



W E L L N E S S   C O U N C I L   O F   A M E R I C A   P R E S E N T S

**WELCOA's 7 Benchmarks**  
Benchmark #1: Capturing Senior Level Support

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# A New Way Of Thinking

Examining Strategies For Gaining Leadership  
Support For Health Promotion

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By Judd Allen, PhD and David Hunnicutt, PhD

## ABOUT WELCOA



The Wellness Council of America (WELCOA) was established as a national not-for-profit organization in the mid 1980s through the efforts of a number of forward-thinking business and health leaders. Drawing on the vision originally set forth by William Kizer, Sr., Chairman Emeritus of Central States Indemnity, and WELCOA founding Directors that included Dr. Louis Sullivan, former Secretary of Health and Human Services, and Warren Buffett, Chairman of Berkshire Hathaway, WELCOA has helped influence the face of workplace wellness in the U.S.

Today, WELCOA has become one of the most respected resources for workplace wellness in America. With a membership in excess of 5,000 organizations, WELCOA is dedicated to improving the health and well-being of all working Americans. Located in America's heartland, WELCOA makes its national headquarters in one of America's healthiest business communities—Omaha, NE. Check out our website at [welcoa.org](http://welcoa.org).

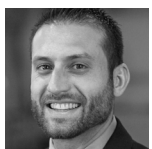
## ABOUT WELCOA'S CEO, DAVID HUNNICUTT PHD



Since his arrival at WELCOA in 1995, David has interviewed hundreds of the most influential business and health leaders in America. Known for his ability to make complex issues easier to understand, David has a proven track record of asking the right questions and getting straight answers. As a result of his efforts, David's expert interviews have been widely-published and read by workplace wellness practitioners across the country.

David Hunnicutt can be reached at [dhunnicutt@welcoa.org](mailto:dhunnicutt@welcoa.org).

## ABOUT WELCOA'S PRESIDENT, RYAN PICARELLA MS, SPHR



As WELCOA's new President, Ryan brings immense knowledge and insight from his career that spans over a decade in the health and wellness industry. He is a national speaker, healthcare consultant, and has designed and executed award winning wellness programs. Known for his innovative and pragmatic approach to worksite wellness, Ryan looks forward to furthering the WELCOA mission and vision and continuing to position the organization for success for the future.

Ryan Picarella can be reached at [rpicarella@welcoa.org](mailto:rpicarella@welcoa.org).



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*Suggested citation for this article:* Allen, J.; Hunnicutt, D. (2006). *A New Way Of Thinking*. WELCOA's *Absolute Advantage Magazine*, 6(2), 14-17.

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### Introduction

Ask the typical health promotion practitioner what their senior level leadership's attitude toward wellness is, and you'll likely get a variety of responses. While some practitioners may be fortunate enough to enjoy strong senior level support for their wellness efforts, many others may feel that senior level leadership is opposed to their efforts—maybe even a little bit suspicious of health promotion's role in the overall business plan.

Perhaps it's their relative lack of corporate power that has caused some health promotion professionals to feel that they are beggars at the banquet. An archival study of health promotion professionals and senior managers found that health promotion professionals consistently overestimated the importance of economic factors in management choices about health promotion programs. Many of us assume that management is unsympathetic and skeptical of our goals, that all they care about is the bottom line, and that we have to constantly prove that health promotion is good for business.

Of course there's often truth in that view. Some managers do lack enthusiasm for the full range of health promotion goals. Some managers do think only in terms of numbers, and fail to make the connection between the wellness of their employees

and the health of the business. But, the fact is, most managers aren't against health promotion. They're supportive and aware that wellness is inherently valuable and important. But they aren't experts in our field—that's our job. Managers need our assistance to imagine the possibilities, to comprehend the value, to understand the research, and most of all, to develop their roles as wellness leaders. Knowing this, we would be wise to embrace a new model for securing senior leadership support for health promotion programming. Instead of treating all leaders as unsympathetic to health promotion, wellness professionals need to tailor their approach to the attitudes of managers—ultimately moving leaders through their own "Stages of Change" toward a more supportive position on health promotion.

### A New Model For Thinking About Leadership Support

In reality, leadership support for wellness spans a continuum ranging from those who are actively opposed, to those who openly champion the benefits of improved health and well-being (see **Figure 1** on the next page). Of course, the majority of our senior leadership falls somewhere in the middle of this continuum. Some are quietly opposed to organizational

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wellness efforts, many are neutral, and some leaders believe in the power of wellness but simply don't vocalize their views.

According to organizational culture change guru Dr. Judd Allen, the above-mentioned continuum is divided into the following five categories. Each category is outlined below, and strategies for interacting with leaders in each sector are identified.

### Category #1: Active Opposition

These managers speak out against wellness programs, challenging their worth and even sabotaging their implementation. While only 5% of leaders fit this profile, these individuals can be particularly devastating for health promotion programs.

Strategy for interacting with this type of leader. Don't antagonize these leaders by arguing with them. Not only can it be a waste of time, but it's also never wise to poke the bear with a stick. Listen carefully to leaders who are actively opposed to wellness, allowing them to voice their suspicions. Most importantly, don't take their comments personally. Using this approach may help the leader remember you as being sensible and straightforward if and when they change their attitude about wellness.

### Category #2: Quiet Opposition

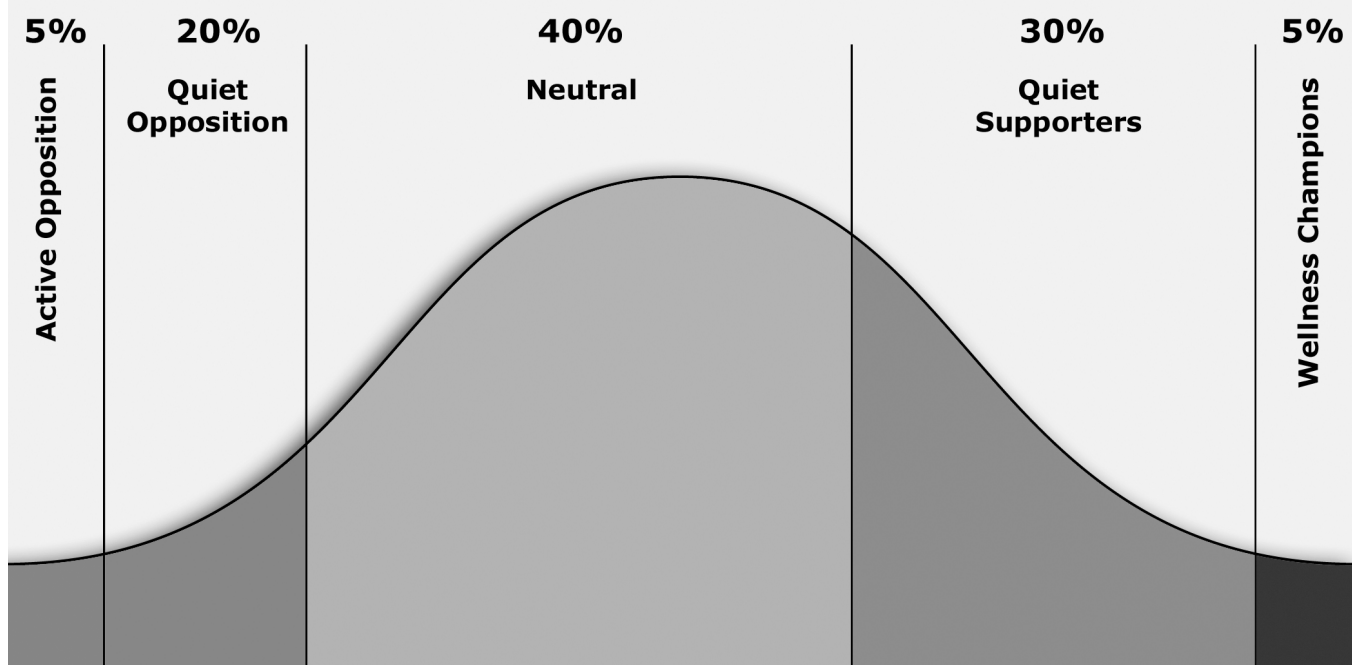
Managers in this group may think that wellness activities are a waste of time. They may communicate their lack of support non-verbally by not participating in events or by only doing the absolute minimum that's required by senior management. This group likely makes up about 20% of managers.

Strategy for interacting with this type of leader. Like the strategy for approaching those leaders who are actively opposed to wellness, approach quiet opposition with a listening ear. The main difference in your approach between quiet and active opposition is that it may be worth your time to begin selling this second group on the power of health promotion. Don't oversell, but find out if this group views anything in health promotion as being positive, and then build your comments around this knowledge. Patience is key with this group.

### Category #3: Neutral

Other priorities preoccupy this group. They don't feel strongly about wellness one way or the other, or they're not sure that programs can really make a difference. These managers simply go through the motions, concentrating all the while on moving on to other things. About 40% of managers fall into this group.

**Figure 1:** Continuum of senior level support for wellness initiatives.



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Strategy for interacting with this type of leader. Oftentimes, leaders in this group simply need a little push. These leaders are ready to be exposed to the benefits of wellness. Try using statistics and case studies to demonstrate how wellness can benefit the organization. The largest group along the wellness continuum, a slight positive shift among these individuals can make a big difference.

### Category #4: Quiet Supporters

These leaders understand the value of increased health and well-being, but often don't know how they can contribute to growing the health promotion program. These leaders support worksite wellness in theory and show up for events, but fall short of actively campaigning for wellness. Approximately 30% of senior leaders fall into this category.

Strategy for interacting with this type of leader. It's usually not necessary to try to convince this group about the value of wellness. Instead, show them how they can get involved. Let this group know they don't have to be "health nuts" to help the program succeed. Also, try pairing them up with wellness champions at events in hopes that the champion's attitude will rub off on them.

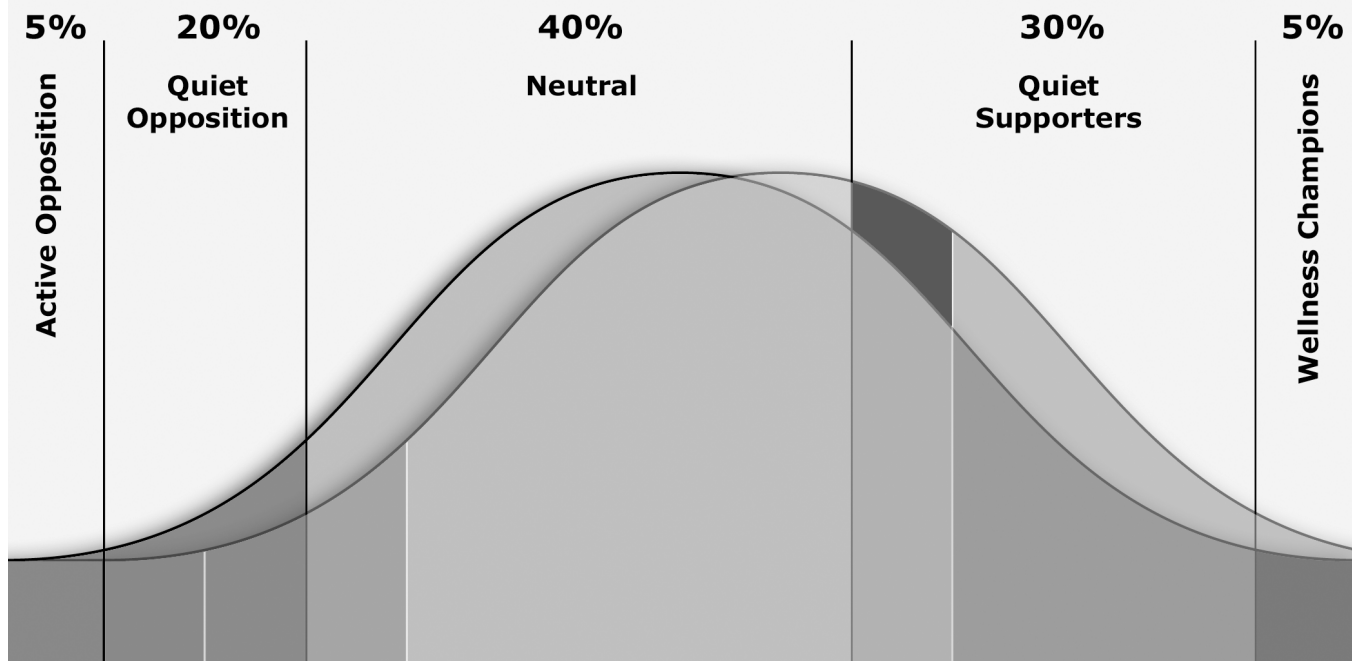
### Category #5: Wellness Champions

These leaders are your core supporters. They understand the human and financial benefits of health promotion and educate other managers and employees about the importance of living a healthy lifestyle. These leaders even adopt healthier lifestyles for themselves and encourage others by recognizing their successes. 5% of leaders fall into this category.

Strategy for interacting with this type of leader. Above all, protect these leaders—they're vital to the success of your health promotion program. Recognize them, celebrate them, and encourage them. Let them know that you appreciate them, and that they are part of a movement within the company. Ask them to help you spread the word on wellness, and keep them informed on new developments in the field—they'll appreciate it.

Understanding and embracing the model presented in this article can go a long way towards gaining senior leadership support for your wellness program. Remember, like employees attempting to change negative health behaviors, senior leadership can be moved through the "Stages of Change" towards a more positive view of health promotion efforts. It's up to you to identify where your leaders fall, and give them a gentle nudge. ★

**Key Idea:** A 5% shift across the values continuum towards support of wellness (represented in blue) could cause a wellness revolution.



# WELCOA's 7 Benchmarks | Benchmark #1: Capturing Senior Level Support

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### Wellness Leadership Survey

**1. What position best describes your attitude toward health promotion?**

- I am enthusiastic about health promotion and actively promote it at the workplace.
- I am enthusiastic about health promotion, but do not actively contribute to our workplace health promotion effort.
- I am neutral about whether or not we should have a health promotion program here.
- I am opposed to health promotion, but I am not actively working to stop health promotion programs.
- I am opposed to health promotion and I am doing what I can to stop health promotion programs at the workplace.

The following questions ask your opinion about management culture at your workplace. In "The Current Situation" column, fill in the circle that represents your level of agreement that the behavior is currently normal practice among managers and supervisors you work with. In "The Way You Would Like It To Be" column, fill in the circle that indicates your level of agreement that the behavior is desirable.

There are no right or wrong answers. Please select the answer that seems most accurate to you. Use the following scale.

**STRONGLY DISAGREE**      **DISAGREE**      **UNDECIDED/DON'T KNOW**      **AGREE**      **STRONGLY AGREE**  
 ①                                      ②                                      ③                                      ④                                      ⑤

| It is normal practice among managers and supervisors to...   | The Current Situation | The Way You Would Like It To Be |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2. Be able to explain the overall vision and functions of the health promotion program.  | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 3. Recognize how supporting employee health supports the mission and purpose of the organization.  | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 4. Recognize both financial and human benefits of health promotion at the workplace.   | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 5. See to it that employees are kept informed about health promotion programs.   | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 6. Explain to new employees, to customers and to the public that the wellness program is an important benefit of the organizational culture. | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 7. Suggest new wellness initiatives that would enhance the health promotion program.   | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 8. Model healthy lifestyle choices.  | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 9. Tell about past and current personal efforts to adopt healthier lifestyle practices.  | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 10. Participate in health promotion activities.  | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 11. Support participation in health promotion activities by allowing flexible work schedules.  | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 12. Participate in health promotion planning efforts.  | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 13. See to it that health promotion programs are of high quality.  | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 14. Set organizational health promotion goals.   | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 15. See to it that there is adequate financial and logistical support for wellness programs.   | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 16. Follow through on commitments made to the wellness initiative.   | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 17. Be open to discussing employee lifestyle improvement goals and plans.  | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 18. Stay informed about employee lifestyle improvement efforts.  | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 19. Recognize employees' attempts to adopt healthier lifestyles.   | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 20. Track the benefits of health promotion programs.   | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 21. Celebrate employees' lifestyle change successes.   | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |
| 22. Celebrate the achievement of organizational health goals (such as reduced absenteeism, disability claims, and accident rates).           | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤             | ① ② ③ ④ ⑤                       |

Online data entry, statistical analysis and recommendations based on Wellness Leadership Survey findings are available at [healthyculture.com](http://healthyculture.com). For further information call 802-862-8855.

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