Workplace Wellbeing - how to get started

Margaret Aboody - Psychologist and GM Luemo Workplace Wellbeing:

"It's absolutely necessary for an organisation to have a wellbeing program that is unique to their organisation and culture.

"Organisations can have lovely aspirational programs designed for them, only to find that employees don't connect with the program and they don't engage, money is wasted and the credibility of the program is undermined.

"I see organisations go straight to 'nice visible tasks' like putting fruit in the kitchen, introducing walking meetings and subscribing to a counselling line. All of these things are great, but if you have a culture of bullying, those things are not going to create any meaningful change.

"Wellbeing programs must be genuine and relate to the needs of the employees in the organisation. Employees can spot a 'tick box' program a mile off and if you deploy a cookie-cutter program that does not appeal to your employees, it will flop, and it will be hard to get back their trust."

Things to think about when starting a Workplace Wellbeing program

Organisational culture varies markedly between organisations, and different workplaces will be at different places in their journey to becoming a 'wellbeing workplace'. Just like individual employees have different needs and are at different stages with their own wellbeing.

Consider the demographics of your employees, what do they need? What issues have arisen in the past that you could immediately address? Where would you like to be in a year's time and how are you going to get there?

Some things to consider when developing a plan might be:
- Is stress a problem? Why? Is there bullying? Is there too much work?

- Does your workplace have a heavy drinking culture? What can you do to change that?

- Do you have a lot of employees with families? What would help them with wellbeing? Do you need more job-sharing arrangements and flexible work hours?

Key principles to address

1. **Get your leaders genuinely engaged and onboard** – when your employees find out that your leaders don't engage, support or endorse a wellbeing program it indicates they don't care about employee wellbeing. This sends a very sad message! Wellbeing is something everyone is responsible for and leaders have special responsibilities to set the tone. It's not something that "the HR department does."

2. **Revise and consider your values** – how are each of your values connected to employee wellbeing? Then look at the features of your culture, your demographics, issues that have already arisen, strengths that you can leverage, and ask people what they need.

3. **Revise and consider your current policies and practices** – do they support a wellbeing workplace? Do you have a bullying policy that no one respects? Does job design mean many people are overwhelmed and under-resourced? Could internal communication be improved?

4. **Provide education on mental health and personal wellbeing** - Train your managers. No budget? There is a lot of free information and online resources that can support this.

5. **Consider a non-monetary giving program** - mentorships, and goodwill programs go a long way to influencing and impacting wellbeing in workplaces.

6. **Have information readily available on how employees can access help** – you don't have to have an expensive EAP or pay for a counselling line. Medicare, community, adhoc counselling and private arrangements are all supports you can suggest.

7. **Have a critical response plan** - do you know how to address and respond to wellbeing concerns during a crisis, and the key supports available to your team and the wider organisation? Having a plan in place will ensure you are able to ease anxieties efficiently and effectively.

8. **Document your plan and calendar** - make it available to the appropriate leaders and staff, and update it regularly.

9. **Make a fuss about launching your wellbeing program** - make sure the program is celebrated and then communicate regularly with updates, events etc.