



# Building Work Environments that Engage

By Terri Howard

A company's workforce is its most valuable asset, and employee morale, engagement, and productivity often form the glue that holds a business together. According to a recent white paper by Towers Watson<sup>1</sup>, 44 percent of health care employees are capable, caring, and ready to be engaged, but they don't feel motivated by company executives. It's an alarming statistic that prompts many HR leaders to ask: How can we better inspire employees?

## Healthy and Happy

Engaged employees maintain a healthy balance between work and life. Human resource leaders can hone this balance by providing support structures like wellness initiatives and Employee Assistance Programs. The combination of resources not only can improve employee well-being and productivity, it also can help companies reduce health claims costs.

The 2010 Stress in America study, completed by the American Psychological Association, shows that workplaces are a major cause of stress for many people<sup>2</sup>. The study also indicates that

poor stress management can lead to a decline in health. Effective wellness programs focus on employees' physical *and* mental health. Consider including components like:

- Individual care advisors: By assigning personal care advisors for employees, a solid relationship can be built between the two, allowing for more effective care
- HRAs and incentives: Employees who improve on their health risk assessments are offered incentives, encouraging an active, health-conscious lifestyle and diet
- Onsite screenings: Having health screenings for employees on site reduces disruption in their work day, thus increasing productivity and comfort for the employees.

It's also important to find the right mix of wellness tactics for a particular employee population. What works well for a small team of medical office managers might not work for a large hospital system. A Wellness ROI (Return on Investment) Calculator allows human resource leaders to test different combinations before launching a wellness program. Companies input data about their employee populations into the tool and calculate expected engagement levels based on a variety of budgets and tactical approaches.

In addition to wellness strategies, hospitals should also implement Employee Assistance Programs, which offer real-time support for everything from financial concerns to personal struggles, to care needs for children and elderly parents. Skilled counselors can provide a listening ear, a quick connection to needed resources, and a helpline for employees facing dangerous situations at work or at home. They help reduce distraction and provide peace of mind on the job.

## Battling Bad Manners

In *The Cost of Bad Behavior: How Incivility is Damaging Your Business and What To Do About It*, business authors Christine Porath and Christine Pearson suggest that rude workplace behavior actually costs significant dollars in reduced productivity<sup>3</sup>.

When employees are mistreated, or witness co-workers being mistreated, they lose concentration and focus. While the extreme acts of workplace violence make the headlines, it may in fact be a simple lack of good manners that actually inhibits employee adoption of many business strategies.

Executives and managers must lead by example. When it comes to issues of civility, people treat others as they are treated, or as they see others being treated. Interactions between management and employees are the best indicator of whether or not a culture of civility is maintained.



