



Employee health contributes to organizational health

By **Dr. Jay Bhatt**

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The commitment to employee health and well-being should start in the C-suite

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Illustration by Matt Lennert Sources: Getty Images/PM Images, Adobe Stock/Paul Prescott

We've all seen the headlines: Job satisfaction and employee productivity levels are plummeting while cases of burnout and absenteeism are skyrocketing.¹ Employee mental health is declining, and work/life integration is far from balanced. With 4.5 million Americans walking away from their jobs in March alone, the so-called Great Resignation isn't showing signs of slowing.² In many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic sounded an alarm on employee health and well-being, and it's time we heed the warning.

Issues of this magnitude generally go straight to the top. According to the winter 2022 edition of the *Fortune/Deloitte* CEO survey—which gathered the perspectives of 175 leading CEOs representing more than 15 industries—nearly 50% of chief executives identified talent-related issues such as “finding/keeping the best people” and “responding to new work paradigms” as some of the biggest challenges their organizations face.³ When asked to describe 2022 in one word, an equal number of CEOs said “hopeful” and “uncertain.”

To counterbalance the uncertainty, business leaders should shore up their strategic priorities, and improving employee health and well-being ought to top the list. After all, the health of your organization sits squarely on the health and well-being of its biggest asset: your employees.

Match benefits to employees' (true) needs so they can bring their best selves to work

Expanding workplace benefits and programs to meet the needs of today's employees can give many organizations a competitive edge. And the list of how to stand out is long, from personalizing wellness programs and improving work culture to helping employees succeed at healthy work/life integration. However, it's not enough to offer great benefits: You should help your employees navigate them. In fact, according to an Employee Benefit Resource Institute survey, just 34% of employees understand their benefits “very well.”⁴

The trouble is that there's a disconnect between how employers and employees assess employee well-being—and what can be done to improve it, according to a recent survey of 2,100 employees and C-level executives conducted by Deloitte's CEO Program in collaboration with research firm Workplace Intelligence.⁵ For example, while nearly nine out of 10 executives view their employees' physical well-being as “good” or “excellent,” just two-thirds of employees have a similar view. Leaders should consider revamping offerings to meet employees' preferences and listening to their changing needs to uncover ways to help them thrive.

Here's how many of today's leaders are bringing a new lens to employee well-being: Employers are going the extra mile by supporting employees who take time off to get preventive and routine screenings or participate in a clinical trial.⁶ They're creating inclusive environments and helping employees feel valued and celebrated.⁷ And they're thinking of new services for employees who have limited access to safe housing, transportation, and child care services.⁸

How can employers help increase their employees' financial security—which research has shown can directly impact employee well-being—beyond their standard compensation and benefits packages?⁹ Consider looking at your employee communications

around retirement savings, for example: Some employees might not be contributing to the 401(k) because they can't afford to, while others might not understand how to access the benefit.¹⁰

It's also about making a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Many employers are learning that small language tweaks can help make their benefits and programs more inclusive across the board.¹¹ For example, parental leave language can be inclusive of same-sex and nonbiological parents by using gender-neutral phrases such as “primary caregiver” and “secondary caregiver.”

Support your employees on the road to better health—and reap the returns

Healthy employees typically have a better quality of life overall: reduced risk of illness, disease, and injury; lower stress levels; and improved mindset. But it's not a one-way street: Healthy employees can reward their employers with more productivity, fewer sick days, and more organizational and community engagement.¹² So how can employers infuse more opportunities to boost wellness?

In general, if you look at data about employees who use wellness programs, they're healthier overall than the employees who don't participate.¹³ And when employers explore why employees aren't engaging, they may find it's a child care issue, or maybe the program is prohibitive because it requires travel across town. For employers, the trick is to start by solving the common problems likely standing in the way of better employee health—and build from there.

It's important that employers address all facets of their employees' well-being. That might mean instituting recognition programs, mental health days, and community volunteer activities; or helping to ensure that employees have a sustainable work/life integration by offering hybrid work environments (when appropriate), health coaching, and onsite trails for lunchtime walks. With the rise in remote workers, employers might find value in establishing rewards programs for gym visits or participating in an online cycle class to help offsite employees create healthy habits.


With many of the pandemic's workplace impacts likely here to stay, it's time to put employee health and well-being at the top of the C-suite's strategic agenda. What might you do differently with your strategies, policies, and programs if employees' health and well-being were primary decision-making criteria? Do you have the data and analytics to identify gaps and opportunities to improve employee health and well-being? Have you sought employees' input on what's working and what isn't to overcome barriers to better health and help boost morale?

The organizations that figure out how to address the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional needs of their employees—alongside their commitment to health equity and sustainability—could see higher workforce retention rates, better employee health outcomes, and a boost in productivity.¹⁴ But the biggest rewards come from the potential to put your employees, their families, and their communities on a path to better health. ●



Dr. Jay Bhatt
jaybhatt@deloitte.com

Dr. Jay Bhatt is executive director of the US-based Deloitte Center for Health Solutions and the Deloitte Health Equity Institute.

 Access more insights on health equity at www.deloitte.com/insights/health-care-equity-steps

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Investing in creative potential

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The end note: The shifting balance between health, safety, and financial concerns

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The shifting balance between health, safety, and financial concerns

Some research and insights have a short shelf life, while others continue to gain color and context. In each issue of Deloitte Insights Magazine, we look back on research we published and ideas we pitched, and evaluate whether they've stood the test of time.

By **Stephen Rogers**

Managing director of Deloitte's Consumer Industry Center



What we said then

“In the span of a few months, what started as a global health crisis morphed into an economic one as well. It's been more than a century since the world has seen these two forces so intertwined. We do not expect to see a return to normal, or even a new normal, until total concern descends from its elevated level and financial concerns overtake those of immediate health and safety.”

In the throes of a dual-front crisis: Establishing the road to a global consumer recovery, Deloitte Insights, April 2020.

What we say now

We're still in a dual-front crisis, according to the Deloitte Global State of the Consumer Tracker. However, after lagging behind for the better part of two years, financial stress is now overpowering health and safety concerns as the primary determinant of consumers' decision-making by quite a strong margin.

Following omicron, global pandemic anxiety subsided dramatically among the 23,000 respondents across 23 countries who participated in our monthly consumer survey. Consumers' perceived safety of doing everyday things like going to the store quickly reached two-year highs, and it continues to improve with each passing month.¹

At the same time, record inflation continued unabated, exacerbated by geopolitical conflict. And with government stimulus programs no longer around to help consumers make ends meet, financial sentiment metrics have begun flashing warning signals. Globally, financial anxiety is high—as is concern around inflation, and consumers' level of savings and credit card debt.² In some countries, including the United States, China, and England, discretionary spending intentions are weakening.³

In many ways, consumer businesses face similar challenges compared to early pandemic days. They still need the agility to respond to rapidly changing consumer behavior. And few can predict the extent of the financial headwinds that lie ahead.

Even as the pandemic gradually fades, many companies are finding that prepandemic financial and forecasting models no longer work. The “new normal” remains elusive. ●


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CONTACT

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