



# THE ULTIMATE EMPLOYEE WELLBEING GUIDE IN 2021

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# INTRODUCTION

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How are you focusing on your employee wellbeing in 2021? In today's modern workplace, you cannot ignore the fact the employee wellbeing has become a critical focus area. According to recent studies, over 25 million work days are lost every year due to employee illness and 45% of the workdays lost were caused by stress, depression and anxiety. It is not enough to simply be the boss, you have to pay attention to your employees' physical and mental wellbeing to better meet the company's goals.

In this guide, you will learn the importance of focus on employee wellbeing, the common causes of workplace stress, and the benefits you'll experience by paying more attention to it. By doing so, you will have happier, healthier employees that are more excited to be at work and contribute positively to their workplace.

# CATEGORIES OF WELLBEING

The first question to ask is what the scope of wellbeing is. Wellbeing no longer refers to just the physical state of health of your employees. Today, mental health is equally, if not, more important for us to focus on.

## Physical Health

Your employees' physical health is an important part of keeping a company running smoothly. Recent research suggests that 81% of employees are currently concerned about their physical health. Despite their concerns, experts say that between 30% to 66% of employees will still go to work even when they feel unwell. This has a direct correlation with how productive and efficient your company is.

If you are thinking of your employees' physical wellbeing, it is important to also consider how your company can encourage employees to care more about their physical health. Your workers spend at least a quarter of their life at work. That doesn't include any overtime and their commute. Without a focus on their health, they can quickly become seriously ill. That's why a focus on physical health can help keep your employees coming to work ready to get things done.

## Mental Health

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In today's climate, we can no longer ignore the state of our employees' mental health. While some level of stress can be a good motivator to work, the chronic stress that is prevalent in a modern workplace can have serious consequences. In the American Psychological Association's 2018 Work and Well-Being Survey, they wrote that, "More than a third of working Americans (35%) reported experiencing chronic work stress and less than half said their employer provides sufficient resources to help employees manage their stress."

In another study - Safe Work Australia - they found that "Between 2010-11 and 2014-15, around 91% of workers' compensation claims involving a mental health condition were linked to work related stress or mental stress."

Part of having a strong wellbeing program in your organisation is having a focus on mental health, as well as physical. The chronic stress your employees are feeling or will feel can lead to burnout. Christina Maslach and Michael Leiter, foundational researchers in The Maslach Burnout Inventory Manual, wrote, "A key aspect of the burnout syndrome is increased feelings of emotional exhaustion; as emotional resources are depleted, workers feel they are no longer able to give of themselves on a psychological level."

Along with these, there are a multitude of academic studies showing long-term negative effects of psychological and emotional stress. It can cost your company money and can impact the efficiency of your workforce. Make sure to plan in your wellbeing program outreach for your employees' mental wellness, especially during these times of crisis.

# IDENTIFYING STRESSORS AT WORK

Part of creating a strong wellness program for your workforce is knowing what stressors they are facing, specifically in the office. There are a few ways to accomplish this.

## Quizzes

A good place to start is by understanding your employees' base knowledge of wellness. If they don't have basic understanding of foundational wellness principles, this can be an opportunity to teach them. Offering more information about wellness in team meetings and in weekly emails can benefit your employees, but you have to know what they understand first.

## Surveys

After you have an awareness of your employees' knowledge of wellness principles, you can gauge their current wellness practices and health with surveys. There are several resources you can draw on to do this. One of those resources is the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Workplace Health Promotion which offers guidance on creating a survey for your employees, to understand their health status, behaviours and tendencies. employees in maintaining their physical and mental health. This will ultimately have benefits that are far reaching and long-term.

## Assessments

To assess the wellness of your employees and organization, you will need to use assessments. There are several resources available:

CDC: Health Risk Assessments

Wellness Program Implementation Guide

Audit on Workplace Culture & Employee Wellness

While these resources are primarily US-based, the concepts, guidance and advice are applicable for organisations across the world, and for us in Malaysia as well. It serves as a benchmark for us to attain.

Using these assessments for your individual employees and your organisation can help guide your wellness efforts and have a better idea of what parts of your wellness program are effective.

## Tactics

As you create your wellbeing program, there are some tactics that have proven to effective in planning

# CONSIDER MODERN WORKPLACE PRACTICES

Think about your current workplace environment. What do the employees face on a daily basis? Just getting to work can be difficult, from fighting traffic, fighting fatigue, and fighting to get their family out the door, all so that they can get to work on time.

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The traditional workplace was run by the almighty clock - whereby employees, above all else, focused on getting to work and leaving work at specific times.

In a modern workplace, the focus has shifted. Instead of paying all their attention on the clock, employers are focusing more on the work and the quality of work being done. Employees are seen as people who also have lives outside of the office that can demand their attention and time. Employees are now being seen as human beings with health requirements.

As you create your wellbeing program, consider modern workplace practices. Many are now focusing on creating a supportive culture and implementing more flexible schedules. With that, you can incorporate health practices. Encourage your supervisors and managers to support employees in maintaining their physical and mental health. This will ultimately have benefits that are far reaching and long-term.

## Use Digital Tools

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While the world turns progressively more digital and virtual, it's even important to maintain connection with your employees and encourage them in their health care practices. Especially as more workers are performing their roles remotely, you have to be aware of and familiar with the common digital communication tools available.

For team communications, look into [Slack](#).

It allows you and your team to easily coordinate and communicate with individual channels that you can customize for teams.

For collaboration, give [Google Workspace](#) a try.

By adding collaborators, a team can easily update and make changes to a project without so many emails and back-and-forth requests.

For your meetings, consider [Zoom](#).

It will allow your team to meet remotely and is easy-to-use, perfect for those team meetings that once required employees to physically be in the same room.

For better transparency and employee management, try [altHR](#).

Through a digital workforce management tool, you can easily manage your employees digitally, share relevant information fast and keep them happy.

With these digital tools, you can give your employees more flexibility to work from home and have a more flexible schedule while still maximising productivity.

## Find Better Work Methods

Above all, it's essential that you analyse your work methods.

How do you embrace new ideas?

How do you keep your team organised?

How do your teams collaborate and interact?

How to keep employees accountable?

How to keep work on track without micromanaging?

Gone are the days of employers receiving unquestioning loyalty and respect. Employees expect more. They want to be treated as human beings and your methods should reflect that. You should consider taking additional training in modern working methods to be sure that you are as up-to-date as possible. Your work methods will have a direct impact on your employees mental and physical health, so invest in your on-going training.

Some of the work methods that have been tried and tested include the Agile methodology. While this is more commonly used in product and software engineering teams, it has also experienced rising popularity in more business-centric teams, from sales to marketing and even finance.

If your only work method so far has been the waterfall approach, which is a sequential process to linear work progress with top-down instructions, chances are, those methods are severely outdated.

# TEAM BUILDING

A huge part of working for a company is your interactions with your fellow coworkers. Your employees' experience with the company can be greatly impacted by the team interactions they have. And so, team building should be a large part of your wellness program.

## Physical Team Building Ideas

If your team is still able to meet in person, there are many ways you can gather together for team building or team bonding time. One of the easiest and most commonly used forms of team bonding is a shared break. Whether it's a coffee break or a sit down break for meals, the chance to relax and take their minds off work during the day will help your team create stronger connections while also helping them to stay productive and address their mental health for a moment.

You may also try a team lunch every now and then. While this is an expense for the team supervisor, it can provide your team with the chance to get to know each other outside of work and see each other as people, rather than just fellow colleagues.

Along the lines of interacting outside the office, encourage your team to participate in extracurricular activities together. Suggest a team dinner or join a sports league together. This will foster team building while also working towards the goal of your wellbeing program.

## Virtual Team Building Ideas

As more employees are working remotely, many are finding that they feel a disconnect from the rest of the team. Utilising team communication apps like Slack can help improve communication, but how can you engage in team building exercises remotely?

Zoom is another digital tool that can help with this. Consider having a Zoom lunches/dinners with your remote workers where they all log into the Zoom call with their meals and have the chance to talk casually. You could have a theme night for a little added fun or prepare questions or games in advance to fill in awkward silences.

There are also a host of virtual classes that you can take together. Try a virtual yoga class or take a virtual tour of a museum. Although you won't all be together, you can enjoy the relaxation and the physical activity together, improving the mental and physical health of those involved while also helping to cultivate those team connections.

## BETTER WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE

When an employee signs on to work with a company, they are committing at least a third of their waking hours to the company. They are committing those hours with the expectation that they will be a valued part of the team and with the hope that they will be treated well. Whether they are working in-person at the office or remotely, here are some ways to make their commitment to the company easier and more beneficial.

## Have A Good Set Up

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For those employees who are working in the office, it's crucial that you have a comfortable set up for them. This starts with the equipment and office furniture they use. Consider these pieces and how they help or hinder your employee in their wellness:

### Desks

While you might think of a desk as simply a table on which your employee works, it's more than that. It's the foundation for maintaining good posture and creating a pleasant environment for your employee. Offer convertible or standing desks. These have been shown to help improve the physical health of employees. Sitting for long hours can have negative health effects and having a standing option can mitigate some of those.

You should also make sure you have desks that can be adjusted to the right height. If a desk is too high or too low, it can cause physical discomfort and long-term issues for your employees.

### Chairs

Have you ever had to work from home using one of your dining room chairs, only to come away from it with a new appreciation for your office chair? Office chairs are designed to be sat in for long periods of time and have the functions that make it more comfortable and ergonomic. These are essential to maintaining the comfort and health of your employees.

Make sure you choose chairs that are ergonomically designed and adjustable. More than just being able to go up and down, your office chairs should ideally have adjustable lumbar support and arm rests.

## Screens

Your employees' computer screens can have a huge impact on their health in a number of ways. The first being the height of their screens. Ideally, their screens should be at eye level. Make sure the screens are adjustable and provide the necessary equipment to make this adjustment possible. Without the right placement, things like musculoskeletal problems can happen quickly.

Along with the physical position of the screens, it's important to know about the effect of screens on your employees' vision. Help your employees know the signs that they need a screen break: vision problems, eye strain, and headaches. Consider encouraging your employees to purchase blue-light glasses or offer a subsidy for them. It can greatly reduce the eye strain of employees who are watching their screen throughout the day.

# BETTER WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE

In the last few years, mindfulness has taken the wellness world by storm. By using mindfulness techniques, a person is able to focus their attention fully on their current purpose and be mentally present in the moment. It's so easy for employees to become overwhelmed with the onslaught of communications, emails, texts, social media, family issues, work deadlines, etc. By encouraging your employees to practice mindfulness throughout the day, you can greatly improve their mental health.

Try these mindfulness tips with your team

## Team Breaks

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Remember how team breaks can improve the team's bond? It can also provide an opportunity to practice mindfulness together. It starts with your example.

Jay Steven Levin from WinThinking had this to say: "A lack of mindfulness in your organization, division or team is a direct expression of your own lack of value clarity." In leading by example with mindfulness, you can show your team the importance of these practices during the team breaks.

You should also make your team break a physical break in which your employees physically move away from their desks.

Lynita Mitchell-Blackwell from Leading Through Living Community said, "Taking a physical break, getting up from the computer and walking away, forces the mind back to present. The shift in both mental and physical activity creates a space for rest and rejuvenation. With a refreshed mind and body come new ideas and renewed commitment."

## Avoid Back-to-Back Meetings

It's easy to pick a day and schedule all meetings on that day, one after another. But there's a big problem with that: it doesn't allow your employees to catch their breath between meetings and will end up leading to less retention and higher levels of stress. Even for virtual meetings, you should allow for at least five to ten minutes of a break between each meeting, says Christine Allen, Ph.D., from Insight Business Works.

"Employees are either late to the next meeting or check out of their prior meeting early, mentally or physically. Allowing five to 10 minutes between meetings increases focus, productivity and well-being for everyone," Allen said.

## Encourage Healthy Lifestyles

Your employees do not simply stop existing when their work day is over. They go home and continue on in certain habits and lifestyle choices, some of which may not be so healthy. To get your employees to live a healthier lifestyle, it starts with the third of their life they spend at work. You can encourage this with the following methods:

### Offer Healthy Snacks

Everyone gets hungry at work and picking the right snack can be difficult. When faced with the hassle of packing a healthy snack versus simply grabbing some chips or a candy bar from the vending machine, many employees will choose the latter. Have a selection of fresh fruit or healthy snack options for your employees, free of charge. This takes the hassle and the money out of having a healthier mid-afternoon snack.

### Gym Memberships

As an organisation, you can encourage your employees to live healthier lives by offering subsidised gym memberships. While many employees won't take advantage of it, there are some who wouldn't have gone to the gym otherwise. Many people want to be healthier but the cost and hassle of going to the gym holds them back. By subsidising their gym membership, you take away at least one of those objections.

### Sports & Physical Activities

Working as a team is essential in sports, making it a great option for team building. But it will also help your employees be healthier. If your organisation doesn't have an official sports team, consider taking an exercise class with your employees or having a yoga instructor come in once a week, blocking off the time like a meeting. That makes it an easy way for employees to get some physical activity in their lives.

### **Do The Small Things**

Ultimately, it comes down to your example and encouragement. Instead of taking the elevator with your employees, take the stairs. Have a team salad day where everyone brings a fresh salad from home for lunch. It doesn't have to be extreme, it just has to be consistent.

## **EFFECTS OF WELLNESS PROGRAMS**

Along with improved physical and mental wellness, there are work-related effects that your wellness program will have

### **Better Productivity**

According to the Australian research group Work on Wellbeing (WoW), a focus on wellbeing in the workplace can lead to each employee being about \$1,000 more productive every year. Employees will also need fewer sick days and they will be more inclined to help each other at work. Along with that, they found that workers who had a workplace wellness program were more receptive to change in the workplace and had a more positive outlook of their workplace.

Basically, your wellness program will have a direct impact on the productivity of your employees. And the more productive they are, the more work gets done and the greater the revenue.

## Higher Motivation

Something happens in your brain when you accomplish even one little thing. Suddenly, you crave that feeling and want to accomplish more. As your employees reach their wellness goals, their motivation will naturally increase, meaning they will also be more motivated at work.

As you engage your employees in their wellness journey, they will also feel more motivated because they feel you have a hand in their wellness. We are always more likely to do a favor for someone who has done something for us. If your organisation shows a vested interest in employees' wellness and offers them subsidies and incentives for focusing on their wellness, then they will be more motivated to work harder and longer.

## Higher Engagement

When your employees are more mindful, they will be more engaged in their work because of your employee wellness program. By creating good habits, especially those related to mindfulness, they will be able to focus more easily on the work at hand, rather than the latest news or social media trends.

## Better Job Satisfaction

Finally, your employee will be more satisfied in their position within the company. They will feel that the company cares about them and will then be more likely to care about the company.

A 2017 survey of employer-sponsored health plans in the U.S. found that those companies who made a point of promoting wellbeing had a lower turnover rate. The difference was by more than 10%. Turnover leads to a lower company reputation and a loss of time and money. Not only that, it can damage employee morale.

Simply placing some focus on your employees' wellbeing can secure their loyalty, improve their lives, and improve your company culture. In short, to be a better company, start by making your employees' lives better.

## RESOURCES

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2018/07/19/14-simple-steps-to-encourage-mindfulness-in-your-workplace/?sh=5de75e7326e8>

[https://www-assets.perkbox.com/media/3383/original/e-days\\_-\\_Wellbeing\\_whitepaper\\_May19.pdf](https://www-assets.perkbox.com/media/3383/original/e-days_-_Wellbeing_whitepaper_May19.pdf)

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/how-to-guides/pages/howtoestablishanddesignawellnessprogram.aspx>

<https://www.salesforce.com/resources/guides/wellness-playbook-employee-wellbeing-guide/>

<https://marketing.sodexoengage.com/the-essential-guide-to-employee-health-and-wellbeing-glow>

<https://engageemployee.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/cultureamp-wellbeing-guide-1.pdf>