This includes physical, mental, emotional, and financial health – all aspects of the persona. Wellbeing programs for the construction industry should include nutrition, physical activity, stress and resilience, smoking cessation, substance abuse management, productivity enhancement, and personal finance counseling.

Employees need to be safe and healthy to be happy and productive. When employees are well and feel mentally supported, they are less likely to injure themselves and others and more likely to remain productive. They expend greater discretionary effort, passion, creativity, innovation, engagement, and productivity.

In their Employee Experience Index, Workhuman® and the IBM Smarter Workforce Institute uncovered meaningful insights about organizations that scored highest for employee experience. The study showed that workers at these companies:

- Offered nearly **2 times** the discretionary effort
- Reported levels of performance **23 percentage** points higher
- Were **52% less likely** to leave their organizations

However, the reality is most employee wellbeing programs are not meeting their objectives. Our experience has uncovered the following reasons for poor performance:

- **No overall employee wellbeing strategy**
- **No on-site, full-time personal support**
- **No continuous evaluation, metrics, or goals**
- **No people with knowledge or bandwidth to implement a program**
- **No comprehensive solution and management**

While more and more construction firms appreciate the synergies of integrating safety and well-being, they may not always understand the best practices and approaches providers must employ to implement a successful program.

# 5 Things you must know

There are five essential criteria construction managers must know to successfully evaluate a wellbeing partner.



## 1

### Understanding the real business value of a wellbeing program

**It is critical for a wellbeing provider to express the expected outcomes and true business value of their programs prior to implementation.**

These outcomes have various levels of value to the organization. For example, lower-value outcomes would include program participation, sign-ups for a stand down or event, downloading an app, or qualifying for a fitness reimbursement, while higher-value benefits include healthier employees, lower absenteeism, less presenteeism, and fewer at-risk health factors. These benefits result in healthcare cost reduction, productivity increases, improved job satisfaction, and accident reduction. Program outcomes should be quantified and monetized, whenever possible.

Let's not forget that healthier employees are a true measure of success. One key outcome is the migration of employees to lower health risk groups. Following biometric screening and a health appraisal, an employee can be categorized into a low-, medium-, or high-risk health group. At one company, average book of business goals were established that drove a 24% decrease in the high-risk population and a 36% increase in the low-risk population. Quantified health care cost reduction and productivity improvement could be calculated by the numbers of employees moving to the lower-risk group.

Another study clearly showed the wellbeing program benefits for a large group of companies.<sup>1</sup>

- **72%** of employers had lower healthcare costs after adopting a wellbeing program.
- On average, employers received a **6-to-1** return on investment.
- Wellbeing programs lowered absenteeism up to **19%**.

Furthermore, a construction industry case study reported its employee wellbeing intervention reduced healthcare costs \$500,086 in year 1 and a total 4-year savings of \$2.5 million.<sup>2</sup>

Organizations should demand their potential wellbeing providers submit the proven, measurable outcomes and benefits their programs will achieve before engaging in a partnership.





**Goal setting and measurement are critical to justify a wellbeing program's existence and investment. Metrics are the vehicles that make measurement and evaluation possible.**

For the construction jobsite manager, on-time and on-budget metrics are the yardsticks by which success is measured. It is important that the wellbeing program's contributions be included in these calculations.

Researchers who examined populations totaling millions of workers found that 15 cost drivers were the elements or risks that drove safety and healthcare costs.<sup>3</sup> These factors included:

- Absenteeism
- Alcohol abuse
- Existing medical condition
- High blood pressure
- High total cholesterol
- Low back pain
- Low HDL cholesterol
- Life dissatisfaction
- Negative health perception
- No seat belt/helmet use
- Overweight
- Inactivity
- Stress
- Smoking
- Seriously overweight

Employees with five or more of these factors were placed in the high-risk group.

Tracking these factors enables the organization to set goals on the health and wellbeing of the population, calculate progress toward healthcare cost reduction and productivity gains, plus show changes that relate to mental health such as stress, anxiety, and depression. They also permit objective setting and measurement of absenteeism, presenteeism, and life dissatisfaction.

By setting realistic goals, metrics, and measurement, one company's wellbeing effort achieved the following:

- Personal safety at risk declined **54%**
- Depression dropped **46%**
- At-risk nutrition reduced **37%**
- Distress declined **56%**
- Life dissatisfaction was down **48%**
- Alcohol misuse dropped **41%**

## The importance of customized, comprehensive strategies and integrated planning



**A comprehensive strategic plan is essential to optimize the results of an employee wellbeing program. This plan must be customized to the organization's specific needs and meet the goals of all company stakeholders.**

There are five main elements of a comprehensive wellbeing program:

- Strategic planning process: assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation
- On-site health coaching
- Population health management
- Focus on promoting wellbeing over managing injuries
- A tool to monitor and guide the coaching process

Each aspect of a comprehensive strategic program should be derived from evidence-based conclusions in nutrition, fitness, and worksite wellbeing. In addition, the plan should incorporate other aspects of personal wellbeing such as chronic disease prevention and management, ergonomics and musculoskeletal issues, and substance misuse. An effective wellbeing partner must have the resources and tool sets to support each one of these key areas. It also should help the company conserve resources by maximizing the utilization of services already available to employees.

Assessment is the first step in the outcome-driven strategic planning process. This step includes a thorough review of health claims, employee biometric screenings or physician visits, health assessments, culture audits, and needs/interest surveys. The individual's risk assessment and biometric data help the onsite medic/behavioral health coach determine the areas the employee must focus on.

Following the planning and assessment step, a multi-skilled account team – including experts trained in developing strategic initiatives – delivers and executes the strategy. The strategic plan must be integrated with the organization's people and resources. It should be structured as an entirely outsourced model, but with an insourced feel. While the on-site behavioral health coach is a member of the provider's staff, the person must be well versed in the client organization's benefits, EAP, insurance, and human resource ecostructure, and become integrated with the company's jobsite team.

This proven approach means each worker will have access to an individual who is qualified and motivated to help them. As a result, employees:

- Achieve wellbeing, not just avoid illness
- Feel supported rather than simply "managed"
- Experience care, not just an encounter
- Learn to be safe at work and at home
- Understand their chronic condition or illness and how to manage and overcome it

## 4

### The role of personal, human, one-to-one wellbeing support

The core of every strong wellbeing program is behavior change. The best providers deliver programs based on evidence-based practices and behavior change theory. It is well established that on-site health coaching works well and is a key factor in successful wellbeing initiatives. The coach builds strong relationships with jobsite employees – learning about their habits, their families, and their lifestyles. The coaches are trained in active listening as part of their motivational interviewing instruction. This technique helps forge bonds with employees that makes them much more likely to talk about intellectual, spiritual, physical, or emotional topics.

Onsite, personal coaching is the keystone of a successful employee wellbeing program. However, simply asking an untrained EMT or medic to provide health coaching is not a strategic initiative that will bring about true change. The personal coach's ability to engage in open, honest communications with workers drives significantly greater behavior change and success rates.



## 5

### The emphasis on mental health

Employee mental health in the construction industry (and the rest of society) has become a significant issue. A report by Atticus, a workers' compensation and disability benefits company headquartered in Los Angeles, revealed that mental health issues make up 52% of all workplace injury cases, more than any other kind.

98% of surveyed construction companies acknowledged that staff mental health has important safety implications.<sup>4</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found suicide is 1.5 times higher among men in the construction industry than any other, including people who were unemployed. These statistics accentuate the need for employee wellbeing providers to have strong mental health programs and resources as part of their strategic offerings.

A wellbeing provider should have behavioral health coaches that are trained to listen and provide guidance for 70% of all mental health issues. And for anything else, they refer the individual to an employee assistance program (EAP) or licensed practitioner.

The coaches are instructed to encourage private conversations with employees and probe for issues that might suggest mental health challenges. Then, improvement goals can be identified or referrals made to practitioners. Follow-up sessions are held to ensure the employee is staying on track.

In addition, the provider should deliver mental health first-aid training to the company's safety managers and staff. This training will cover mental health and substance-use issues for day-to-day employee engagement.



# Conclusion

Selecting a wellbeing provider for a construction job site is a more challenging task than implementing a safety program or new employee benefit. However, the business value and employee satisfaction outcomes of a successful wellbeing effort far outweigh more traditional safety approaches.

People become unhealthier as they grow older. As long-service employees age, health risks – both physical and mental – increase, eroding productivity and driving up cost. Studies show that the cost of doing nothing can be a significant drag on business performance as organizations miss out on millions of dollars in savings.

For example, in a medium-size construction population, a wellbeing program can save almost \$2.5 million in healthcare cost savings alone. Reduced absenteeism and higher productivity can add more than \$4 million in savings.<sup>5</sup>

The merits of a comprehensive wellbeing program have been proven on construction jobsites around the nation. In choosing a provider, there are five criteria that should be understood and applied to ensure program success.

1. Understand the true business value a wellbeing provider can generate with their program and competencies.
2. Know how to employ goals, metrics, and measurement to track progress and maintain provider accountability.
3. Ensure the provider applies customized, comprehensive strategies and integrated planning methodologies.
4. Understand how personal, on-site, one-to-one wellbeing support drives the behavior change that achieves greater quantifiable outcomes.
5. Seek a provider that offers robust mental health resources at the jobsite.

By following these guidelines in the selection process, construction companies can evaluate and choose wellbeing partners that can optimize workforce performance and enjoy greater employee retention.

## References

<sup>1</sup> 22 TELLING EMPLOYEE WELLNESS STATISTICS 2023: HOW MANY COMPANIES HAVE WELLNESS PROGRAMS, Zippia.com, November 14, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Construction Industry Case Study, Wellness Workdays.

<sup>3</sup> Dee W. Edington, The University of Michigan Health Science Research Center.

<sup>4</sup> 2020 Construction Federation Industry Mental Health Report.

<sup>5</sup> The Cost of Doing Nothing Report, Wellness Workdays.

## About Wellness Workdays

Wellness Workdays, headquartered in Massachusetts with offices in New York, Florida, and Texas, is the only employee wellbeing provider that drives **measurable** health and safety progress across the job site. Our programs deliver **unified safety and wellbeing synergies** that achieve higher participation and engagement, fewer reportable accidents, and lower absentee rates. Working with Wellness Workdays gives construction organizations the tools and resources to achieve **measurable improvements** in job site safety, and healthier, more productive employees. The certified Women Business Enterprise has earned industry recognition and best-practice awards for its work with clients, such as Turner Construction, Skanska, the Maine Department of Transportation, and Harvard Business School.

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