



WHITE PAPER

Making workplace wellness a priority for your healthcare organization

Healthcare

Philosopher George Santayana famously said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Santayana wasn’t talking about workplace wellness in 1905, but he could have. In 2022, healthcare workplaces and workplaces generally were staggered by a number of body blows from burnout to resignations to pandemic-related mental health issues to inflation.

The question is, did the experience teach healthcare employers and employers generally a lesson about cultivating a healthy work environment? Or will they soon forget 2021 and 2022 and make some of the same mistakes again this year after their band aide approaches to their problems fall off?

I’m happy to report that there are signs of intelligent workplace-wellness life out there. Employers across virtually every industry, including healthcare, are remembering the past because they don’t want a repeat of the last two years — a period that saw millions of workers quit their jobs, companies cutting service or closing because of staff shortages and labor costs eating up operating budgets and profits.

Let’s look at a few of these positive signs.

In 2022, burnout, resignations, pandemic-related mental health issues and inflation all mixed to make healthcare workplaces and workplaces in general tough environments in which to be an employee. But there are signs we’re pulling out of our collective workplace funk in 2023. **Infor’s Future of Work Specialist, Marcus Mossberger**, points to the rays of sunshine peeking through the clouds.

Convergence of health and workplace strategies

The Business Group on Health recently released a list of employer health and well-being trends to watch in 2023. The list of trends is based on the BGH's [2023 Large Employers' Health Care Strategy and Plan Design Survey](#). The survey includes responses from 135 large companies that cover more than 18 million lives in the U.S.

Topping the list of trends is the fact that more employers are seeing their health and well-being strategy and their workforce strategy as inextricably linked and not as two separate things. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents — 65 percent — said their health and well-being strategy was an “integral part” of their overall workforce strategy in 2022. That’s up from 27 percent who said the same thing five years earlier in 2018, when the BGH did a similar survey.

“Employers will continue to invest in health and well-being and view these investments as part of a long-term workforce strategy,” the BGH said. And we at Infor couldn’t agree more.

We also agree with another trend identified by the BGH, the rising importance of workplace initiatives that support employees during difficult times in their lives, whether that’s financial distress or emotional distress. Helping workers cope with those stressors reduces turnover and improves retention.

Making employee mental health a priority

Another [employer survey](#), this one by WTW (formerly Willis Towers Watson), detected the same trend. WTW asked 455 U.S. employers about their worker emotional well-being strategies. Here’s what those employers had to say.

- 88% said they took additional measures in 2022 to address workforce mental health needs.
- 67% said they plan to make employee mental health and emotional well-being programs and solutions one of their top three health priorities over the next three years.
- And 30% said they’re planning or considering general mental-health awareness or identification and intervention training for managers. That’s in addition to 44 percent that said they’re currently doing so.

“Employers are highly focused on supporting the mental health of their employees, especially as they look to retain and engage talent,” WTW said. “Those that prioritize employee mental health and increase access to virtual and digital solutions will be uniquely positioned to improve their ability to deliver much-needed care.”

Hear, hear to that!

Giving workers more of what they need

The pandemic forced businesses to shut down their physical offices and deploy various technologies to let their employees work from home. Frontline caregivers at hospitals, medical practices and other sites who provided urgent and emergency care didn’t have that option. But many of their coworkers in nonurgent, nonemergent and administrative positions did.

And guess what? They liked it. They liked the flexibility of working from home. They liked the flexibility of working from anywhere. Physical and geographic barriers to having a job evaporated. Employers must now deal with that reality.

Based on a [recent report](#) from the Society for Human Resource Management, smart employers are responding accordingly in the benefits that they offer their workers. The report is based on a survey of more than 3,000 human resources professionals working across all industries.

In 2019, 49 percent of the respondents to SHRM’s annual survey described offering flexible work-schedule benefits, including hybrid and work-for-home options, to employees as “very” or “extremely” important. That figure jumped to 83 percent in both 2020 and 2021. In 2022, it “settled” at 70 percent, according to SHRM.

“The COVID-19 pandemic and its lasting impacts on economic and public health have expedited the evolving nature of organizations, many of which now have access to wider talent pools through the possibility of remote work,” SHRM said. “Workers now have more options for where and when they will work, and these two factors together create a challenging talent landscape for organizations everywhere. These benefits can play an instrumental role in this competition for talent and, in some cases, may determine success or failure.”

Employers also are responding to the desire of employees, especially in healthcare, to feel both professionally and personally fulfilled in their work. They want a calling, not a job. To wit, 65 percent of the HR professionals surveyed by SHRM last year said they offer professional and career development benefits to their workers. That's up from 51 percent in 2019 — a year before the pandemic. Another lesson learned.

Purpose, strengths and autonomy

Finally, a [recent article](#) by Gallup said managers across all industries must have “routine and authentic conversations with employees about burnout.” The healthcare industry, which is suffering from a high prevalence of burnout, is at the top of that list. The article references an [earlier Gallup survey](#) on employee burnout. The survey identified the top five causes of burnout, including:

- An unmanageable workload
- Unreasonable time pressure

Sound familiar to all you doctors and nurses out there?

More interesting and useful is a series of recommendations from the Gallup report on what employers can do about it. Among their recommendations:

- **Make work purposeful:** “Employees are significantly less likely to be burned out when they can connect their work to their company’s mission or purpose in a way that makes their job feel important.”
- **Focus on strengths-based feedback and development:** “When people have the opportunity to tap into their strengths, they are more engaged, more effective, less stressed and more focused on doing their best work—rather than seeing their job as a burden.”

- **Design jobs to allow for autonomy:** “Job autonomy means having flexibility and control over how work gets done. It is a strong enabler of high performance and can take on many forms, from personal choice in what to work on and how much time to spend on a task, to choice of work schedules and locations.”

Most healthcare employers and employers in general survived serious workplace challenges in 2020, 2021 and 2022. They know what to do and what not to do this year to avoid the same experience. And, as I said earlier, there are signs that many employers have seen the light.

What they need is a single interoperable cloud-based platform through which to coordinate, control and run their new workplace wellness initiatives. When that happens, the past few years will quickly become a distant memory.

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