



SOCIAL

Improving health outcomes through social connections

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Social connectedness

The subjective experience of feeling close to others and having a sense of belonging with others, are crucial to both physical and mental health. According to a recent Gallup survey, adults employed full-time report working an average of 47 hours per week ... or nearly six days a week! When so much time is spent in the workplace, why aren't employers doing more to build communities and social outlets to facilitate overall health in the workplace?

The impact

Many existing well-being programs negate the impact of social interactions and how they can promote positive health and business outcomes. Frankly, they're missing the mark. Just how much? According to research cited by the National Business Group on Health, people who are socially connected at work:

- Have higher overall well-being
- Are seven times more likely to be engaged in their jobs
- Are better at engaging customers
- Produce higher quality work
- Are less likely to get injured on the job

The opposite is true for those who do not engage in social opportunities in the workplace. A 2010 meta review of 148 studies found that people who felt less socially connected were at greater risk for early death than those who smoked, drank or were obese.

Traditional programs tend to focus solely on preventive screenings, exercise and nutrition. Other programs just follow the latest "fads" and focus solely on the individual

and the individual experience rather than the collective, e.g., their ability to deploy 1:1 challenges even when the science tells us this doesn't work.

So, what can employers do to foster an environment that promotes social wellness?

A recent Employee Benefit Plan Review article offered several suggestions for organizations to positively grow their social offerings. Some of these include:

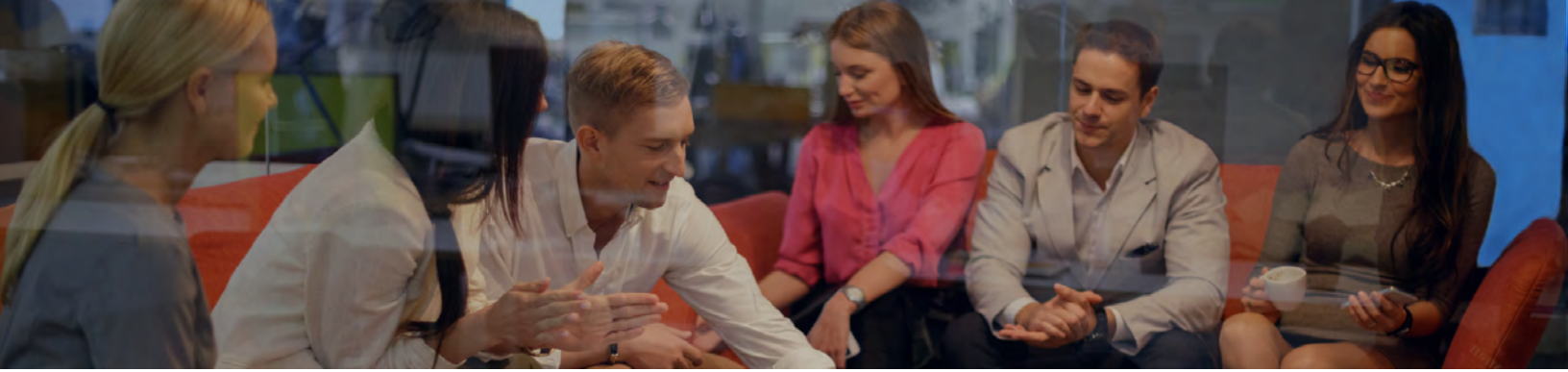
- Celebrate milestone markers such as company anniversaries and birthdays.
- Make time to share achievements and challenges.
- Provide an employee social network, where employees can work together, ask questions and ask for help from other employees.
- Promote all aspects of diversity to create a culture of social acceptance and an opportunity for all opinions to be heard and valued.
- Look to foster relationships between the organization and the community. Broaden the scope of social connectedness to outside the workplace and involve employees and their family members, and everyone will benefit.

Where Vitality comes in

With an emphasis on the science and evidence, Vitality deploys several strategies that tap into what truly works best to leverage the impact social networks can have on all facets of health. Here are some of our best practices:

Promoting healthy, fun competitions in the workplace

When executed properly, challenges are a fun way to tap into everyone's competitive spirit and are a great igniter for participation in a wide range of activities designed for behavioral change. Challenges should always be structured in a team format with a minimum of two people per team. In order to maximize the impact of the challenge, it is integral that a variety of influential people are dispersed amongst teams to encourage active participation by all.



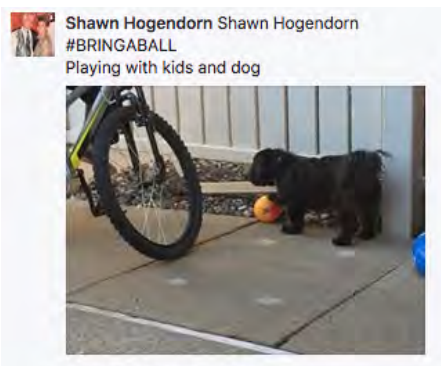
Appointing a team captain is another engagement strategy best practice. Champs and C-suite executives make the best captains—who doesn't want to beat their CEO in a steps challenge?

Additionally, Vitality's challenge platform uses several social components to encourage sustained engagement, including discussion walls, leaderboards, and even customized social profiles.

Engaging members where they already are

Using existing social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube has been critical to Vitality's success at engaging members socially. In fact, sometimes it is better not to reinvent the wheel but to make what already exists work for you. In addition to sharing content including recipes, advice, inspirational quotes and even program updates, Vitality actively encourages members to ask questions, share their own journeys and motivate each other. We've found that the key to engagement success has been keeping campaigns fresh and lively. This past year, engagement on our Facebook page doubled in 2017. Some examples of what we've done include:

Hashtag campaigns



Whether members are sharing #HealthySelfie photos, #BringABall posts or #LiveYourStory testimonials, Vitality hosts a wide variety of hashtag campaigns on social media to elicit ongoing excitement and engagement.

We've found small prizes as incentives can go a long way toward encouraging participation, but once you've developed a group of "influencers" on your page, they're not even necessary. Engaging campaigns and the opportunity for people to interact with each other is sufficient at creating participation.

Facebook groups

Vitality's Virtual Training Club on Facebook is a forum for more than 800 Vitality members across geographies, industries and companies who've banded together to support one another on their personal health journeys, offer each other tips, or even engage like-minded folks in a little friendly competition. While moderated by the Vitality social team, the majority of the comments and posts come directly from our members.

Video contests, social media takeovers

Invite your employees to submit their own health and wellness videos. These shouldn't be fancy—shot on a phone—and should be only a couple of minutes in length. Or, do you have champs or employees who serve as wellness program advocates? Invite them to administer your social pages whether on a specific day or on an ongoing basis. Champs are a terrific resource to use.

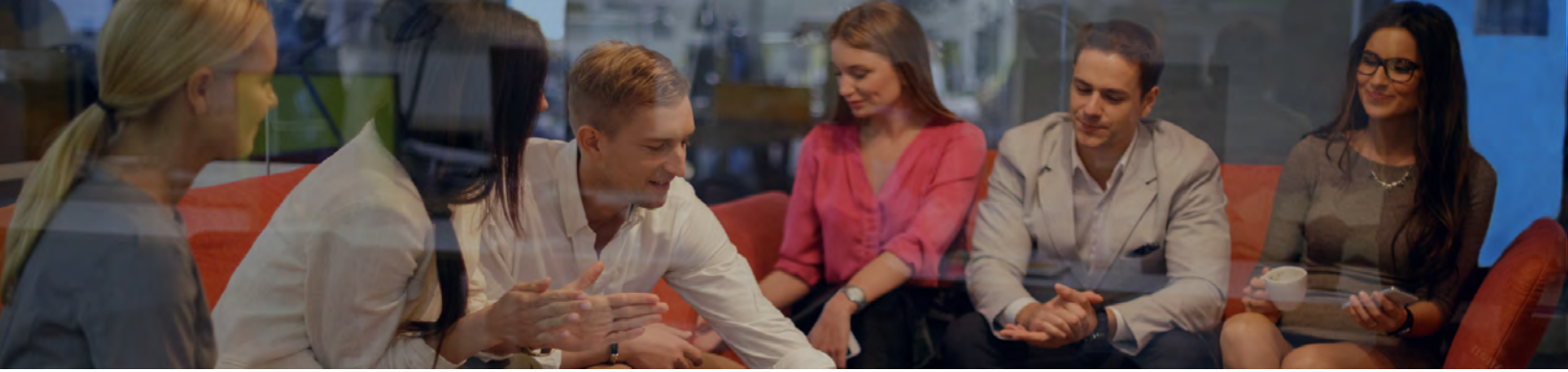
Driving engagement to the platform

Similar to a Facebook feed, Vitality hosts a newsfeed available on the mobile and desktop versions of Power of Vitality to provide members with the latest and greatest news and content from Vitality and their employers. The newsfeed is ranked in the top five program components members engage with on the Vitality Today™ mobile app.

Hosting interactive webcast series

Approximately 50,000 Vitality members have participated in Vitality's live monthly Health FYI webcasts. These extremely popular webcasts features speakers and topics that range from improving one's financial fitness to fostering good sleep habits to setting achievable goals. These webcasts often feature members sharing their wellness successes and encourage participants to share their victories. Our members consistently report (#25 out of a list of 132 features) that these webcasts are what they like best about the Vitality program.

Few things motivate people like other motivated people. Adding social interaction and collaboration to health promotion through team challenges and social interaction is a win-win for everyone and provides new ways to encourage employees to get – and stay – on the healthy habit bandwagon!



REFERENCES

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