

Wellness initiatives will become increasingly important as competition for staff strengthens. **Rosalyn Jack** explains how to launch one in your organisation

HOW TO... IMPLEMENT A WELLNESS STRATEGY

Wellness management is a hot topic on the HR agenda. As competition for staff heightens amid unprecedented demographic changes, there will be a corresponding increase in the number of organisations aspiring to be an employer of choice. The smart ones will recognise the added value of “wellness” and its capacity to enhance corporate success at a relatively low cost.

In its simplest sense, wellness concerns an individual’s state of physical and mental health. An organisation that genuinely embraces the importance of wellness will have a continuing and proactive concern for the entire workforce (and not focus solely on sickness absence). These organisations will be well positioned to respond to the

question, “how well are our people?” in a way that enables fundamental improvements to working life and the business.

We have long been accustomed to the more reactive models of care, such as occupational health and employee assistance programmes. But wellness tools and techniques aim to make proactive interventions leading to more effective coping strategies. This is achieved in part through the completion of a personal profile, its analysis and feedback tailored to the individual. Heightened self-awareness and increased choice and control when coping with potential stressors can empower an employee quite considerably.

A wellness review conducted at a corporate level will span your entire people

processes and practices. This level of intervention presents the greatest challenge. But working within this paradigm has the potential to offer rich and fresh insights into your organisation, thereby making a greater contribution to your HR strategy.

1 CLARIFY YOUR VISION

A vital first step is to revisit organisational aims and objectives – and, in particular, your aspirations for the workforce.

Armed with this information, consider where you wish to centre your efforts. To what extent do you wish to embrace wellness? Are you looking to promote healthier lifestyles within your organisation or are you looking more holistically at wellness management – not a product, but a way of managing people that implies a comprehensive review of your existing people practices.

Consider the business case. Studies indicate that the UK will face the dual demographic challenges of a decline in birth rates and the approach of the post-war, baby-boom generation to retirement. Competition to recruit with “youth appeal” will be crucial, as will flexing the workforce to retain the skills and expertise of the older generation. These changes will seriously challenge traditional working life

REAPING THE BENEFITS

Investing in the health and well-being of your workforce can reap significant benefits, such as:

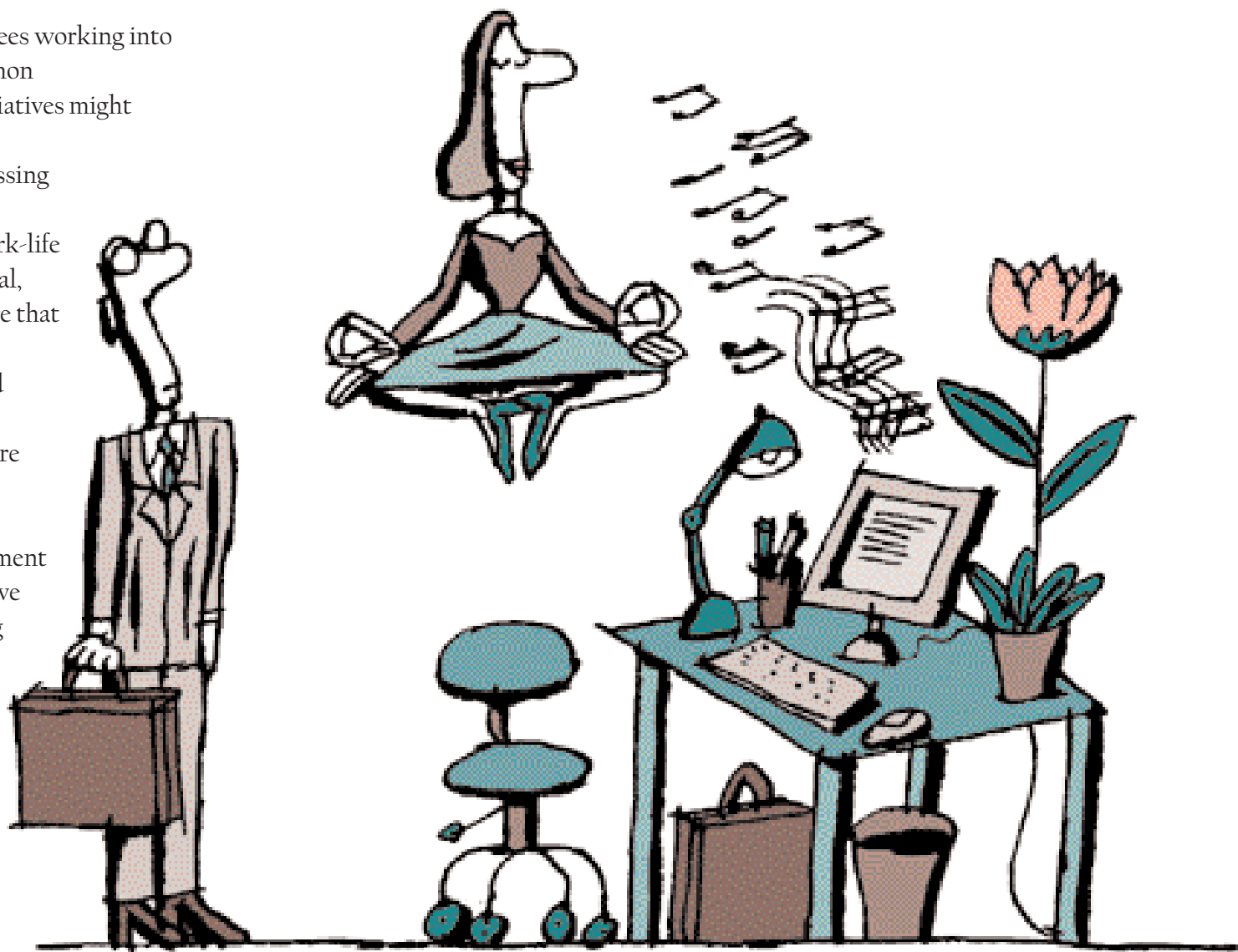
- Reduced sickness/absenteeism
- Stress reduction
- Increased motivation and individual commitment
- More effective work-life balance
- Greater employee satisfaction
- Improved recruitment and retention
- Better corporate performance
- Enhanced employer image
- Increased profitability

as we know it, with employees working into their 70s being a more common phenomenon. Wellness initiatives might therefore be a necessity.

In addition, we are witnessing fundamental changes to the psychological contract. Work-life balance is seen as an essential, rather than desirable, feature that distinguishes one potential employer from another. And juggling life's demands and working longer requires more effective interventions to stress-proof staff.

Finally, wellness management programmes can also improve your profitability – working on the belief that a healthier workforce is more productive.

There are many benefits, but defining what you want to achieve from a wellness initiative will help to inform your strategy and subsequent plans of action.



2 GAIN TOP-LEVEL COMMITMENT

Getting your chief executive and senior business partners on board right from the outset is essential. Present them with a sound business case that clearly identifies the value of this investment. Given the right tools to measure individual and organisation wellness, such as individual profiling, it is possible to implement low-cost, high-impact interventions that support employee's wellness at all levels.

3 INVOLVE YOUR STAFF

Invariably, staff are the best critics of what will or won't work in an organisation. If your strategy is genuinely one of empowerment, then you will want to involve them from the outset – you are looking for their commitment too. Ensure they are fully consulted and have the opportunity to get involved. This isn't a case of being "done unto" or paternalism in the workplace, but the reality is, for some staff, it may even be a turn off; respect their views too.

4 PILOT WELLNESS TOOLS


There are an increasing number of wellness management tools on the market. Make sure these are the right ones for your organisation. Ensure initiatives are user friendly – not overly complex or time consuming. You are looking for the simplest and most accurate tool to generate common sense solutions. Pilot these among different staff groups and services so you get a good cross-section for evaluation; this will inform future action. Seriously consider buying in expertise to conduct and analyse individual profiles and offer feedback from a qualified coach.

5 CREATE HR PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

"Return on investment" and "added value" are terms increasingly familiar to HR as it is held to account for the impact of HR-related actions. With this in mind, it is important that you have developed a set of robust indicators against which to measure the benefits of wellness initiatives and their contribution to corporate goals. You are looking for a mix of quantitative and qualitative data that may

include turnover, absenteeism, employee satisfaction, etc. For example, you could incorporate wellness into staff opinion surveys. Implement robust systems: you want to continually review performance so you can modify your actions accordingly.

6 BE REALISTIC

Your wellness intervention won't save the world but it will increase the range and scope of resources available to your staff. Some individuals will already possess good coping strategies, others will wish to develop them and some won't want to know. But a positive experience shared by a colleague may be enough for them to give it a whirl. And at a time when there is a national obsession with lifestyle, looks and diet, the time could be riper than you think! 

THE EXPERT

Rosalyn Jack is associate director of human resources at Portsmouth City Teaching Primary Care Trust, which is currently developing wellness management initiatives. She can be contacted on 023 9289 4375 or email rosalyn.jack@ports.nhs.uk