

# Certiably healthy

How workplace wellness certification programs add accountability to wellness initiatives

**A**s employee wellness and health assume increasing importance in the workplace, the need for more qualified wellness leaders is growing. Employers need to know their investment in wellness is producing leaders who are current with the latest advances and emerging trends. They need to know their investment is being used efficiently and effectively to design comprehensive integrated programs, effective incentive plans and measurable results.

As a result, there has been an increase in the number of workplace wellness certification programs and the emergence of certified wellness leaders.

“Successful wellness programs need to have holistic health champions in the workplace,” says Rose Gantner, Ed.D., senior director, Consumer Education, Training and Innovation for UPMC WorkPartners. “And it is only through wellness certification programs that we can develop these champions who can make the business case for wellness and create a culture of health in the workplace.”

*Smart Business* spoke with Gantner about workplace wellness certification programs and why they make sense for employers and companies. Gantner is the author of a new book, “Workplace Wellness: Performance with a Purpose,” due out in March.

## Why is there a need for wellness certification programs?

Corporate wellness programs are needed because of an increased focus by employers on employee health, recognition of the link between physical health and the psychosocial aspects of the environment, and the need for increased productivity and decreased health care costs. Certified professionals help create the mission, drive engagement in an organization and work to improve the health and well being of all employees and their families.

A healthy work force has numerous benefits for employers, and wellness certification programs are designed to help capture those benefits. A wellness culture is fundamental. It is based on trust, psychological safety in the environment, shared norms and a genuine feeling that employers care about employees. You can't change behaviors without this positive culture of health, supported by committed senior leadership willing to serve as role models.

Changing the culture isn't just holding a weight race; it's making the race the thing to do to reach a healthy weight. It's not just encouraging healthy eating; it's making healthy choices the easiest ones in lunch rooms. It's



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making taking the stairs, versus the elevator, ‘just what we do.’ The most important ingredient is having people who understand the importance of having the peer and social support necessary to effect meaningful changes in behavior in the workplace. Employees who value their health and the health of others can best gain this knowledge and skill through wellness certification programs.

## What are the advantages of a wellness certification program for an employer?

When a company has a wellness program that offers certification, an employer can feel confident of the professionalism of those involved in running the company's wellness program, and consequently, in the effectiveness of the program. Certification is one way an employer can identify a true expert in the field of workplace wellness. Certification programs provide employers with the metrics that are essential to support wellness and health productivity programs. Studies have shown that when companies support wellness with measurable outcomes, they have greater financial success. Through these programs, participants can learn about return-on-investment calculations that can provide employers with the best information and the application of the right interventions at the right time.

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## Are all wellness certification programs the same?

No. Some focus on the clinical aspects of wellness, on specific health conditions. Others put more attention on one-on-one services such as personal training, health coaching, or nutrition, while still others require a participation fee. But some are offered free to commercial employer groups as part of a total benefits package. What is important is finding the right program to fit a company's needs and demographics. Successful corporate wellness programs must engage employees from the top-down and bottom-up. The strategy should be multidimensional and use tools that leverage technology and the power of social support.

## What elements should a wellness certification program include?

Participants should come away with a full understanding of the latest industry standards and best practices. This knowledge component is invaluable. Second, they should learn about a wide variety of programs and services critical for sustaining engagement long term and about how to increase high performance while decreasing health care cost trends.

Employers should expect a competency-based program that provides the most recent and relevant resources. Good programs should include pre- and post-training exams, instruction in how to strengthen and expand programs, and sharing of real testimonials and lessons learned about how such programs make a difference in people's lives.

## What are some skills that can be acquired in a wellness certificate program?

You can learn fundamentals necessary to build sustainable cultures of health and new research on positive psychology components to maximize engagement strategies. You can become confident in your knowledge and ability to implement self-care programs, design and manage program calendars, integrate chronic disease management programs and employee assistance, and evaluate and provide reports to stakeholders. There is a difference between having employees participate in wellness programs, and being engaged and actively involved in long-term, meaningful changes in behavior. When that happens, it's a win-win for employees and for employers. <<

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