

## **WHAT CONSTITUTES A HEALTHY ORGANIZATION?**

**Health is not just the absence of disease;** it is an overall state of mental and physical wellbeing! The question is: What is the responsibility of the individual in his or her health and wellness and where and when and how does the organization fit into all of this?

The concept of health and wellness in the workplace is far greater than what we anticipate! A few of these are discussed below:

**Organizational Culture:** The organizational Vision, Mission and Value statement creates a sense of direction, a sense of belonging and also offers a sense of security to employees. When the culture is one which is practiced by all, it alleviates stress, increases productivity and therefore output as well as enhances teamwork. The lack thereof leaves employees without direction and 'proud-out-loudness' about the organization they represent.

**Corporate Governance:** When the principles of good corporate governance - care, fairness, diligence and skill - are employed at directors' and leadership level, it becomes a 'best practice' within the organization. This 'best practice' in turn allows for transparency, discipline and accountability to be evident and allows employees to focus on output and deliverables rather than the completely inward focus on non-productive and negative issues.

**Employee Assistant Programmes - EAP:** Many organizations think of EAP's in terms of 'Rand and cents' and yes, it certainly forms part of that, however, the assistance to employees must also take on the form of allowing them to live a

healthy and meaningful life whilst being fully productive within the organization. Many organizations now have gym facilities on site, or offer gym membership to employees, have sponsored canteens, regular stress massage programmes, etc. Another fairly new concept is the Weigh-Less Corporate initiative. This organization offers 15 – 20 minute sessions (with management consent) once a week at different organizations where they stress the 'healthy way of being well.' This includes best food choices for stress, cholesterol, diabetes, etc. This programme also adds value to HIV and AIDS patients through education in healthy food choices for sustainable living.

**Emotional well-being:** Having counselors on your staff compliment, whom employees can contact with emotional issues, also allows for a more productive workforce. Very often the manager or leader is not equipped to deal with emotional issues and if those issues are not dealt with, it eventually has a very negative impact on the team morale and productivity output of that individual.

**HIV and AIDS:** Hopefully, as HR Leaders, we all understand the huge impact this has on the individual and his / her family as well as on the organization and its staff members. This emotional issue will get far worse before it will get better and we need to make provision for this through education on HIV and AIDS, facilitate or arrange for workshops on correct eating habits, etc. Another area of concern is Tuberculosis – TB. It is imperative therefore, that organizational forums formulate the structuring of Workplace Health Initiatives that are cost contained, sustainable and highly effective. It remains the responsibility of the leadership of an organization to thoroughly convince shareholders and stake holders alike of the importance of actuarial measurements in aiding their companies to not only understand the financial as well as the "unseen" (productivity, absenteeism and more) liabilities and impact of HIV/AIDS in the workplace, but to strategize effectively to mitigate its impact.

The abovementioned issues are only a few examples of how the staff member and the organization can work together to create a better and mutually beneficial work environment. Effective leadership and management principles are imperative should we wish to balance this very delicate scale. It is also true that not all employees will always come to the party when the organization shows initiative in creating a sense of all round well-being for the employees just as some of the employers do not consider that the investment made when creating 'wellness' in their organizations is far less than what absenteeism, missing deadlines, delivering late on projects and not delivering fully on KPA's and KPI's costs.

**How do we, as an organization, start with an initiative such as this?**

It is advisable to initiate a climate survey where specific questions related to health and wellness in the workplace is included. This will allow us to determine areas of concern for staff members and to link the end result with the overall performance of the organization. One aspect of wellness that must be addressed by all organizations is awareness training on HIV and AIDS.

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