

**WELCOA's 7 Benchmarks**

Benchmark #2: Creating A Cohesive Wellness Team

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# The 10 Secrets Of Successful Worksite Wellness Teams

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By David Hunnicutt, PhD



WELCOA (The Wellness Council of America) is one of the nation's most-respected resources for building high-performing, healthy workplaces. Over its 25+ year history, WELCOA has perfected its patented Well Workplace protocol which is the key to developing, delivering, and sustaining a healthy corporate culture. Whether you are a workplace wellness practitioner, human resources professional, business leader, or consultant/broker, WELCOA's tools, trainings, and resources will help you better promote organizational well-being and, at the same time, contain escalating health care costs.

## **THE MISSION**

Transforming organizations into high-performing cultures by improving the health and well-being of their employees.

## **FAST FACTS**

- » WELCOA was founded 30 years ago as a resource for building and sustaining results-oriented workplace wellness programs.
- » The WELCOA Nation is the largest network of health promotion professionals in the world made up of over 5,000 Member organizations, 30,000 subscribers and followers, and millions of employees around the globe.
- » More than 1,000 organizations have achieved WELCOA's Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum or Small Business Well Workplace Award status.
- » WELCOA has certified over 1,500 health promotion professionals in all 50 states and 5 countries.

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### Benchmark #2: Creating A Cohesive Wellness Team



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## Introduction

When it comes to building results-oriented wellness programs, teams are a big part of the equation. In fact, teams comprise the second critical benchmark of success in the Well Workplace process. In this article, we'll share the 10 secrets of successful worksite wellness teams.

But before revealing these 10 secrets, it's important to discuss why teams are such an important part of the worksite wellness equation.

## Built To Last

Several years ago, James Collins and Jerry Porras authored a best-selling business book entitled, *Built To Last*. In their book, Collins and Porras studied the characteristics of companies that enjoyed long histories—some more than 100 years. Interestingly, one of the key factors in companies that were literally “built to last,” was a reliance on teams rather than on individuals. Collins and Porras referred to the phenomenon of investing in teams rather than individuals as clock building versus time telling.

According to Collins and Porras, “Having a great idea, or being a charismatic visionary leader is ‘time telling’; building a company that can prosper far beyond the presence of any single leader and through multiple product lifecycles is ‘clock building.’”

Not surprisingly, we found that teams are also a critical part of the longevity factor in results-oriented worksite wellness programs. After studying successful wellness initiatives for the last 20 years, there's no question that the great ones rely heavily on teams.

## Secret #1: Team Members Are Formally Appointed

The first secret of successful worksite wellness teams is that team members are formally appointed to serve. This is in stark contrast to the idea that wellness teams are largely comprised of eager volunteers. Formal appointment most often occurs by the CEO or another senior executive. By formally appointing individuals, it is clear that the team is important and that members have definite roles and responsibilities.



Regular promotion of the wellness team is critical as it gives team members a sense of importance in that their roles are made known to the organization at large. This helps not only in keeping present members engaged, but also creating a desirable profile for others so that they may aspire to one day be appointed to this team.

To be sure, this type of appointment makes it clear that wellness is a key part of the strategic functioning of the organization and that those who serve are charged with overseeing the health and well-being of the employee population—despite any other priorities which may emerge. Indeed, when a company's wellness team is made up of volunteers, the wellness program can often fall to the wayside when other “more pressing” matters boil up. By formally appointing wellness team members this will never be the case.

It's also worth mentioning that while most people who are appointed to the wellness team are excited and eager to serve in this vital capacity, it's important to understand that this is not always the case. Indeed, it has been our experience that formal appointment sometimes means recruiting individuals who most likely would not have come forth voluntarily. Nevertheless, formal appointment is the first secret of any successful worksite wellness team.

## Secret #2: Team Members Have Wellness Written Into Their Job Description

In addition to formal appointment, the second secret of successful wellness teams is that their members have

health promotion responsibilities written into their job descriptions. In so doing, there is nothing left up to chance. Too many times, employee health and well-being falls to a lower priority when urgent organizational matters present themselves. We believe this should not be the case. In fact, we feel strongly that when pressing organizational matters emerge, employee health and wellness should still remain a fundamental priority for the organization.

For example, we have heard a number of horror stories where companies went through turbulent waters and, as a result, the wellness program was jettisoned. But isn't this the time that wellness is most needed within an organization? By having wellness responsibilities written into a team member's job description, there will be no possibility for confusion as to what the priority is at the individual or organizational level.

Please don't misunderstand the intent here. Our experience has been that successful wellness teams have members who have health promotion as a part of their job description. We are not implying that wellness team members need to have full-time responsibilities for wellness. They should however, have some part of their time allocated to protecting the health and well-being of the organization's most valuable asset.

## Secret #3: The Wellness Team Is Promoted Throughout The Organization

The third secret of successful worksite wellness teams is that the group as a unit is widely promoted throughout the organization. This is important for several reasons. First, by promoting the wellness team, all employees will see that worksite wellness is an organizational priority—so much so that a team of people has been appointed to address this topic.

The second reason is so that employees will see that these individuals are there to help, support, and assist them—not identify the unhealthy so that they can be terminated. Effective promotion of the team ensures not only who serves, but what approaches the team is taking to advance health within the organization.

Finally, regular promotion of the wellness team is critical as it gives team members a sense of importance in that their roles are made known to the organization at large. This helps not only in keeping present members engaged, but also creating a desirable profile for others so that they may aspire to one day be appointed to this team.

By regularly and effectively promoting the wellness team, organizations can take enormous strides in ensuring that team members feel important and, at the same time, employees at all levels support and believe in the group's efforts.

## Secret #4: The Wellness Team Has Strong Leadership

The fourth secret of successful wellness teams is strong leadership. In fact, in many instances, the quality of the team leader is often the key ingredient in creating a healthy and functional team. Specifically, strong leadership is characterized by vision, energy, altruism, a spirit of inclusiveness, and a desire to help others.

Believe it or not, when it comes to developing an organizational wellness team, this is one ingredient that is routinely overlooked. In fact, we have witnessed serious struggles within organizations when leadership was not clearly established from the start. However, once this

element was put into place, the team was able to work effectively and cohesively.

When looking for a team leader, it is important to note that the individual doesn't necessarily have to have a background in health. They must, however, be able to establish an agenda, manage a variety of different personalities, define priorities, meet goals and deadlines, motivate others, and communicate effectively with all of the organization's constituents.

## Secret #5: The Wellness Team Includes People From Different Areas And Levels

The fifth secret of successful worksite wellness teams is diversity. By diversity, we mean that the team includes people from many different areas and levels throughout the organization. For example, it is important to have formal representation from core strategic areas such as human resources, benefits, safety, occupational health, finance, information systems, operations, and organized labor just to mention a few. To further encourage broader representation, many companies are choosing to include their insurance providers and benefits administrators as well.

In addition to having broad representation from various areas throughout the organization, it is also necessary to have individuals at all levels participate in wellness team functions. In fact, one of the biggest mistakes organizations make when it comes to wellness teams is that they only include executives from the upper echelon. In so doing, it creates an "us vs. them" impression whereby frontline employees think that wellness is only something reserved for the organization's elite.

To counter this impression, it is vital that individuals from all levels be chosen to participate in wellness team functions. This means that frontline employees and senior executives will be seated next to each other as co-members of the organization's wellness team. Oh, and by the way, it's essential not to exclude middle managers as they are generally the catalyst to adoption.

It is also worth mentioning that it's generally not a requirement that all members of the team be in perfect health. By including individuals of different health status,

the organization takes important steps toward embracing individuals at all levels of the wellness continuum.

Before closing out this secret, we should take an opportunity to address a commonly asked question: “How big should the wellness team be?” Interestingly, there is no right answer to this question. However, we recommend that the wellness team be big enough to be representative of the organization as a whole, but small enough to be manageable. Specifically for large companies, it’s not uncommon to have wellness teams that range in size from 14-20. In smaller companies, four to seven will usually suffice.

### Secret #6: The Wellness Team Meets Regularly

The sixth secret of successful worksite wellness teams is that they meet regularly. By regularly we mean monthly or bi-monthly. However, as the wellness imperative grows within an organization, it is not uncommon for teams to meet every other week. Although there is no set timeframe that

will determine overall success, it has been our experience that teams that meet less than monthly generally have agendas that aren’t urgent and priorities that don’t get accomplished.

An interesting observation that has emerged in monitoring successful wellness teams is the reality that cohesive and well-functioning teams definitely have a rhythm. And this rhythm is established and nurtured through regular face-to-face meetings. Certainly it is unreasonable to think that every team member will make it to every meeting. However, it is not unreasonable to think that the vast majority of team members will take part—especially if it’s written into their job descriptions.

### Secret #7: The Wellness Team Has A Formal Agenda

The seventh secret of successful worksite wellness teams is that they have formal agendas which drive their meetings. Plain and simple, agendas focus and clarify the group’s

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collective consciousness. Without an agenda, the team will struggle at some point in their existence and, more likely than not, team members will lose interest.

When establishing an agenda, it is important to make sure that all members of the team are at some point meaningfully involved in the execution of it. Without routine and regular involvement from all members, the team will struggle and could ultimately get sidetracked with personnel issues.

To be effective, the agenda should be developed well in advance of the upcoming meeting and circulated to each member ahead of time. This will allow team members to have time to review, prepare and think through each item before coming together.

Make no mistake; developing an agenda for each meeting is a critical part of the overall success of a results-oriented wellness team. And, by meeting regularly, agendas can be brief and manageable rather than bogged down with dozens of items and not enough time to get through them.

## Secret #8: The Wellness Team Keeps Minutes

The eighth secret of successful worksite wellness teams is that they keep meeting minutes. To many, taking and managing minutes from the meeting often seems like a nuisance task. However, thoughtful minutes will be extremely useful to record and monitor the team's activity and progress.

Meeting minutes should be circulated shortly after the conclusion of the meeting, and also should be representative of what happened during the team's time together. To be even more effective, some companies will send out the meeting minutes with the agenda for the next session.

In addition to providing a useful record of the team's progress, meeting minutes will be essential in the event of team turnover. In fact, without meeting minutes, new members will struggle to discern the team's position on wellness and its immediate and long-term priorities.

## Secret #9: The Wellness Team Communicates Frequently

The ninth secret of successful worksite wellness teams is that they communicate frequently. Remember, if established appropriately, the wellness team is the epicenter of health within the organization. By communicating frequently, the wellness team has a unique opportunity to educate and inform the rest of the organization about their health and the specific individual and company-wide priorities that surround this initiative.

Initially, it is not uncommon for wellness teams to spend time developing and communicating the organization's overall wellness philosophy. In addition, the team must communicate specific information as to how each and every employee can get involved. Many times teams overlook this basic approach to communication. In so doing, they severely underestimate what it takes for people to embrace wellness within the organization. And without proper communication, the overall acceptance rate for wellness within the organization will remain low.

To counter this, successful wellness teams communicate frequently.

## Secret #10: The Wellness Team Participates In Continuing Education

The final secret of successful worksite wellness teams is that they participate in continuing education. Because team

members come from many areas of the organization, it is important to think about a continuing education agenda. This agenda will ensure that team members are sufficiently educated with respect to worksite wellness and employee health improvement.

Ten years ago, this was a nightmare for existing wellness teams because continuing education opportunities did not exist. Today, much has changed, and continuing education opportunities are plentiful. Specifically, continuing education opportunities can take the form of guest experts who present to team members. This is both a cost-efficient approach to continuing education and a great way to keep the wellness team meetings fresh and different.

In addition to in-service presentations, wellness teams can also attend conferences. Conferences may be local, regional, or national, and may encompass half-days, full-days, or multiple days. With the advancements in telecommunications, many teams have contracted with national experts to deliver important content via the phone

and/or Internet—the learning takes place in the comfort of their own facilities.

It's also not uncommon for team members to receive subscriptions to wellness publications that can help them advance their understanding of workplace health and productivity management.

Whatever the form, it's critical that teams establish a learning agenda for all of their members if they expect to be successful.

## The 10 Secrets

Worksite wellness initiatives can improve health and contain costs. However, in order to be effective, health and productivity management initiatives need to be built properly. At the core of the process is the idea of developing a cohesive team. By implementing the 10 suggestions highlighted in this article, you will take important strides to building a best-in-class wellness program. ★



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