# 5 Takeaways from Study on Integrating Worker Wellbeing and Safety



The concept of integrated health and safety, that is, the blending of wellness and safety programs to enhance overall worker wellbeing and prevent work-related injuries and illnesses, has been gaining momentum. The idea is that a true culture of health and safety is dependent on not only a strong safety program, but also a program that focuses on worker wellbeing, including both mental and physical health.

The Campbell Institute conducted a research study on worker wellbeing programs at Institute participant organizations. Researchers interviewed nine organizations on the development, implementation and lessons learned from their workplace wellbeing and safety initiatives.

The Institute's white paper outlines the successes and challenges these organizations experienced when developing and maintaining their wellbeing programs. It also addresses other issues, such as the difficulty in calculating a return on investment for wellbeing programs, and some of the barriers to truly integrating health and wellbeing with occupational safety.

The five key takeaways from the research are:

1. **Pilot health and wellbeing programs with stakeholder input.** When starting health and wellbeing programs,

Campbell Institute participants began by piloting key aspects of their programs at select locations before rolling out the whole program to the entire company. They also recommend gathering input and support from employees and leaders to get a better understanding of what they would like to see in a company wellbeing program. You can gather stakeholder input through focus groups and town halls; one-on-one interviews; surveys; and roundtable discussions.

2. **Craft good communication.** Research participants agree that good communication is key to maintaining effective and engaging employee wellbeing programs. Such communication could take multiple forms, including:

   - Piggybacking on existing company safety communications, such as adding a tip on health and wellbeing in periodic email newsletters;
   - Holding quarterly campaigns that focus on specific health topics that are timely and/or relevant;
   - Sending monthly updates to raise awareness of different health topics and encourage employees to be proactive about their health;
   - Enlisting employees to serve as ambassadors of the company health and wellbeing program and to communicate the program's importance and benefits; and
   - Gathering testimonials from employees to create posters and other messaging to convey how well the health initiatives are working.

3. **Experiment with incentive structures.** Another piece of advice from the research participants was to experiment with incentive structures to find one that works best for your employee population. Finding the right balance of 'carrots' and 'sticks' to maximize worker participation and achieve optimal results isn't easy, but it is something that Campbell Institute participants have and continue to test.

4. **Engage employees through organized activities.** The research participants found that organizing frequent fitness/wellness competitions was an effective way to keep employees engaged with health and wellbeing programming. For example, one company holds an annual Fat Out Challenge, which was started by an individual site and has since expanded to more locations. Another offers both team-based and individual fitness competitions for their employees, while one organization offered over thirty sports competitions or run/walk events at their various facilities. In addition to internal activities, you can encourage or help employees participate in outside competitions, such as local 5Ks.
5. **Connect wellbeing to safety.** Research participants recognized the importance of better connecting wellbeing to safety. Although the departments responsible for managing safety and wellbeing may be separate in an organizational chart, Campbell member organizations found ways to informally connect them by communicating to employees that being physically and mentally well enables a person to perform work better and safer. An analogy they use is that being proactive about your health is similar to performing preventive maintenance on machinery'both allow workers to read trends and keep up with changes so there are no surprises or catastrophes down the line.

Certain programs like medical monitoring programs may begin purely as safety initiatives, but develop overt ties to wellness. And one company's metapostures program, which teaches employees to stretch in ways to strengthen muscles and lubricate joints, is one way that it has connected safety with health from an ergonomic perspective.

For more on integrating wellness and safety, see:

- A guide to implement a successful workplace health promotion program

- How to integrate wellness into your OHS program
- Why your wellness and OHS programs should work together.