

## Trends

# PICTURE OF HEALTH

A snapshot of the connection between employee engagement and wellness

BY NEIL CRAWFORD

ave you ever wondered if your organization's efforts to increase employee engagement are worthwhile?

Research carried out in conjunction with Aon Hewitt's *Best Employers in Canada* study

shows a link between highly engaged employees and improved health and overall well-being.

To analyze the data, organizations were grouped as high-, medium- or low-engagement employers based on their scores in the *Best Employers* study. Employees at these organizations were surveyed to determine correlation between engagement levels and various measures of health.

Those working at high-engagement organizations reported better physical health—56%, versus 47% for employees at organizations with moderate engagement and 41% at low-engagement organizations. Job stress levels were lower, too: 28% of employees at high-engagement locations reported high job stress, versus 33% at moderate-engagement firms and 39% of those at low-engagement workplaces.

Better health and lower job stress translate into tangible benefits for employers. While higher engagement doesn't guarantee better health, a strategic focus on increasing employee engagement may support health and thus reduce levels of absenteeism.

Those at high-engagement workplaces reported an average of two days off annually due to emotional, physical or mental fatigue. That number was 2.7 for those at moderate-engagement organizations and 4.3 for employees at low-engagement companies. In addition, high-engagement organizations experienced fewer long-term disability claims and lower workers' compensation premiums. The cost savings in workers' compensation alone are significant: an average of \$246,000 per year for a 1,000-employee organization.

### View From the Top

Organizations with high engagement scores are also more likely to proactively encourage employee health. Many offer health management tools and resources, including health risk assessments, screening, health coaching and education.


Additionally, many of the high-engagement companies in the *Best Employers in Canada* study offer extra perks to promote a healthier workforce. According to an article in *Maclean's*, where the 2011 *Best Employers* list is published, some examples of these are:

- funds for employees to spend on wellness-related expenses, be it on running shoes or ski passes;

- on-site yoga and fitness classes;
- the opportunity to meet with a personal health and wellness consultant on company time;
- healthy cafeteria menus;
- coverage for naturopaths, acupuncture and registered dietitians; and
- lunch-and-learn seminars on health and nutrition topics.

While not all of these initiatives are financially or logistically practical for every organization, the range of activities covers a variety of cost points. And employees are more likely to respond to perks if the employer seems excited about offering them: 65% of employees surveyed at high-engagement organizations indicate that they take full advantage of their organization's

health and wellness initiatives, compared with 53% at low-engagement employers.

But while implementing initiatives to support employee well-being can clearly help to create a healthy, engaged workforce, research reveals that the key ingredient may be the people, not the programs. Findings from employee focus groups conducted subsequent to the study show that caring managers who are tuned in to the health and well-being of their team, and who provide appropriate levels of support and flexibility, really make the difference. 

### Fact File

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**EDUCATION**  
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**PREVIOUS EMPLOYERS**  
The Empire Life Insurance Company  
The Wyatt Company  
The Coles Group

**ACHIEVEMENT**  
Has led the Aon Hewitt *Best Employers in Canada* study since 2003