

DEAR WORKFORCE

How Does Wellness Affect the Bottom Line?

We are planning a program next year to focus on health and wellness as a key strategic element of our economic growth. Is there any conclusive evidence to support the idea that wellness produces a direct financial gain?

—*Health-Conscious, clinical director, health care, Cleveland*

A: **Dear Health-Conscious:**

A great deal of evidence demonstrates that health and wellness yield significant financial gains. Here is a sampling of conclusions drawn from a wide range of credible global research:

- “Employers get a good return on investment from health; for every US\$1, [invested] up to US\$6 back.” *World Health Organization*
- “When health and well-being are promoted, organizations are seen as 2.5 times more likely to be a best performer and 4 times less likely to lose talent within the next year.” *World Economic Forum*
- “An organization [that actively promotes wellness] is 3.5 times more likely to encourage creativity and innovation among employees, who are 8 times more likely to be engaged in what they do.” *World Economic Forum*

Even a company that dispassionately views employees purely as “assets” would logically want to invest in wellness, just as they invest in maintaining their physical plant and equipment. Like well-maintained machinery, healthy people perform better and cost less.

Direct medical expenses are but the tip of the iceberg when it comes to what poor health actually costs your company. The World Economic Forum estimates that medical payments total less than 40 percent when compared to the productivity losses that organizations suffer from employee absenteeism and “presenteeism”—people who are well enough to show up for work, but not able to perform at full capacity.

Healthy employees are more present, more attentive, more energetic and more focused. Of course, if you have healthy people working in an unhealthy company, the environment will soon undermine the benefits of your wellness initiatives. Global research conducted by Healthy Companies International over two decades suggests that a “healthy” company is one in which healthy leaders build healthy cultures that inspire healthy people to drive healthy performance.

Healthy leaders are healthy not only in the physical sense, but also emotionally, spiritually, socially and intellectually.

Healthy culture unites people around a higher purpose and promotes freedom, self-discipline and responsibility.

Healthy people are agile, optimistic, curious, collaborative and self-motivated.

Healthy performance fits classic business definitions, e.g., sustained profitable growth. Healthy companies achieve healthy performance by intrinsically valuing the health of their leaders, culture and people.

In sum, if your goal is economic growth, you want to invest strategically in the wellness of individual employees and in the health of your organization.

SOURCE: Stephen Parker, President, Healthy Companies International, Arlington, Virginia

LEARN MORE: In light of recent research, it may be more vital than ever that companies nurture a culture of wellness.

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