2017'S HEALTHIEST EMPLOYERS: 5 LESSONS & TRENDS
Springbuk recently announced its America’s 100 Healthiest Employers for 2017.

This annual list celebrates the healthiest in population health, taking into account organizational vision, success metrics, the impact on company culture, development of internal expertise, and use of technology.

Fitbit Health Solutions partnered with Springbuk to dig into the data, and spoke with several employers on this year’s list to identify major lessons and trends.
According to a 2016 Integrated Benefits Institute (IBI) survey, 85% of CFOs play a role in benefits decisions.1 And while 87% of CFOs said that cost control is one of their top five goals for health benefits, over one-third (34%) also view health benefits as an important tool in talent management, and helping employees better manage their health. Therefore, a critical component to successful wellness programs is an executive team who walks the talk.

Jason Boudrie is the Wellness Director at OrthoCarolina, a regional orthopedic practice based in North Carolina. His philosophy: “It really does come back to the adage of probably the past 10 years in wellness programs across the country: without that senior level support, you can only have so much success.”

OrthoCarolina’s wellness program, which began about 10 years ago, was created to help employees take better control of their health. In an interview with Fitbit Health Solutions, Boudrie said:

“We have to practice what we preach. We want our patients to be healthy, and we have to follow suit...As part of the give-back of doing the right thing, we try to encourage [our employees] to be healthier, and we put the tools and resources in their hands to make better decisions.”

Today, the organization’s CEO is also a leading wellness champion, as he sits on various community boards that promote heart health, fitness, and activity. The organization’s leadership team routinely runs in 5Ks and even mud runs.
At nutritional products company Wellnext, the CEO is an avid cyclist, and the company’s VP and director-level leaders understand the impact that wellness has on the direction of the company. Norton Healthcare, a Kentucky-based healthcare system, organizes an annual all-day population health off-site with over 25 executives across the organization. They review data sets, compare wellness program participants to nonparticipants, and identify new opportunities to engage employees.

Emerus, the largest operator of micro-hospitals in the U.S., has unique opportunities when it comes to wellness. Many of their employees are healthcare providers who work in demanding environments across long hours and shifts. They’re in high-stress situations day-to-day and their nutrition and fitness isn’t always top of mind for them. When their human resources team began focusing on wellness, not only were employees aware that they needed to get their health in check, but executive buy-in was integral to ensuring engagement in their program.

Dawn Ammons, founder of a corporate wellness company called Going All In, consults for Emerus, helping to lead their wellness efforts. Having spent her career in the executive suite across marketing and human resources, Ammon emphasizes the importance of C-suite support. She said, “Know your company...know how to engage your employees through their hearts, through the culture, and be able to talk financials with your C-suite. For them, the top three costs aside from labor and costs of goods sold, is benefits. And your benefit load has a lot to do with the health of your employees.”

KEY TAKEAWAY

Think about how you can enable your C-suite to personally connect with your wellness program. Is your CFO an active cyclist? Organize a team spin class and draft an invite for your CFO to send out to employees. Does one of your VPs hit the pavement for a run every morning? Ask her to lead a lunchtime walk.
For instance, many of these employers use fitness wearables as part of their program. And in a 2017 survey from NBGH and Fidelity Investments, 53% of employers have offered subsidies for fitness wearables or are considering it for the future.²

At Medical Mutual, the largest health insurer in Ohio, their corporate wellness program was born from the goal of helping to improve employee happiness and productivity—for both employees and their families. Kate Rawski is the Population Health and Wellness Manager at Medical Mutual. For their program, “Fitbit made sense because it enabled us to see whether there were improvements from [employees’] biometric data as a result of using the device.”

What started as a tool to measure health outcomes became an everyday part of company life. Rawski said, “Now it’s become a culture. We’ve watched those employees grow from only achieving maybe 2,000 steps all the way to 8,000-10,000 steps [per day]. We’re not focused on the number of steps in our organization as we are on that culture of movement. We saw people be sedentary for hours and now they’re up moving for a 15-minute break instead of just sitting there.”

Use technology to simplify and scale your efforts.

One common theme among the Healthiest Employers is their use of technology which enables wellness leaders to scale their efforts, particularly across multiple office locations.
Wake County Government in North Carolina has 3,800 employees, spread out over 860 square miles and more than 80 locations. The human resources team conducted surveys and paid close attention to what employees are looking for in their wellness and benefits programs—which was for these programs to be brought to them.

In other words, Ashley Ann Lategan, Benefits & Wellness Manager, said,

“They want to be able to have wellness at their work locations during their work schedules. So we’re working to identify, how do we do that for them? How do we have an employee health center without walls? How do we engage them through online platforms?”

Facing these challenges, she and her team decided to leverage Fitbit technology to engage their dispersed population.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Consider how you can use technology to scale your efforts. Whether it’s sharing Google Sheets rather than emailing Excel attachments for spreadsheet collaboration, or offering fitness trackers that auto-sync rather than manually logging employees’ physical activity—these opportunities to go hi-tech can save you time and effort.
Consider every employee’s first day as their introduction to wellness.

Day one for any employee can be daunting—they’re busy choosing a health insurance plan, getting to know their new coworkers, setting up meetings, and figuring out which conference room is where.

But this is also the opportunity to engage them in wellness, and get them onboarded right away.

For Garver, an engineering services company based in Arkansas, full-time permanent employees are eligible to join the wellness program from day one. At Baylor College of Medicine, they keep the engagement going by having faculty do presentations on wellness programs throughout the year, a successful program they call “DocTalks.” At California-based CBIZ, wellness starts with the enrollment guide, a 45-page guide which is updated yearly in conjunction with open enrollment.
At OrthoCarolina, the wellness team ensures new employees thoroughly understand their wellness program by onboarding them into the program through several channels. Boudrie’s advice for onboarding new employees: “Regular communication, without a doubt. If staff are up to speed on the program and have a way to ask questions, they’re a lot more likely to be engaged. It’s easy to get lost in how ‘simple’ the program seems to be for us who live it every day, but for new staff, it’s a totally foreign program.”

Boudrie’s team has bi-weekly new employee orientation sessions for new hires. During orientation, he presents a general overview of the wellness program, the requirements, the incentive, and the different opportunities they offer. Following new employee orientation, every new hire gets a Wellness 101 email. Depending on when during the “wellness year” the employee starts, the email outlines what they need to do to get up to speed and compliant with the program, outlines how to log in to the company wellness portal, and includes a program overview of the details.

**KEY TAKEAWAY**

Communicate your wellness and benefits offerings in a simple manner from day one. This could be as simple as including a one-page bulleted list of your offerings in employees’ onboarding package.
In fact, a recent consumer mindset survey from Aon, NBGH and Kantar Futures found that 32% of people feel “the healthcare system and benefits are so difficult and confusing that [they] just give up and hope for the best.” For wellness and benefits leaders, there’s continued opportunity to provide visibility and clarity into how the wellness and benefits programs work.

Among the Healthiest Employers, many offer thorough educational tools across multiple channels—sometimes even healthcare professionals. For instance, **Nabholz Construction** in North Carolina takes a multidisciplinary approach and their wellness department includes a full-time physician, assistant/wellness director, medical doctor, medical assistant, bilingual dietitian, and personal trainer.

**OrthoCarolina** also takes a multifaceted approach to communication. They offer regularly scheduled live and pre-recorded webinars that detail how to navigate and log information in the company portal, how to sign up for lunch and learns, when our on-site classes are held, and more. Additionally, regular “wellness update” emails are sent to all staff that announces upcoming events, “save the dates” for screenings, challenges that are scheduled to start, and more.

**Frequent communication and consistent education are key.**

For employees, understanding their full benefits package can be difficult.
As a financial, benefits and insurance services company, CBIZ has a higher-than-average educated group. Still, the wellness team has struggled with ensuring that employees are well-versed in their health insurance policy. The team now sends regular emails to staff. Called “delete mails,” Deborah Sherman, Director of Compensation & Benefits, says that “These emails are always about [employees’] benefits. We refer to them as ‘delete mails’ because you can read them as you delete them. They’re very brief and they go out every Thursday, about the same time of day. Our goal with education is to make it as simple as we can so employees can easily pick up information about their benefits instead of having to read lengthy SPDs.”

The CBIZ team also goes beyond their enrollment guides for new employees and for open enrollment. The benefits team creates one-page printable documents that are posted to the employee website. Sherman says, “I built this model years ago to make it simple, to better understand what we offer when it comes to your pregnancy, when you need to take a medical leave, when you’re adopting a baby, or when you’re needing preventive services. They’re just one-page printable highlight documents, but they summarize what you need to know to equip yourself when going to your physician for a preventive visit or what you need to know when you become pregnant in terms of taking advantage of our leave benefits, medical plan benefits, flexible plan benefits, etc.”

KEY TAKEAWAY

You don’t need to develop a lengthy education program to help your employees. Try reaching out to your employees across a number of channels such as email, direct mail, and company intranet to communicate when they need to take an action in the benefits program.
Corporate activity challenges really can get people healthier and more active.

Running corporate activity challenges is not uncommon. In fact, the NBGH and Fidelity survey reported that 86% of employers are offering physical activity programs or challenges.
It may come as no surprise that many employers among America’s Healthiest incorporate physical activity, such as corporate challenges, in their wellness programs. Additionally, many of them have executive leadership playing a direct role in these challenges.

At Wake County Government, activity challenges in the wellness program have made a positive impact on company culture. HR Director Angela Crawford noted, “[Employees are] seeing the program is supported by leadership so they can take time while they’re at work and participate. They’re engaging with their co-workers in other departments and divisions that they would have never [connected with] before—and they’re having a good time.”

SAIF Corp, Riverside Healthcare, and New Era Cap regularly engage their executive leadership, who help host walking groups, take the stairs instead of the elevator, and even allow employees to take charge of their well-being during work hours.

Pasco County Schools, a Florida school district with over 10,000 employees, officially started their wellness program in 2014 after a Department of Transportation (DOT) mandate established a blood pressure requirement for its bus drivers. Seeing the clear need to help employees better engage with their healthcare, wellness leaders chose to focus on chronic conditions like diabetes by way of physical activity and nutrition. They began using fitness trackers in their program, to help them track activity during challenges and provide motivation to employees. Asked about the advantages of using wearable technology, Patricia Howard, Senior Manager of Employee Benefits and Risk Management said, “The activity trackers make the program fun and easy for the employees to participate in as they’re much more accurate and comfortable than traditional clip-on pedometers.”

Howard said, “According to the American College of Sports Medicine, moderate physical activity—such as brisk walking—significantly contributes to our longevity by helping to lower blood pressure, control blood sugar, and improve cholesterol levels. Therefore, in support of our district’s mission to continue to increase the health and wellbeing of our employees, Pasco County Schools hosts an annual walking challenge where participants are challenged to reach 500 miles within 16 weeks, equating to about 10,000 steps per day.”

And this activity is paying off. Howard said, “Looking at our numbers from 2017 and 2016, we’ve seen our wellness program as a whole experience decreased risk levels of 33%, 26%, 22% and 16% for systolic blood pressure, diastolic blood pressure, total cholesterol, and blood glucose, respectively.”

**KEY TAKEAWAY**

Consider how you can offer a mix of different physical activity options by running step challenges, active minute challenges (challenges based on the amount of time exercised), or a mix of both.
WANT MORE?

For additional information about the 100 Healthiest Employers in America, including the full list of recognized employers and what makes them different, download the 2017 report from Springbuk.

To learn more about how Fitbit Health Solutions can help you develop successful programs, create engaging challenges, and improve employee health, contact us at healthsolutions.fitbit.com.

References

1 Integrated Benefits Institute (IBI), 2016. “CFOs - Ready to Invest in Healthy Outcomes.” https://ibiweb.org/?ACT=65&id=tXzdIgpsFVTvP9VW7-kanTrQATrBiyR29sqaD2yTShKz0yi_sBY7RY5OsPlYPLfmyhq0dZyT632TSRL5WFgw

