Fostering Wellness Leadership: A New Model

By Judd Allen, Ph.D., David Hunnicutt, Ph.D.

This special report from the Wellness Councils of America and HealthyCulture.com will present a new approach to the crucial issue of management support of wellness programs. First, we’ll suggest that the approach taken by health promotion professionals toward management may need revision. Then we’ll describe several management attitudes toward health promotion and how to tailor your responses to them. We’ll discuss strategies for assessing management attitudes and culture. And we’ll employ a tool for measuring current wellness leadership and its potential for growth in your organization. Finally, we’ll explain strategies for changing the leadership culture so that it better supports health promotion objectives.
OUR APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT MUST CHANGE

Health promotion professionals don’t need to be reminded how essential it is to have management support for their programs. After all, management controls the money, resources, employees’ time, access to space, promotional media, policies affecting health, and to a large degree the culture of the organization. Managers can sabotage or save a program and hire or fire the wellness professional.

Perhaps it’s the relative lack of corporate power that has caused some health promotion professionals to feel that they are beggars at the banquet. A 1993 study of Canadian health promotion professionals and senior managers found that the health promotion professionals consistently overestimated the importance of economic factors in management choices about health promotion programs. Many of us assume that management is unsympathetic and skeptical of our goals, that all they care about is the bottom line, and that we have to constantly prove that health promotion is good for business.

Of course there’s often truth in that view. Some managers do lack enthusiasm for the full range of health promotion goals. Some managers do think only in terms of numbers, and fail to make the connection between the wellness of their employees and the health of the business.

“The fact is most managers aren't against health promotion. They’re supportive and aware that wellness is inherently valuable and important. But they aren't experts in our field—that's our job. Managers need our assistance to imagine the possibilities, to comprehend the value, to understand the research, and most of all to develop their roles as wellness leaders.”

KEY IDEA

Instead of treating all managers as unsympathetic to health promotion, wellness professionals need to tailor their approach to the attitudes of managers.

Our preoccupation with convincing managers about the value of health promotion misses the mark for a majority of managers who are already on board. Think of James Prochaska’s “stages of change” approach to individual lifestyle change. Prochaska found that health promotion messages tend to alienate their audience when they are not tailored to the readiness level of that audience. For most managers who already support health promotion goals, we may be preaching to the choir, and putting them to sleep. Worse yet, our persistent presentation of evidence may unintentionally sow seeds of doubt in those who have already been sold on health promotion goals. A good salesperson stops selling after she or he has closed the deal.

Richard Hernandez, V. President, General Manager Consulting Services, Johnson & Johnson
WHAT ARE MANAGERS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD WELLNESS?

The readiness of managers to participate in health promotion spans a broad range from the enthusiastic core of wellness champions to those who actively oppose our programs.

Managers can be divided into the five groups pictured in Figure 1. The percentages listed are based on our experience and will vary from one organization to the next.

**Active Opposition 1-2%**

These managers speak out against wellness programs, challenging their worth and sabotaging their implementation.

**The approach**...Don't antagonize these folks by arguing with them. It's usually a waste of your time to try to convince them of your point of view. Be a thoughtful listener. Hear their concerns and allow them to vent. It's like the classic martial arts move—when attacked, simply step aside. And don't take it personally. Listen for now, someday this person may be ready to hear you. They may also offer you some valid criticism that is useful in improving your efforts.

**Quiet Opposition 15-25%**

Managers in this group may think that wellness activities are a waste of time and communicate their lack of support nonverbally by not participating—or doing the absolute minimum that’s required by senior management.

**The approach**...Listening is once again your main response, but you can begin to tell these managers about the benefits of wellness programs. Don't try to oversell this group. Try to determine what, if anything, they like about health promotion. Build on their answers. Your goal is to shift the balance of pros and cons so that they become neutral in their attitude toward health promotion activities.

**Neutral 40-50%**

Other priorities preoccupy this group. They don't feel strongly about wellness one way or the other, or they aren't sure that programs can really make any difference. They'll “go through the motions” as required by their bosses. They will not obstruct those interested in health promotion activities.

**The approach**...These managers are ready to be exposed to the benefits of wellness programs, and to hear about how they could get involved if they want to. Try to address their concerns. Eliminate some of the cons and enhance their appreciation for the benefits and you could shift their decisional balance toward health promotion.
Quiet Supporters 30-40%
These managers “get it” but don't really know how to contribute to wellness initiatives. They support workplace wellness in theory and show up for meetings and events, but they aren't actively campaigning for wellness.

The approach...It's not necessary to convince this group, but instead to show them simple, easy ways to get involved. The message is that they don't have to become “health nuts” to help employees move toward health. Ask them to participate in non-threatening ways. Pairing them with wellness champions to work on projects may inspire them as well.

Wellness Champions 5-10%
The core supporters – these managers go to bat for better wellness programs. They understand the human and financial benefits of health promotion, and educate other managers and employees about them. They adopt healthier lifestyles for themselves and encourage others by recogniz-

ING and celebrating others’ efforts. They participate in health promotion planning.

The approach...These managers are your gold mine. They need to be recognized and celebrated individually and as a group. Encourage them to feel that they are part of a movement in the company. They can help you to spread the word, so keep them informed of new research and strategies in health promotion by sending them articles with significant parts highlighted.

KEY IDEA
A 5% shift across the values continuum towards support for wellness could cause a wellness revolution.

Your goal is to shift management attitudes one level closer towards the Wellness Champion position. A 5% shift across the continuum could represent a revolution in the perceived level of management support in the corporate culture. The original idea for the continuum (seen in Figure 1) was based on a review of newspaper polls during and before the American Revolution. During the revolution, public opinion shifted 5% toward being in favor of independence and against the British government. We are seeking a similar health promotion revolution. A 5% shift might just do the trick.

ASSESSING MANAGEMENT ATTITUDES
There are a variety of useful strategies that can be used to assess managers’ attitudes. Managers can be surveyed about their opinion of worksite wellness (see sample questions at www.healthy-culture.com). Individual interviews can often be helpful. Managers may be willing to discuss their views about the pros and cons of health promotion. Observational techniques also serve a purpose. You may have an
opportunity to see a manager discuss health promotion goals or activities. Field research and participation data may reveal stronger commitments by particular managers. Feedback from employees about their managers may also be useful.

DEFINING THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

It is hard to get excited about organizational wellness if you don’t understand your role. Many managers do not see how they can make a useful contribution to employee wellness. Clarifying the leadership role will gain management support for wellness programs. One strategy is to create a dialogue about the role of management in health and productivity. Healthyculture.com’s workshop video, Wellness Leadership, features organizational leaders from five prominent companies. The testimonials of these leaders set the stage for a conversation about the role of leadership in health promotion programs. There are four primary leadership roles featured in the Wellness Leadership workshop video. These roles are presented in Figure 2.

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE MANAGEMENT CULTURE

The support of individual managers is much more likely to take root in a management culture that supports wellness. Examining the management culture can be a complex and long-term process. However, understanding culture can be made easier by breaking it down into five dimensions. These five dimensions are illustrated in Figure 3.
Values are beliefs about what is important. For example, in some management cultures speed of innovation is a value, while in other cultures slow and steady is the value. Where possible, link health promotion goals to management values. Sometimes it will be necessary to alter management values to support wellness.

Norms are expectations about behavior, “the way we do things around here.” For example, it may be a norm for managers to allow flexible work schedules to accommodate employee exercise interests. The Wellness Leadership Survey examines cultural norms among managers. Survey findings make it possible for managers to more clearly see their current culture and to set goals for new management norms.

Peer support encompasses managers’ efforts to assist one another. For example, a manager needing help organizing employee wellness activities might get assistance from another manager. Peer support could also play a role in assisting a manager to achieve a personal lifestyle goal such as stopping smoking. The video, *With a Little Help from My Friends*, and the *Wellness Mentor Training Program* are both designed to increase the quality of peer support. These HealthyCulture.com resources can enhance the peer support available to managers.

Organizational support encompasses policies, procedures and programs such as rewards, training, orientation, modeling and communication systems. For example, managers could be rewarded and recognized for achieving workgroup wellness goals. Another example of organizational support would be for top leadership to model their commitment by participating in company wellness activities.

Climate is the culture's capacity to support individual and group innovation. Climate factors such as the sense of community,
shared vision and positive outlook, make innovations such as health promotion possible. For example, in a management culture with a healthy climate, individual managers would feel comfortable expressing their enthusiasm. In an unhealthy climate, all new ideas are looked at with suspicion. The Working Well video and Work Climate Survey are tools for helping managers to improve their work climates. Both resources are available at www.healthyculture.com.

STRATEGIES FOR GAINING MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

In addition to shifting the management culture, there are a number of steps that can be taken to gain management support. For the best results, consider the following strategies.

Share your research findings on the attitudes, norms and values of management. Many managers may not know that most of their colleagues are big fans of wellness. Your data can help managers set goals for their subculture.

Avoid preaching to the choir. Save your sermon for those who are undecided about health promotion goals. Instead of one-size-fits-all presentations to managers, tailor your program recruitment efforts to draw the right audience for your presentations.

Hold a meeting of managers who are open to supporting health promotion efforts (Neutral to Wellness Champions). Show the Wellness Leadership video and facilitate a discussion of management roles. The video features senior managers who have championed wellness programs. During the meeting, provide opportunities for managers to commit to the following health promotion roles discussed in the video.

Provide health promotion training opportunities on such topics as mentoring, peer support and leadership. Managers are likely to support activities they feel personally knowledgeable about.

Orient new managers so that they are aware of health promotion resources and their role in supporting health promotion activities.

Reward and recognize managers for supporting health promotion activities. For example, use an employee survey to hold a well department awards program. Recognize managers whose departments achieve the highest scores.

Offer fun health promotion activities for managers such as a fitness-oriented retreat or relaxing massages.

Use “teachable moments” and important milestones to deepen personal wellness commitments.

“We need to step back a bit and we need to say, ‘What type of culture are we going to create in the corporation?’ Are we going to say to our employees, ‘It’s important that you’re well as a whole person’?”

Esther J. Williams, Manager, Corporate Benefits, Seagate Technology
Each year approximately 80% of managers will try to adopt healthy lifestyle practices. Traumas and close calls sensitize people to health promotion issues. Health challenges faced by family and friends can also present opportunities to examine the value of wellness efforts.

Challenge managers to work together to achieve a national award. The Wellness Councils of America’s Well Workplace Awards recognize organizations that have developed comprehensive wellness programs at the Bronze, Silver, and Gold levels. The award winners are listed at www.welcoa.org. Some of these organizations are also highlighted in a monthly series entitled Best Practices. Call 402-827-3590 to become a member and receive this series and other membership publications.

WE CAN FOSTER MANAGEMENT SUPPORT

It’s time to change our approach to gaining management support. We can deliver information and resources that are better tailored to the attitudes of managers. We can help managers to gain a better appreciation of their roles in promoting employee wellness. We can recognize the power of the management subculture and shift that culture to better support wellness. Such an approach will lower everyone’s anxiety and lead to better working relationships.

Changing management subculture is both art and science. Use scientific discovery techniques to assess current attitudes and the management subculture. This information can empower wellness champions and inspire inactive supporters. Working together with management, you can create new cultural standards for leadership that better support healthier and more productive workplace cultures.

ABOUT HEALTHYCULTURE.COM

The Wellness Councils of America has long been a fan of Dr. Judd Allen’s work and his organization, Healthyculture.com. Dr. Allen’s organization is dedicated to empowering people to create healthier and more productive cultural environments at work, at home and in the community. The web site is a service of the Human Resources Institute, Inc. It features on-line surveys, training, videos, discussion groups, consulting resources, books, journal article reprints and research reports. Further information is available on the web site or at 115 Dunder Road, Burlington, Vermont 05401, phone (802) 862-8855.