

Four Steps To Boost Wellness Program Engagement

Wellness programs succeed when people engage. Driving that engagement, though, can sometimes look like starting a dance party with one person.

That's the metaphor John McMahon, Director of Client Experience at the Well-Being Index, gave in his recent webinar presentation titled "How to Build a Foundation of Trust in Your Organization," [available in full here](#).

Below are actionable steps based on McMahon's talk.

STEP 1: GENERATE TRUST IN SMALL GESTURES

In 2017, Michael C. Bush said, "[The root of the tree is trust](#)," when discussing the cultivation of great workplaces. As with any great tree, trust's seeds are small. As small as one or two words, even.

Two starting points:  use people's names  use pronouns like "we" and "us" instead of "they" and "them"

Why does this work?

Seeing a department holistically requires knowledge of its individual parts. Each person depends on other people in the unit. Seeing how our healthcare professionals exist in the context of their team and entire organization helps make the ingredients and conditions for unity and well-being clear.

This was borne out in a 2020 study, [The Impact of COVID-19 on Primary Care Teamwork](#), where Dr. Erin Sullivan and her colleagues found that efficiency combined with teambuilding drivers led to the best outcomes.

STEP 2: CULTIVATE THE EMPATHY ADVANTAGE

Honest and empathic communication regarding your organization's wellness program starts by considering how you say what you say. Communicate that you see the situation from your teams' perspectives for greater buy-in.

Our [State of Well-Being 2023-2024 Report](#) tells us that a common theme among physicians at risk of burnout is metrics demands. This is a situation that requires an empathetic gaze. To clinicians, metrics that take time away from patient care means time away from their mission, which leads to distress.



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STEP 3: EMBRACE TRANSPARENCY, SEEK CHANGE

You can only listen with empathy if there is a place for people to be heard. In McMahon's talk, he outlined the clear need to include staff from the start of a wellness initiative.

Make sure everyone knows their job in the wellness plan. The person in charge of stewarding well-being should be easily identified. Methods of suggesting feedback needs to be clear. And that should continue all the way up the chain of command at your organization.

[A study of Brigham and Women's Hospital](#) during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic found that regular town hall meetings attended by appropriate administrators "broadened reach throughout the department and supported messages about transparency and approachability of leadership."

Making change means setting an example. In his talk, McMahon [emphasizes](#) that this is a place where it is essential to "be the change you want to see." Avoid the 'checking-the-box' trap. Engage your teams, empower them to help find solutions whenever they can.

People will see the results of well-being-centric actions and follow suit.

STEP 4: BASE YOUR PROGRAM ON VALIDATED TOOLS

If the root of your wellness tree is trust, the data your program is built from needs to be reliable, and the method for employee feedback must be anonymous. That makes a validated tool, like the Well-Being Index, essential.

A validated tool can also help make even large organizations feel manageable. CommonSpirit Health Arizona Division's organization is too large to allow for the wellness committee to work directly with staff. Utilizing validated tools has made it possible to empower department leaders and managers across the country.

As Dr. Keith Frey, Chief Medical Officer of CommonSpirit Health Arizona Division [says in our case study](#), "I couldn't personally reach out to 5,000 doctors. Knowing this, I switched our focus to educating the physician leaders within our organization. The data we could retrieve from the Well-Being Index proved immensely helpful in leading conversations with these leaders and arming them with the evidence to continue the discussions with their staff. Their goal was to keep this topic top-of-mind and continue to build a culture of support."



For longer thoughts on the subject, we invite you to view McMahon's speech directly, at the [Well-Being Index website](#).