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How to Create a Culture of Organizational Well-Being

by Jennifer Robison

When executives do this right, they help their organizations thrive

Individual well-being, employee engagement, and a culture of well-being link to important organizational outcomes, such as productivity, health, and employee retention. These factors complement and affect one another in ways that leaders, managers, and organizations can influence.

Managers should be aware of their own engagement and well-being.

So says a recent Gallup study that explored relationships among individual well-being, employee engagement, and a well-being culture over time. The study asked more than 5,000 full-time workers in the U.S. questions about their engagement, well-being, and workplace, then resurveyed them using the same questions about a year later. "We wanted to understand how the elements of well-being, engagement, and culture complement and influence each other," says Jim Harter, Ph.D., Gallup's chief scientist of workplace management and well-being.

The study also revealed:

- Individual well-being had an effect on future employee engagement and changes in employee engagement. "If people had higher well-being in year one, they would tend to have higher engagement in year two and a more positive change in engagement in year

two," Harter says. "People that have high individual well-being are more likely to see their workplace as positive, productive, and engaging. Conversely, if they are struggling or suffering, it rubs off on the workplace and the team."

- Employee engagement in year one affected future well-being culture and well-being culture change. "When you have an engaging team, you're more likely to have an open and trusting culture," Harter says. "That encourages people to talk openly about well-being in ways that positively influence each other's well-being."
- These positive changes in individual well-being and employee engagement fed further improvements in well-being and engagement, completing a healthy organizational cycle.

The Three Types of Employees

1

ENGAGED employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.

2

NOT-ENGAGED employees are essentially "checked out." They're sleepwalking through their workday, putting time -- but not energy or passion -- into their work.

3

ACTIVELY DISENGAGED employees aren't just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish.

How managers can promote well-being and employee engagement

So here's how managers can keep engagement alive in year one and year two (and in years three, four, and beyond):

- **Be aware of their own engagement and well-being.** As the research shows, there's a strong connection between well-being and engagement, and that applies to managers as well as their employees. For example, employees may not be aware of all the well-being opportunities a company offers, but a manager who discusses and promotes them can encourage his employees to get involved in well-being activities. This reflects a powerful cascade effect from managers to employees, Harter says: "When managers care about their well-being, their team members take a greater interest in their own well-being."
- **Give employees a platform to recognize the actions they're taking to improve their well-being and engagement.** "A lot of studies are showing that change happens because of our social environment," Harter says. "Norms are shared in a way that's contagious, and companies and managers can help set those norms. But the team will carry them forward."

Employees who are engaged and thriving also have greater agility and resilience. "When people are engaged and have thriving well-being, their life situations don't weigh them down and keep them from performing," Harter says. "They see changes as opportunities, not problems." That's a constructive perspective, and managers who promote it by encouraging well-being and engagement will help their companies reap the benefits in year one and beyond.

The Five Essential Elements of Well-Being

For more than 50 years, Gallup scientists have been exploring the demands of a life well-lived. More recently, in partnership with leading economists, psychologists, and other acclaimed scientists, Gallup has uncovered the common elements of well-being that transcend countries and cultures. This research revealed the universal elements of well-being that differentiate a thriving life from one spent suffering. They represent five broad categories that are essential to most people:

- **Career Well-Being**: how you occupy your time -- or simply liking what you do every day
- **Social Well-Being**: having strong relationships and love in your life
- **Financial Well-Being**: effectively managing your economic life
- **Physical Well-Being**: having good health and enough energy to get things done on a daily basis
- **Community Well-Being**: the sense of engagement you have with the area where you live

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