

MASTER PRACTITIONER SERIES

WELL-BEING PROGRAM DESIGN

A comprehensive guide to designing an engaging, evidence-based well-being program that gets results!

Propel[®]



Follow a proven framework to design a program that is customized to your organization to meet your outcomes goals.



Learn how to customize and integrate proven engagement strategies.



Learn how to define, measure and report key metrics that will guide your program's progress toward your desired outcomes.



Learn how to avoid the most common mistakes that keep programs from being effective.

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Designing an Engaging Well-being Program that Gets Results

Research consistently shows a strong link between employee well-being and employee performance. When employees are physically and mentally healthy, they are better equipped to handle daily tasks, decisions, workplace challenges, and workload. Employees who feel supported in their well-being needs are more engaged, more motivated, and more consistently satisfied with their job.

Research demonstrates that these positive feelings about well-being directly translate into improved productivity, better job performance, and increased retention rates. Developing an engaging well-being program that can produce such results requires effort using evidence-based best practices and the right tools. Ultimately, the key is to develop a program that inspires people to *want* to build and maintain healthy habits.

This how-to guide is intended to provide an easy to follow, step-by-step framework for creating an engaging well-being program that is customized to your organization and *will* get positive results.

Our work in the well-being industry over the last two decades has shown us that no two organizational well-being programs are alike. The purpose of this eBook is to provide a comprehensive strategy that *could* be implemented as a whole to get tangible results, however we know that the vast majority of readers will take smaller pieces from these strategies to use in their programming.

For the well-being professional with a program in place, we invite you to examine the strategy recommendations here and find pieces of the framework that you could implement into your existing strategy. You may find that some of the recommendations in this book work well for giving you an extra nudge out of a homeostatic program that isn't yielding the results you're looking for.

If you haven't yet put a well-being program in place (or you are in the early stages), we hope this resource will serve as a guide to fast track your well-being program planning and execution.

This eBook also comes with five downloadable resources:

- A Framework to Define and Measure Engagement Metrics
- Employee Well-being Satisfaction Survey Template
- How to Use Health Claims Data in Well-being Program Design
- Well-being Champion Application Form Template
- Well-being Champion Email Invitation Template

Make sure to download these resources in tandem with reading this eBook to get the most out of this guide!

Part I: The Framework

Step 1: Evaluate where you are today.

Following is an outline of the program-design framework that we will discuss in detail throughout this guide. This will serve as a foundation for the engagement strategies we discuss in part two. This is the critical triage/diagnosis step. What is the data telling us? What are the trends?

Review claims data

This includes claim frequency, cost per claim, cost by claimant, size of claim, and types of claims.

The research is clear: approximately 75% of medical costs are due to mostly preventable conditions. That's good news because it means most health care costs are based on lifestyle choices. And lifestyle is where we will focus our efforts in designing and executing our program.

The goal here is to analyze the data to identify prevalent health conditions within your employee population that will then be used to design targeted well-being program interventions and programs that address those specific needs. These inventions will incorporate elements like health screenings, education initiatives, and lifestyle modification strategies based on the most common risk factors revealed by the claims data.

*If you are uncertain about how to best analyze this data or determine what data is most useful, review the **How to Use Claims Data in Well-being Program Design** downloadable resource.*

Review any health-condition data

This includes, for example, results from biometric screenings. You want to know what are the highest risks? What are the trends? This type of data is often more valuable than claims data because it tells us where the risks are of lifestyle behaviors becoming claims. In other words, we can view this data as a map for what well-being topics/behaviors should be prioritized in our program design.

Review employee survey data

Satisfaction surveys fall into this category. If you do not already have an employee survey, develop one that includes core well-being questions and capture the data as soon as possible. ***We have provided a sample employee satisfaction survey that you can download.***

Survey data is often tremendously valuable as an early warning indicator. Quality survey questions tailored to your organization can reveal important information about both individual well-being strengths and weaknesses as well as the strengths and weaknesses of your organization's well-being culture.

Review turnover data.

Review exit interviews, statements from management, online company-review sites (e.g., Glassdoor), etc. for insights into why employees are leaving; such data can influence well-being program design decisions. Work-life balance, life satisfaction, career development and other well-being program strategies can impact turnover in very positive ways.

Review absenteeism data and, if available, productivity data.

Negative absenteeism/presenteeism data is often correlated with poor employee well-being. Understanding trends informs well-being program design.

Review safety data.

While safety is well-being adjacent, the two are often strongly correlated. Unsafe behaviors (resulting in employee suffering and organizational costs) are often found in organizations with poor employee well-being. Given that safety initiatives can easily be integrated into your overall well-being programming, safety data should be considered in your data analysis.[\[1\]](#)

Step 2: Establish a clear vision for where you want to go.

Before assembling your new or revised well-being program, consider developing a vision statement. The point of a vision statement is to define the aspirations of the program. The central theme and self-imposed mandate that will guide decision-making, align efforts across stakeholders and help prioritize initiatives. Without a clearly articulated vision, decisions about your well-being program can be more difficult and can result in conflicting priorities.

How to develop a vision statement.

While many (perhaps most) well-being programs do not have a stated vision, there is real value in developing one, both for the program design/direction as well as for the employees to understand the program motives. Considering the fact that many employees mistakenly believe that a company well-being program is an effort to extract personal information about them, (that they perceive is potentially to their detriment), any opportunity to dispel this myth should be welcomed. Consider this vision statement: *Deliver reliable, proven tools, resources and initiatives that will help our employees and their families improve their overall well-being.* If this vision is well communicated to the employee population and the program delivers on the vision's promises, once-skeptical employees are more likely to trust the program and engage in its initiatives.

Your vision might be broadly stated as the above example demonstrates or, it might be more specifically focused on the workplace as captured in this example: *Design and engage workplace initiatives that will result in a culture of well-being and a healthier employee population.* A program with this vision will likely prioritize workplace initiatives that involve group/team/company initiatives. This helps clarify program design and resource allocation for the program management team.

Your vision statement does not need to be a grand literary masterpiece. Simply identify what is truly important to the organization, why the well-being program is important (what problem do you want it to solve) and at a high level, how the program will accomplish those goals.

Step 3: Establish concrete annual and quarterly goals with metrics that will inform progress.

Set SMART goals.

One of the toughest challenges for a well-being program manager is to know whether the program they have designed and are managing is effective. But it doesn't need to be! The key is to take the time to develop SMART metrics for your program. Goals should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-based:

- **Specific:** Make sure your goal is clear and well defined.
- **Measurable:** Have a way to measure success.
- **Achievable:** Ensure your goal is challenging, yet achievable.
- **Relevant:** Make certain it is relevant to the overall vision for your program.
- **Time-based:** Your metrics should have a clearly articulated timeframe for completion. Set quarterly goals or benchmarks so that, if they are achieved you will hit your annual success metrics. This allows you to determine where to make adjustments during the program year to keep the program on track.

Embed commitment.

Goal commitment will be most prevalent when goal achievement is included in individual and corporate OKRs (Objective and Key Results) and performance reviews.

Be Creative.

Organizations should consider creative ways to enhance goal-commitment and achievement (e.g., team-based well-being goals).[2]

Step 4: Define the steps that will get you from where you are now to each quarterly and annual milestone.

When we arrive at this step, we've completed the triage and diagnosis, now it's time for the prescription.

Motivate registration

Most organizations use registration rates as their core program success metric. This is understandable as without registering, you generally can't participate and benefit from the programming offered. It's also an understandable metric because it is so easy to measure. However—and you know this already—registration does not equal engagement. For your well-being program to have an impact, your population must engage. The challenge, of course, is knowing exactly how much engagement is enough to have an impact and how to measure that engagement. But never fear! This guide takes a step-by-step approach to defining and measuring engagement that works for your organization.

Based on your quarterly and annual goals, design clear, concrete initiatives to inspire engagement.

To achieve the best results, focus on a few initiatives that are well-structured, easy to understand and easy to engage in. Many organizations make the mistake of trying to do too much in hopes of appealing to everyone in one way or another. The problem with this effort is that it dilutes your program, makes it complicated and confusing. A few, well-designed and well-communicated initiatives will achieve more.

There are many potential initiatives to choose from when designing your engagement strategy. The following—which we discuss in detail in the Engagement Strategy section of this guide—are examples of highly effective initiatives that are among those utilized by well-designed programs:

- **Challenges**
- **Custom incentive program design**
- **Team initiatives**
- **Well-being champions programming**
- **Social-engagement initiatives**
- **Integrations**
- **Benefits communications**
- **Employee recognition**
- **Community initiatives**
- **Safety programming**

Designing an Engaging Well-being Program that Gets Results

Customize the platform to integrate organizational brand, culture and voice.

Second to your employees, your organization's culture is the most important asset you have. Not only *can* your well-being program be integrated into your organizational culture, it should be. A well-being program that operates independently from your organizational culture has very little chance of generating the levels of engagement that are necessary to achieve the sustained positive behavior change you are seeking.

Essentially, integrating well-being means not treating well-being programs as events—initiatives that are distinct add-ons to your organization's daily business. Rather, well-being should be part of the personality of your organization.

Admittedly, when you can fully customize your program plan and your program portal to your culture, this is a much easier task. Such customization capability allows you to choose what works for your organization; you can customize initiatives by region, business group or facility; you can easily customize your communications to meet your unique needs; you can integrate important internal initiatives into your programming and your platform. If you are using a well-being vendor that does not offer much in the way of customization or culture integration, the process is much harder and will require more manual administration. Also, if your vendor does not provide fully customizable communications, you'll also need to lean on your internal comms team more to communicate your program and initiatives.

At Propel, culture integration begins with the name of the program. If our client already has a program name, we brand the entire program and platform with this name and logo (we'll design a logo if they don't already have one). We will then work with the client to identify success metrics and design their program to meet these goals. We'll fully customize the platform to ensure the content, initiatives, tools, resources, reporting and internal integrations are woven into the culture—all designed to work on multiple levels to achieve the client's well-being goals. We'll then create a communication plan for the program and design fully customized program communication for all program initiatives in whatever formats make sense for the organization.

Designing an Engaging Well-being Program that Gets Results

When a program is successfully integrated into the culture, you can see it and hear it in employee interactions and comments:

- Employees form teams and interest groups around common well-being interests.
- Employees begin routines like taking walking breaks and sharing healthy recipes.
- We see more standing meetings and walking meetings.
- People begin sharing success stories and providing well-being program feedback.
- We hear comments like, “Unless you have a health condition, no one takes the elevator for just one floor anymore,” and “We now begin all of our weekly staff meetings with a Mindful Moment,” and “We begin our shift work with 5 to 10 minutes of stretching,” and many similar indications that the culture is a well-being culture.

Customize the platform to promote personal pathways and ensure multiple easy-to-access on-ramps so individuals can engage based on their needs and interests.

Integrating your program into the culture of your organization is important because it signals to your employees that working with a well-being mindset is “how we do things here.” When the organization is engaged in organizational well-being initiatives and colleagues are engaging with one another in local/national/global well-being initiatives, the message is clear that this organization values employee well-being. In this environment, employees are empowered and encouraged to engage in ways that lift each other up, improving the overall organizational well-being. The importance of organizational well-being initiatives leveraging the culture cannot be overstated.

It is also important for your program to allow individuals to quickly find personally relevant programming, content and initiatives. At Propel, we call these **on-ramps** to your portal and programming. When individuals can easily understand their own well-being risks (through, for example, HRAs, screenings, assessments, surveys, etc.) and pursue a pathway that helps them improve their well-being at their own pace, they are significantly more likely to engage in ways that generate sustained results. They are also more likely to engage in organizational initiatives. Unfortunately, many vendors provide content and features that are very limited and not customizable. This approach assumes individuals are essentially the same and that the organizational culture has nothing to do with an individual’s well-being journey.

If you are looking for measurable impact, you need to offer highly customizable resources, offer programming that allows individuals to easily find and pursue a pathway relevant to their personal well-being needs while ensuring organizational programming initiatives are integrated into and customized to your culture. This allows the program to work at two levels (individually driven and corporately driven) to achieve comprehensive impact.

Design comprehensive program marketing/communication strategy

Designing a comprehensive marketing and communication strategy that is fully customized to your program design is absolutely essential to your program success. You simply cannot rely on template communications that are not tailored to your organizational culture and program initiatives. Poorly communicated well-being programs are the number one reason they fail to have impact.

In separate a publication, we discuss the methods we use to design effective, comprehensive communication plans including the choice architecture and motivational principles that drive our communication design. Whether you are using your in-house marketing/design/comms teams or an external team of comms professionals, this is one element of your program that should never be left to chance or a vendor's templates.

Well-being program engagement is often cited as the most sought-after metric among program managers. The thought is, if employees are actually engaging in a program, they must be interested, and that engagement should result in positive outcomes. While there is unfortunately not a straight line between engagement and outcomes, you certainly will not see outcomes from the program without engagement, so it's a fair metric!

Part II: The Engagement Strategy

The challenge with engagement lies in its definition. What exactly is “engagement”?

Is a member engaged if she logs into the platform at least 1 time per day? Three times per week? Twice a month? And is logging in really engagement? Is it performing and recording well-being-related activity one, two, three times per day, week, month? Many programs love to make bold pronouncements saying their members engage with the platform “6 to 10 times a day.” That sounds like *real* engagement until you realize those vendors count as engagement every time the member’s Apple Watch, Garmin device, Fitbit, etc. syncs its data with the vendor’s platform. Those members may have connected their device a year ago and have never seen the vendor’s platform since. But as long as their device remains connected to the platform, they appear to be “engaging” with the program many times a day. So, maybe that “6 to 10 times a day” number isn’t so much engagement after all.

At Propel, we consider individuals engaging in the program when they are utilizing the well-being resources you have made available, to perform actions that support their well-being. This could be recording physical activity in support of a challenge, tracking nutrition in support of a nutrition goal, reading an article on stress management on the platform, watching a “Mindful Moment” meditation video, completing a health screening that is a part of the incentive program, reviewing health benefits in the benefits section of the portal, listening to a podcast on performance nutrition, forming a team of colleagues to participate in an upcoming resiliency challenge, submitting a “healthy selfie,” completing a survey, and so on. Each of these kinds of interactions with your program move the member toward the formation of healthy habits. Healthy habits become healthy behaviors, and healthy behaviors deliver healthy outcomes.

Ultimately, each organization must decide what engagement means to them. Based on your goals—the outcomes you want to achieve with your program—decide what employee interactions help move you toward those goals. When you define metrics that can capture those interactions, you can measure engagement. See [***A Framework to Define and Measure Engagement Metrics***](#) for a step-by-step guide to help you through this important process.

Just remember that before you can measure the engagement, you need to actually *motivate* that engagement. For that, you need an **engagement strategy**.

There are many potential initiatives to choose from when designing your engagement strategy. Now, we discuss examples of highly effective initiatives utilized by well-designed programs.

Holistic Challenges/Competitions

An important first step when discussing challenges is to clarify exactly what we mean when we say challenge. Many well-being vendors will say they offer dozens—or even hundreds of “challenges.” Usually, what they are referring to is a member’s ability to set goals and track progress against those goals. A person may want to increase their water intake, so they challenge themselves with a goal to drink a minimum number of ounces per day for 30 days. Similarly, they might set a sleep goal, physical activity goal, community service goal, and so on. This is a personal initiative; no one else is involved. The member sets the goal and tracks progress against that goal. The ability to set and track goals is certainly an essential element of a well-being program, it’s just not what we mean when we use the word “challenge” here. Perhaps “competition” would be a better word to describe what we mean here. Unlike challenging oneself to meet a goal, a competition involves other individuals, other teams or other groups (depending on how it is set up). There is a leaderboard to track each participant’s progress compared with the others enrolled in the competition.

From an engagement perspective, competitions are tremendously useful and when designed well, they have a strong record of success in engaging employees. They also are highly effective in generating healthy habits that can result in the formation of persistent healthy behaviors.

Why exactly do competitions work to motivate program engagement?

Research has made clear that structured well-being competitions increase participation rates and sustain engagement in well-being programs. Competitions make well-being programs more engaging because they tap into individuals' intrinsic motivation and competitive nature. This gamification approach transforms mundane activities into exciting ones, keeping employees motivated. More importantly, competitions require routine, daily engagement over a period of weeks. This routine engagement leads to habit formation which tends to stay in place even when the competition is over.

At Propel, we include callouts on the competition leaderboard page to nudge further engagement and point participants to other relevant resources on the platform. This targeted placement works to create deeper engagement because participants are seeing this messaging at a point when they are recording their competition engagement and viewing their progress on the leaderboard—a positive trigger that makes them more open to exploring related tools, resources and initiatives.

Can any competition work?

Unfortunately, no. There is a common misconception that if a competition will work to engage employees, then *any* competition will work. But keep in mind the two goals you should have for every successful competition: (1) get the most engagement possible in the competition that (2) motivates actions likely to result in new healthy habit formation.

This is why competition design is so important.

Launch a competition, and some portion of your population will join. But does that achieve your goals? Take for example the most common default competition: a steps challenge. Since most people take steps during the day and steps are easy to track, it seems like the perfect choice for a company-wide competition, right? Maybe, but probably not.

You need to decide what you want to accomplish with a steps challenge. The key is to consider all aspects of your employee profile, company culture and work styles when you are planning a competition. You also need a platform flexible enough to allow full customization that will meet your specific needs.

At Propel, we have many clients that have the majority of their employees in manufacturing facilities or distribution centers or in restaurants or retail stores. Employees in these types of jobs will routinely get 10,000 to 20,000 steps or more every day—just doing their job. So, while their daily step counts look great on a leaderboard, your competition hasn't motivated any new behaviors; the employees are simply getting leaderboard credit for something they are already doing. Likewise, we have clients that do not permit employees (for safety or security reasons) to have their cell phones with them while they are on the job. This means any steps they would be accumulating during the workday can't be easily tracked or recorded. In this case a steps competition is not a motivator to engagement.

A flexible platform will allow you to run an individual competition where each colleague is competing against all other colleagues, a team competition where each team of colleagues competes against all other teams of colleagues or a group competition where each company designated group (e.g., grouped by division, region, department, etc.) competes against all other company designated groups. You also want to have the flexibility to create a competition where everyone in the organization is competing together to achieve one company goal.

With these options, you'll want to have the flexibility to track a wide variety of actions that best suit your organization's culture, work style and your goal to motivate healthy habits.

Designing an Engaging Well-being Program that Gets Results

At Propel, we allow an organization to track hundreds of actions—essentially, any action that is measurable can be used for a competition—and the organization can create their own custom action(s) to use for a competition. The Propel tracking tools will then automatically track competition progress and present results real-time on a custom leaderboard. Many of our clients even take advantage of the ability to create a fully custom competition based on the organization’s culture. For example, we frequently create “map” challenges where participants’ activity motivates them around a map on a tour of the client’s major locations. We also create challenges unique to the organization’s operations. One of our public utility clients runs a competition where the participants’ activity powers the client’s regional power grids—one at a time as activity levels are achieved. As participants complete the competition activity, they watch a real-time leaderboard which is a virtual view of the largest city they serve showing sections of the city lighting up and coming to life as power is progressively restored throughout the competition. For an organization where the core mission is to keep the power to their customers on 100% of the time, a competition that begins with all the power out, generates immediate motivation to do whatever it takes to get that power back on—even if it is only a virtual representation on a leaderboard.

CASE STUDY:

Propel built a custom competition for a large construction company client that was in the process of building a large multi-use complex. The leaderboard we designed for this competition started with a vacant lot and through 16 stages (revealed one stage at a time as the competitors’ healthy actions accumulated) ultimately revealed a fully built and leased virtual version of the same complex that was actually being built. This competition was perfectly aligned with the organizational culture and created significant discussion throughout the organization as the competitors watched the virtual version of the complex they were actually building take shape! Finding as many ways as possible to integrate culture into well-being initiatives will pay dividends both in the short-term and the long-term future of your program’s brand value.

Let us know if you’d like to see some of our custom competitions and leaderboards—we’re happy to share!

You want your competitions to create buzz, be exciting, accessible and relevant to your culture and your entire population. And you need it to be automated, easy to record activity and track results, and fun to participate in. What you do *not* want is a competition that becomes an administrative nightmare for the program administration staff. We hear horror stories of trying to track activity through manual processes and dozens (even hundreds!) of spreadsheets that must be manually tabulated. Not only is this approach time consuming, but it also creates significant opportunity for error and reduced employee confidence in the results.

There is no question that a well-planned competition that fits your culture and your program goals will be one of your most successful engagement strategies if designed properly. But you shouldn't expect much if you are leaving the event to an app that is completely separate from your culture and forces you into selecting from a few basic options.

Incentive Programming Built For Your Goals

When it comes to incentive programming, we must begin by saying we do not believe financial incentive programs are an absolute necessity. In fact, we believe you can achieve very high levels of engagement even if you don't incorporate one in your program. With that said, there is no denying that a financial incentive *will* motivate program engagement. Just make sure that the engagement you get is the kind you want, because for most organizations, a financial incentive program will be the most expensive component—by far—in your overall well-being program design. Accordingly, it should command the program-designer's full attention. Let's look at this with some realistic numbers.

Let's say your organization has 5,000 employees and you intend to implement a full-featured well-being program complete with a fully custom well-being portal that includes unlimited challenges, an extensive library of multimedia, holistic well-being content, benefits section, employee recognition tools, fully customized communication support, unlimited inbound health coaching, biometric screenings and a generous incentive program that pays up to \$500 per employee who completes the incentive activities.

How much will you need to budget?

About \$24/year/employee for the fully customized portal with the described features;

About \$6/year/employee for the unlimited inbound health coaching and

About \$48/person/screen for the biometric screens. So, put in annual cost terms:

\$115,000 Biometric screens (assume 50% of population gets screened)

\$120,000 Custom Portal

\$ 30,000 Unlimited inbound coaching

\$265,000 Total before the incentive program

With an incentive program that pays up to \$500 per employee who completes the program, if only 25% of your population completes the program, you would pay out \$625,000—nearly **two-and-a-half times** the cost of all the other program components combined! And of course, you may have a much higher incentive completion rate than 25%.

The point here, is that creating a financial incentive program should be very carefully planned to ensure the investment is working to achieve your program goals.

Getting the most out of your investment requires a focus on behavior.

At Propel, we help our clients design custom incentive programs that use evidence-based behavioral economics principles to meet their program goals and get the most for their investment. In fact, for most of our clients, we are able to help them design a program that significantly reduces their incentive budget while *increasing* engagement.

We begin with this foundational premise: A financial incentive is an extrinsic motivator intended to engage an employee in an action that will ignite the employee's intrinsic motivation to take actions that result in sustained healthy behaviors. This is a premise that appears to be ignored by too many incentive program designers.

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For example, we have found that most organizations pay incentives for the completion of a biometric screening or the completion of a health risk assessment. While we believe these are very important components of a well-being program, we do not recommend paying employees to complete them. The reason is straightforward: paying employees to complete a “one-time” action does not motivate behavior change. The hope of course, is that if an employee completes a biometric screen or an HRA and receives feedback about their risk profile, they will do something to correct areas identified as high risk. The reality is that the data does not support this position. People may see the areas of risk and recognize that they *should* take action, but they rarely do.

If you want to motivate employees to complete a screening or HRA, create a program that requires them to complete these items before they can move to incentive program actions that result in a payout. Think of these items as prerequisites to get to the “payout” items. Then, create incentive items that require multiple actions taken over a series of days, weeks or months in order to achieve a payout. For example, if you want to motivate physical activity, you could create an incentive item that requires participants to complete at least 150 minutes of moderate physical activity at least 9 of the 13 weeks in each quarter. If they complete at least 9 weeks in Q1, they earn an incentive. If they do it in Q2, they earn another incentive, and so on.

When people are required to complete routine behaviors over the course of several weeks or months, they will begin to form routine behaviors which are much more likely to become habits. And when you create habits, you create behavior change. Participants completing routine physical activity begin discovering they have more energy, sleep better, are better able to manage their weight and generally feel better about themselves—results they want to continue experiencing whether there is a financial incentive attached or not. In this example, your goal of using the incentive (extrinsic motivator) to generate intrinsic motivation (healthy habits) is now successful! In fact, after completing the incentive goal for a couple of quarters, there is a very good chance the participant would continue the physical activity routine even if there was no extrinsic incentive to do so.

There is much more to quality incentive design (which we cover in other publications), but we use this simple example to demonstrate that while incentives can be a powerful engagement tool they should be treated like rocket fuel: used properly, they can launch your program engagement to new and impressive heights; used improperly and they can blow up in your program’s face. You certainly don’t want to be at the controls of an extraordinarily expensive program that gets no results. If you’d like some advice about incentive program design, let us know. We’d be happy to share our research and our experience!

Team Initiatives

While most organizations have at least considered individual incentives, if not integrated them into their program, few have even considered team-based incentives.

There are many ways to design team-based incentives, but the common theme is that all members of the team must contribute at a certain level in order for the team to reach a goal that will trigger an incentive. Unlike individual incentives, team incentives generate additional motivation through peer accountability—a powerful motivational force. But team incentives take advantage of more than just peer pressure, they tap into the energy of the collective. They operate as a social initiative that motivates discussion, group activity planning and sharing of successes and challenges. When you have as a core goal to create and strengthen a culture of well-being, team incentives can be a very meaningful asset.

The “team” can be a small group, a department, an entire division—even the entire company pulling together to meet a singular goal. The key is to find something that works within your culture.

Well-being Champions Programming

Well-being champions can be one of your program’s greatest engagement assets, ***if it is designed and managed effectively***. If it is not designed and managed correctly, it can actually work as a negative influence on your program’s engagement.

Typically, a well-being program achieves reasonable engagement at the corporate office and progressively less engagement from employees the further they are from HQ. This is almost always because it is much more difficult to effectively communicate to employees who are not centered in one location. And since effective well-being programming requires engagement and engagement requires effective communication, well-being champions are well-suited as assets to help fill the communication void.

Well-being champions program vs. wellness committee

It is important to make a distinction between a well-being champions program and a well-being/wellness committee. Traditionally at least, a wellness committee is a group of people working in the same office or general location who get together a few times a year to discuss potential program initiatives. This is not the same thing as a well-being champions program. Many organizations will say since they already have a wellness committee, they will just revamp that into their well-being champions group. You will almost certainly be better served by disbanding the wellness committee and starting over when designing your well-being champions group. There are simply too many differences between the two concepts. Well-being champions are best suited for being placed in the company's locations outside the corporate headquarters. They should be highly motivated colleagues who are already demonstrating high levels of program engagement. They should be excellent communicators who are enthusiastic about your program initiatives and who want to do whatever they can to generate awareness and enthusiasm about the program throughout the year. They are people who want to engage with other champions to share ideas, set goals and share their successes.

If you have wellness committee members who meet this description, they will make the transition well (and can represent your corporate office location). Wellness committee members who do not meet this description should not be invited to join the champions group. This is not to say that no organization needs a wellness committee. When we have clients that have a wellness committee with longstanding members and they find value in having a group of employees periodically review program progress, we recommend changing that group to a "well-being program advisory team," and meet two or three times per year to review the program goals and progress.

At Propel, when we help our clients design their well-being champions program we focus on five key components:

- 1. Champion program design**
- 2. Potential champion identification & recruiting**
- 3. Communication plan**
- 4. Champion tasking**
- 5. Champion success**

Designing an Engaging Well-being Program that Gets Results

Each of these components is critically important to the overall success of the champion's program—and therefore to your well-being program. When designed well and operating efficiently, a champions program can be a main driver of your grassroots programming efforts and engagement. This is particularly true for those organizations that have widely dispersed employee populations or have groups of employees that are not easily reached by email or other computer-based communication.

Following is a quick summary of each of these key components (we have a separate publication in our Master Practitioner's Series titled, "*Well-being Champions Program Design*" that provides much more detail around each of these core components).

Champion program design.

There is not one well-being champions program design that meets all organizations' needs. In fact, the Champions program should be carefully customized to meet your specific needs. Elements of your program should include the size of the champions group, the overall goals for the group and the structure of the group (will you have generalists, specialists, a combination, etc.). All the other key elements will effectively make up the total plan design.

Potential champion identification & recruiting.

It is very important to consider the ideal profile of a champion for your organization. Certainly, you want to have enthusiastic consumers of your program and initiatives, but you also want great communicators who need to be strategically located throughout your organization. You may also want at least some of your champions to be accomplished organizers/planners, depending on your overall program goals. You would likely benefit from a recruiting plan that is designed to identify potential champions and an invitation/ communication strategy that entices them to join. Most programs will benefit from a combination of accepting proactive volunteers and recruiting talent who may not initially volunteer.

At Propel, when we help clients build a well-being champions program, we create a recruiting plan designed to identify, recruit, onboard and train new members who will be true assets to the organization's vision. In most cases, we believe the recruiting plan should include a campaign encouraging people to apply to be a well-being champion as well as an effort to reach out proactively to high-potential prospects. For an example well-being application form and email invitation template, see the downloadable resources accompanying this eBook.

Communication plan.

The fundamental purpose of a well-being champions program is communication at a grass-roots level. We want informed, enthusiastic people who are fully engaged in the well-being program to reach out regularly to colleagues to generate awareness and encourage program participation in their work locations. Those communication efforts must be planned and targeted to the unique needs of the organization and the individual champions.

A communication plan for champions will include identifying the messages to be communicated and when, and the format of the communications (e.g., talking points, flyers, emails, etc.) and the training necessary to accomplish the communication tasks. But the champions' tasks can go well beyond program awareness communication as we discuss in the next section.

Champion tasking.

One of the most frustrating realities of many well-being champions programs is lack of direction. People eagerly join a champions group ready to take action to support the organization's program initiatives, only to be sidelined because of poor planning and direction. A successful champions program is one that fully utilizes its champions with tasks that align with that champion's skill set and motivation—but doesn't overburden them.

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When Propel works with our clients to design champion programs, we focus significant attention on champion tasking and finding who is best suited for what tasks, what we call “fit.” We use a variety of tools and methods to help achieve the best alignment. And when you have alignment, a champions program can be among your greatest assets. Here are just a few examples of potential tasks of a well-being champion that could be assigned based on an individual’s strengths and interests:

- **Communications support** - distribution of well-being program communications regarding launch, competitions and initiatives as they are being rolled out:
Posting flyers, posters, table tents/desk-drops, digital screen displays, sending emails, speaking at local internal meetings, informal conversation, etc.
- **Registration and onboarding support** at program launch or for new hires. Tasking the well-being champions to personally poll members in their respective areas to ID who has registered on the portal and assist those who have not completed registration.
 - Assisting with registration events or individual registration-support initiatives (e.g., registration challenges)
 - Reviewing registration reports from your portal vendor to assist with identifying who has not registered.
 - Setting registration percentage goals and dates for their respective areas. (It’s a good idea to post registration percentage results on your well-being program portal to recognize success and inspire friendly competition.)
- **Demonstration of portal** - on computer and mobile; this can be through impromptu sessions or formal small group meetings with colleagues.
- **Strategic support** - Share company well-being program goals/mission statement at staff/department meetings and communicate monthly well-being topics as applicable.
- **Social media support** - Post pictures from events to the well-being portal and/or social media when authorized. Post success stories.

Champion success.

Most of the time, champions are motivated by their internal love for well-being and being a part of the overall program. But we find great value in formalizing a process where the organization identifies and celebrates successes – big and small – within the champion community. Recognition for the work the champion community does in support of the program is fuel for ongoing enthusiasm and commitment.

At Propel, when we have a client that has a champions program, we like to set up a special section on the portal just for the champions; when they log onto the portal, they will see a champions network section that includes tips, announcements, polls, surveys, success stories, pictures, videos, training tools, a look at what is coming/what is new, profiles of “champion of the week” and so on. It is a special community, and we like to support it with an environment of sharing information, celebrating success, and gathering feedback.

Social-engagement Initiatives

Most well-being programs will benefit greatly from social-engagement initiatives. These are well-being initiatives or events that involve large numbers of colleagues interacting with one another. They can be group competitions, healthy selfie initiatives, community service events, etc.

The key is to design initiatives that fit with your organizational culture and work style. In fact, it is usually the case that social initiatives work to activate the collective interest and enthusiasm precisely because they leverage your culture. People are willing to engage because large numbers of their colleagues are participating—a motivation strategy called “collective motivation.” *Everyone around me is joining, so I guess I’ll join too!*

At Propel, we love to use the customized program portal to promote and celebrate social-engagement initiatives. We will dedicate specific sections to a healthy selfie gallery, a company cookbook, community service photos and videos, etc. Regardless of what tools you use to run and manage your social-engagement initiatives, celebration and recognition are important keys to success. Creating these “program vibe” moments strengthens your organization’s culture of well-being and creates an expectation that the collective will continue advancing well-being as a key part of your culture.

Integrations

Integrating organizational initiatives into your well-being program signals to your employees that well-being is a central theme to your culture—not a standalone, separate event or initiative. It also provides opportunities to achieve broader engagement with all your initiatives.

At Propel, all of our clients choose to integrate internal initiatives, and how they utilize this capability is unique to each organization. With our approach, you can recognize at least four primary benefits to integrating internal initiatives into your well-being program:

1. **You can significantly improve your program engagement** because your employees will begin to recognize your program portal as a go-to resource. At Propel, we typically embed topic pages with callouts, links, surveys, and other resources relevant to the topic all on the same page to enrich the engagement opportunities.
2. **You can create a central resource that significantly improves the user experience.** For example, if you have integrated your benefits communications into your well-being portal, when your portal presents a mental health initiative with programming, tools and resources, it can also direct employees to your mental health benefits (e.g., EAP, counseling/coaching services or other third-party resources) all with one click. At Propel, we will frequently set up single-sign-on connectivity to vendors to ensure a frictionless experience for employees.
3. **You can create a central resource that significantly improves the admin experience.** With Propel's flexible and customizable platform design, our clients are able to reduce the number of third-party sites the employees have to navigate. Within one centralized, easy-to-navigate platform (that is optimized for all devices), employees are able to explore extensive multimedia holistic well-being content, track activity from among hundreds of actions, set unlimited goals, engage with assessments, surveys and polls, set up teams, join challenges, enroll in incentive programming and track progress real-time, communicate with colleagues, review all available employee benefits, engage with community initiatives, employee recognition, safety education and more. And all of this integrated into the client's culture—look & feel, voice and branding standards. And we can even operate multiple versions of the platform, localized by region for global clients.
4. **You can create and edit your own content on the program portal.** The Propel platform allows our client administrators to upload and edit any article, video, and image content they choose, create new pages and sections, create and launch unlimited fully customized surveys and polls, launch employee-recognition initiatives, podcasts, blogs, FAQs and much more. Our client administrators have the tools to manage this on their own if they choose or use the Propel team to assist. This level of integration allows the organization to fully demonstrate that well-being is an essential element of the organizational culture.

Footnotes

1. Derdowski, L.A., & Mathisen, G.E. (2023). Psychosocial factors and safety in high-risk industries: A systematic literature review. *Safety Science*, 157, 105948. **Research results indicate that job demand factors are likely to trigger employees' health-impairing mental/physical conditions that can constitute a precursor of unsafe behavior.** Results imply as well the existence of a link between work-induced psychosocial states (typically in a form of stress or exhaustion) and safety. A growing body of research that relies on the JD-R (Job Demands-Resources) theory indicates that the identified aspects of working conditions have the potential to predict not only such outcomes as performance, citizenship behaviors, or absenteeism (e.g., Rich et al., 2010, Schaufeli et al., 2009), but also diverse safety-critical outputs (Hansez and Chmiel, 2010, Li et al., 2013). ↑
2. Goals that aim to help colleagues achieve their goals or create a greater sense of wellbeing at work can encourage collaboration and social unity among teams. Collaboration at work has a direct impact on productivity, motivation, resilience, and performance. A few years ago, the *Journal of Experimental Psychology* published a study carried out by researchers at Stanford University. The researchers found that when employees felt they were working *with* others on a task, they were more productive, motivated, and determined to persevere despite challenges. Work-induced tiredness also decreased, and employees showed much more interest in the challenges they were faced with. Another more recent study showed that companies that promote collaborative working are five times more likely to be high-performing. As there is a solid case for incentivizing teamwork, managers should proactively encourage employee performance goals around collaboration. ↑