



Pizza parties don't cut it

I recently chanced upon reports detailing the inane number of activities companies are organising for their staff in the name of promoting the wellness factor. These businesses showcase how much they care and are doing in the name of wellness, and their impact on employees' "happiness index".

As I thought about the why's and how's, I wonder if companies are choosing the simpler option of treating symptoms with some basic assumptions as opposed to diving deeper into the root cause of employee well-being?

My chats with colleagues around the proverbial water cooler normally centre on their health, ie their blood pressure and cholesterol stats (mine is higher than yours kinda' banter), and how many steps they achieve daily. This made me wonder if more yoga sessions or healthier snacks in the pantry or even another month of wellness lecture series that we are too busy to attend are really what we need?

I was fortunate enough to meet an ENT (ear, nose and throat) specialist concerning this topic. He is working on identifying the root cause of common health and behavioural problems in children and its progression into adulthood if not treated.

We talked about research that was published as early as 1909 and the book, *Breath*, by journalist James Nestor, linking the root causes to breathing dysfunctions, especially mouth breathing. I also learnt how you breathe affects how much oxygen goes to your organs including your brain and how that impacts one's overall health and cognitive function.

In the course of my work, doing a root cause analysis (RCA) after an IT system deployment is standard protocol and critical. This got me thinking about applying the RCA to wellness in the workplace.

Blame the pandemic

Covid-19, and the resultant shock to life as we know it, brought into focus



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■ Despite world moving on post-Covid, fear of instability has lingered

■ Making wellness a foundation of our work culture could be vitamin required to reverse talent shortage

how businesses thrive in a stable ecosystem.

However, when one lever stops working, this stable ecosystem that we have grown accustomed to, crumbles – leaving many without a reliable source of

income and sense of the future.

Despite the world picking up the pieces and moving on, I feel that the fear of instability has lingered.

According to Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2023 Report, 44% of staff worldwide said they experienced record high stress levels today. This revelation was found to be true for the second year in a row.

In 2020, it was likely due to the pandemic, but in 2021, the report still showed that "worry", "anger" and "sadness" had maintained above pre-pandemic levels, while stress continued to climb to new highs.

While considering the topic of mental well-being, it is wise to question if the pandemic essentially gave people the permission to be open and real about this topic, something which makes us Asians uncomfortable.

A case for treating the cause, not symptoms

The workspace has become an all-encompassing environment where staff spend their most productive hours in a day with their teams. This is where the implication of not dealing with wellness concerns can hugely impact everyone around them.

It doesn't take a genius to deduce that poor health leads to low energy and mood disorder, which negatively affect work culture and productivity.

Leaders may convince themselves these conditions can be dumped at HR to drum up a set of reactive activities. But the fact remains that the workplace requires full engagement and enthusiasm of those who work alongside you to achieve business results.

I certainly do not have all the answers to solving the deep and personal issues every staff may have, but there are a few core things leaders can

do to create a healthy workplace. The easy part is ticking the compliance boxes of rewards and bonuses, pizza parties and staff retreats.

Going beyond the cookie-cutter wellness initiatives that treat symptoms, at the root I believe people need:

- Sense of purpose and belonging. We may think it is cliché to say work colleagues are family, but a genuine sense of acceptance and kinship can go a long way, especially between a supervisor and co-workers' relationships, when it comes to people working together.

- Leadership and stability. In the current rage of start-ups, it may feel sexy to be working out of a garage, but this quickly runs afoul if employees do not feel the business is stable. A business that is stable not only reflects clear leadership, but gives a secure space for employees to go the extra mile to plan and thrive.

- Opportunities for growth and development. People want to be part of a culture where they are recognised and rewarded for their grit, actions and behaviours. To be part of a culture where people are comfortable to share how they feel and think. To be part of a culture that allows you to have a bad day. To be part of a culture that allows you to grieve. To be part of a culture where well-being is integrated within the design of work.

So here's the thing, it's safe to say as business leaders, we can't solve the world's problems. But what we can do is make it just a little easier for the people who work with us.

As the year draws to a close, it's important to reflect on our business performance and whether our employees are satisfied and happy. Making wellness a foundation of our work culture could just be the vitamin required to reverse the talent shortage we face in the workplace.

Perhaps what we need is for corporations to start treating wellness as a key element in an organisation's strategic approach to business. After all, behind every great company is its people.

I wish you a Happy and Prosperous 2024!