



It Takes a Culture

Building a Wellness Strategy for the Modern,
Distracted, Uber-Individualized Workforce

by Bija Bennett



Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The Perils of Our Workplace Culture	2
Taking Back Control	8
How to Build a Company-wide Culture of Wellness	13
Key Organizational Practices	23
Final Thoughts	31

Introduction

Our workplace is facing an engagement crisis.

No matter how we try to prioritize our day, we are pulled away and distracted by a hundred different things — the barrage of digital information and the unprecedented flood of material we need to take in; the endless emails and texts and calls we feel compelled to return; not to mention the rapid-fire feeds and outlets that penetrate every waking moment of our lives. This crucial new reality of the super-stressed worker demands a workplace investment where wellness becomes part of the company's culture.

Gone are the days when wellness programs were a luxury. Once leaders invest in a powerful workplace wellness-focus — and support renewal on a multitude of levels — they'll have a distinct organizational advantage in the years to come.

The Perils of Our Workplace Culture



The relentless urgency and endless distraction of our workplace culture may be the defining tenet of our modern age. We exist in an always-on culture; a vicious cycle of multitasking, distraction, overwhelm, less time, less energy, less sleep, and less focused attention for performing at our best and showing up in the world.

Bersin by Deloitte **reports** that people unlock their smartphones up to nine times every hour. Workers now get interrupted as frequently as every five minutes — and perhaps not surprisingly, two-thirds of knowledge workers complain they don't have time to do their jobs.

Neurologists argue that there are technological forces in our workplaces **disruptive** to the very fabric of our human brains. No wonder organizations are seeing **burnout**, distraction, breakdown, **stress**, fatigue, disengagement, and lack of emotional connection affecting their business.



9x/hr

People unlock their smartphones up to nine times every hour



2/3

Two-thirds of knowledge workers complain that they don't have time to do their jobs.



— **EVERY** —
5 min

Workers now get interrupted as frequently as every five minutes

All of this takes its toll on the quality of work being created. Deloitte's 2014 Global Human Capital Trends **report** states that "this constant and frenetic level of activity costs money, perhaps \$10 million a year for mid-size companies." Additionally, a 2015 Gallup poll **reports** that only 32% of U.S. workers feel "engaged" in their jobs.

U.S. EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

2011-2015 yearly averages



Clearly, this is not the problem of just one person, one generation, or even one working style. The challenges of stress, engagement, and recovery are the same throughout the corporate world. It doesn't matter who you are or where you're from — employees, middle-managers, and top executives across the spectrum are perpetually overextended and seeing repercussions in their work.

This perfect storm of distraction, multitasking, cognitive overload, and the bias toward continuous high-pressure work suggests that as long as this way of life in business continues — and there's no reason to think it won't — it will keep getting worse with grave consequences to the health of our work-place world. We need to *take back control* in a fundamental way.

OUR WORKPLACE IS FACING AN ENGAGEMENT CRISIS



Engagement is attention.

There is a real relationship between the quality of your attention and your ability to perform at your best. Reaching a level of high-performance requires willingness to focus and engage.



Engagement is personal.

Managing yourself and your energy brings new levels of personal insight — which leads to innovation and action. Overextension fosters lack of investment. Engagement frees you and gives you the energy to invest.



Engagement is control.

Resistance to letting your mind become distracted, is what keeps you engaged. Train yourself to focus and go deeper into the things that are important to your success.

By seriously investing in your **HUMAN CAPITAL** — in the human beings who are powering your business — productivity can and will soar.

The question today is not whether this is happening — but how can we save ourselves from it? As powerful as these forces are, they are not our destinies. They simply tell us that it is to the benefit of our future well-being to *mandate the health of our workplace culture and steer ourselves in a new direction.*

I advocate an urgent call to action for companies to shed a traditional, top-down approach to corporate health and wellness, and instead, build a workplace culture that nurtures the individual and drives personal performance, engagement, and success. Employees and their wellness is your company's greatest asset — *it is the very foundation of your success.* By seriously investing in your human capital — **in the human beings** who are powering your business — productivity can and will soar.

Taking Back Control



TAKING BACK CONTROL means helping your people stay engaged, focused, and find real meaning in their daily working lives.

Succeeding in this new world of work means more than just putting in a health club or a gym; it requires a fundamental shift at the organizational level where renewal is the norm. Taking back control means helping your people stay engaged, focused, and find real meaning in their daily working lives.

To begin, you need to think beyond a Corporate Wellness Program, and instead, focus on building a well-designed “baked into the company”^{*} Workplace Culture with initiatives of renewal across the board. By developing a *mindset* at the highest level of business — investing in employees and their teams, providing workers with platforms that enable healthy lifestyle changes with strong execution that supports them along the way — your company will have the greatest competitive advantages in the years to come.



RENEWAL + ENGAGEMENT = PRODUCTIVITY

- Organizations with world-class employee engagement are 18% more productive and 12% more profitable — *Employee Engagement: What's Your Engagement Ratio? Gallup, 2008-2010*
- Highly engaged employees are 38% more likely to have above-average productivity — **Workplace Research Foundation**
- Companies with engaged employees outperform those without by up to 202% — **Dale Carnegie**
- Productivity losses linked to absenteeism cost employers \$225.8 billion (or \$1,685 per employee) — **CDC**, *International Monetary Fund*

In this **PEOPLE-CENTERED** company culture, energy and engagement are the new divining rods.

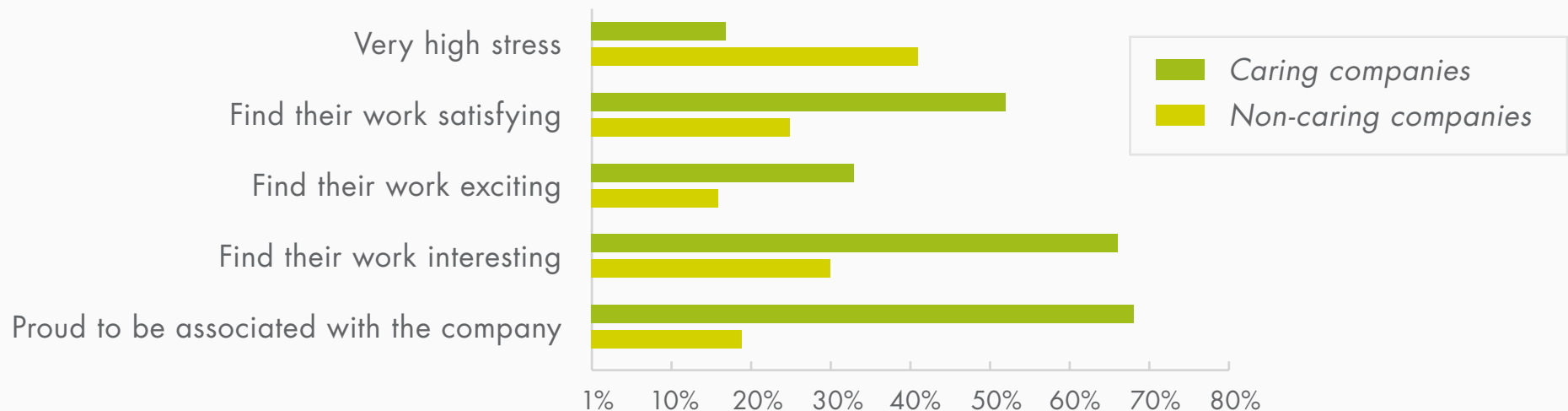
In this people-centered company culture, energy and engagement are the new divining rods. Companies who emphasize employee engagement are fiscally healthier as well. Studies show a compelling correlation between companies who have strong financial returns and those who are adopting a wellness strategy that's corporate-wide.

According to **Gallup** in a poll based on 200 institutions: "Concentrating on employee engagement can help companies withstand — and possibly even thrive — in tough economic times." Undoubtedly, employee engagement has a radically direct and transformative effect on your company's bottom line.

Research **shows** that the top-ranked companies on Glassdoor and in Fortune's '100 Best Places to Work For' continue to outperform the S&P 500 companies because they are meeting people's inner and outer needs.

This is a strategy that millennials — the **largest group** in the American workforce — are embracing. They're demanding a people-centric corporate culture where workers are personally valued and supported to become more energized, motivated, and fulfilled. But no matter if your workers are younger or more mature, both age groups are mingling in the workforce and want their companies to care about their health. In time, "they'll expect it."

EMPLOYEES AT CARING COMPANIES ARE DRAMATICALLY MORE ENGAGED



A photograph of a field of wildflowers, possibly daisies or similar small white flowers, with green stems and leaves. The scene is bathed in warm, golden light, likely from the sun low in the sky, creating a soft, hazy atmosphere with visible light rays filtering through the foliage. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

How to Build a Company-wide Culture of Wellness



1. Start with a Vision

Wellness is not just an idea; it's a mission.

Building a culture of wellness may seem complicated, but it's actually built around one simple concept: *the person*. Clarify your people-centered mission; establish priorities and commit to a vision that inspires people to innovate.

Take stock of your workforce. Set out to understand your employees. While decisions may come from the top, the buy-in is company-wide. Do data mining; initiate a wellness-audit and interpret the results. Find out what people are feeling, how they're sleeping, eating, working — and what their concerns are. Identify their patterns of engagement. With a strategy that addresses the many dimensions of the human being — body, energy, mind, behavior, and personal growth — entire corporate cultures *can and will be* designed and changed.

But it takes an authentic vision followed by a concrete plan, with bite-sized, daily actionable rituals and goals.

Your employees need to know you're investing in them.

Make reshaping your culture a shared and social process. Ensure that people know your intent and include them in the discussions. Be transparent. Employees shouldn't be the last to know.

Workplace wellness will thrive when it meets an employee's long-term needs, and sees them through the process. Initiatives must reflect the individual as well as the whole of the company, and connect workers and their teams with platforms that support renewal on a multitude of levels. By instilling a shift of "we're all in this together" mindset, employees will stay vastly more fulfilled.

CBRE Group, Inc. is a Fortune 500 and S&P 500 company that has taken dramatic steps for their employees. Recent winners of the *Health at Work Awards*, CBRE provides comprehensive wellness programs that address the full continuum of their workers' needs, including:

- Free onsite biometric screening events for eligible U.S. employees
- Available health coaching on a variety of wellness topics
- A well-being portal featuring resources and tools to encourage a healthy lifestyle
- Sweepstakes and challenges to keep wellness top of mind throughout the year

According to Jennifer Ashley, Senior VP of Human Resources: "We recognize that our employees are our most valuable asset, and we are dedicated to providing health and wellness programs with meaningful tools that empower employees to invest in and improve their well-being."



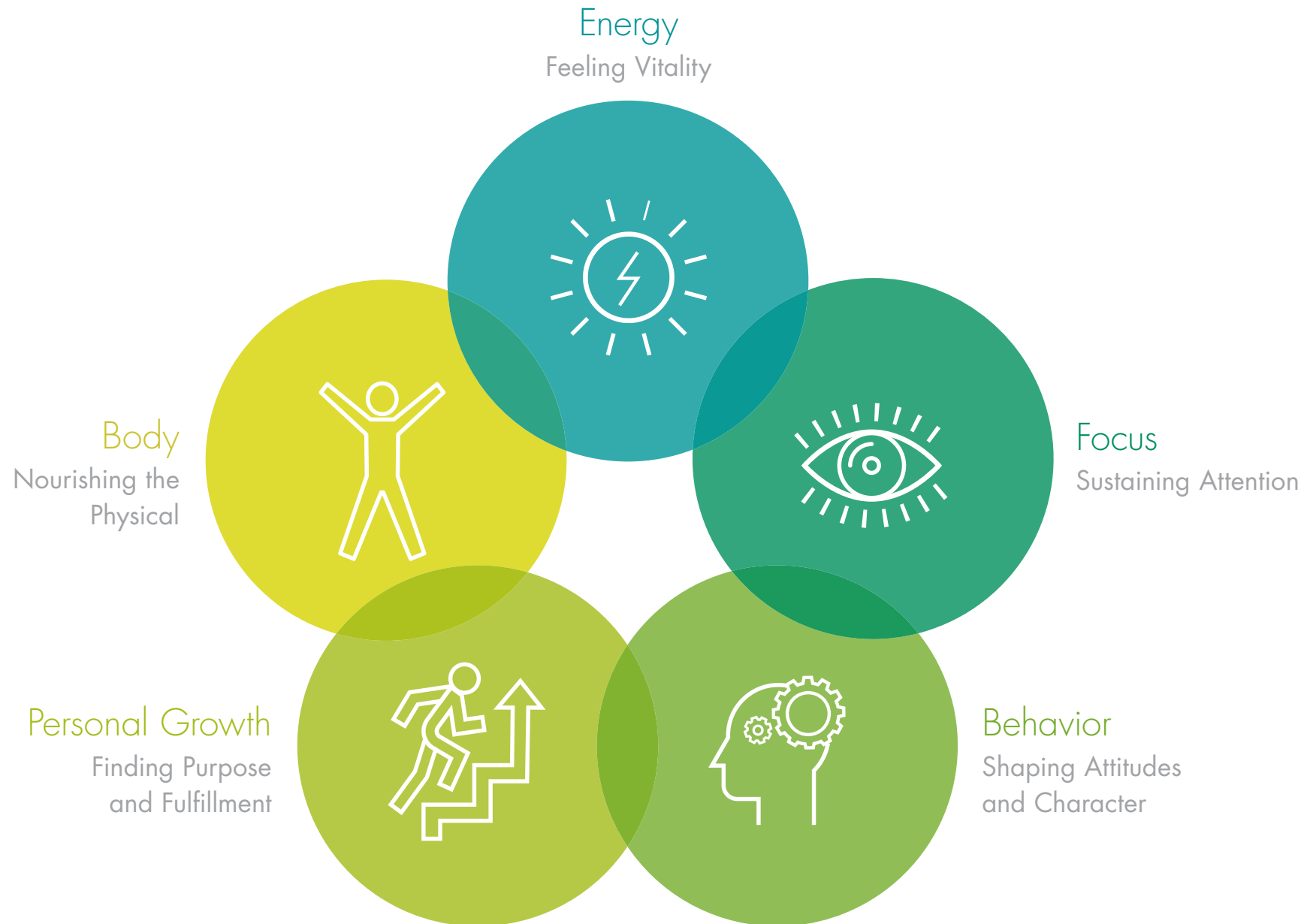
2. Create a Human-Centric Strategy

Ancient Science, Modern Results

Long before modern science validated the connection between the body and the brain, ancient teachings revealed that our body, mind and emotions are part of one integrated system, and when we influence one aspect of our system, we affect every other aspect. *Panchamaya* — meaning “five dimensions” — is the world’s earliest system of holistic health and self-care that provides a full-spectrum of teachings for every layer of the human experience: *body, energy, focus, behavior, and personal growth*. This multi-dimensional model is the key to understanding the mission of wellness for the modern human being.

A well-designed, integrated approach addresses all levels of a person’s needs and gives your workforce the chance to thrive:

FIVE DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS:





3. Boost Energy & Renewal

Renewal equals productivity.

How exhausted is your staff? What measures are you taking to help them renew?

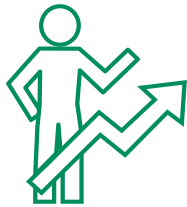
Productivity starts with rejuvenation. In fact, productivity is a *function* of rejuvenation. An essential equation for wellness is: *the degree to which you expend your energy, is the degree to which you must renew and regenerate your body and mind.* There is a direct relationship.

If you're serious about performance and success, then you'll get serious about getting your workforce to practice high-quality unplugged, disconnected, relaxing, and energizing rejuvenation and renewal.



4. Cultivate Focused Attention

Cultivating focused attention goes beyond the domain of meditators: everyone in business needs to learn this skill. *Harvard Business Review* reports how CEOs are increasingly **turning to meditation**'s curative effects, while workers across industries are discovering focusing habits to build concentration, which increases enjoyment at work.



5. Sustain Personal Growth

*Choosing a job is choosing a personal journey. Your workers want time on the job to be **meaningful**. Allow employees to feel a sense of purpose and watch their productivity and engagement soar as a result.*

- Reframe your culture conversations: being productive isn't only about the day-to-day and to-do lists, it's about seeing life as a series of choices and learning to have power over the way we think and how we can "be" in the world
- Make "meaning, purpose, inspiration, and personal growth" the new mantras; encourage a fuller, more human way of thinking about how productivity can happen



6. Implement Daily Personal Rituals

How does a human being actually change? Change comes from the habits we sustain every day, as well as the countless small decisions and actions we perform. Habits developed into rituals keep us on track. Personal rituals are an essential part of a daily practice that is regular and full of attention. Personal rituals give form to our lives. As you implement your wellness strategy, keep the idea of repeated daily personal rituals in mind.

Daily personal rituals include: morning intentions that are practiced before you begin work each day to set your purpose and goals; rituals for renewal throughout the day that replenish, renew and re-attune your energy; breaks from work that are set to revitalize and give perspective; and preparation rituals for a good night's sleep.

Key Organizational Practices

Consider these areas and action steps while crafting your workplace-wellness strategy:



FIVE DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS



Body – Nourishing the Physical

Achieving physical health is fundamental to the overall health of your body and mind. When you make movement and exercise a regular part of your day, you can create balanced growth throughout the whole of your life. Physical health along with structural fitness, bodily strength, flexibility, and stamina, is the foundation upon which high performance rests.



Energy – Feeling Vitality

Creativity, engagement, and enthusiasm for life is dependent on vital energy. By restoring your energy through regular renewal, your immune system is strengthened, stress is relived, and your physiology restores itself. This creates overall health in your entire body-mind, including your digestive, respiratory, immune, and cardiovascular systems.



Focus – Sustaining Attention

The power of your mind has tremendous influence over your cognitive capacity and the depth of your experience. Your ability to create and maintain clarity of perception, strong memory, and concentration through intellectual mind-training and education, is the key to leadership, optimal performance, and living a well life.

FIVE DIMENSIONS OF WELLNESS



Behavior – Shaping Attitudes and Character

Understanding what motivates you — knowing what your mind is doing, feeling what your body is feeling *every single day* — leads to responsible behaviors. This behavioral awareness develops strength of character. Exercising conscious behaviors and defining them in specific ways, brings the commitment, focus, and momentum, critical to your success.



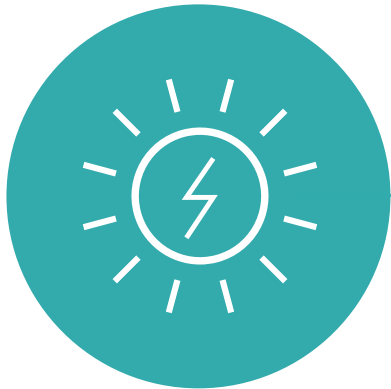
Personal Growth – Finding Purpose and Fulfillment

Achieving spiritual purpose and fulfillment on the deepest personal level comes from linking with your spiritual center or source. Personal transformation through sustained exploration and effort can create a sense of joy, fulfillment, happiness, and enhanced quality of life. Creating practices with the intention of connecting with something beyond yourself, along with personal rituals to maintain that connection, allows you to achieve your fullest potential as a human being.



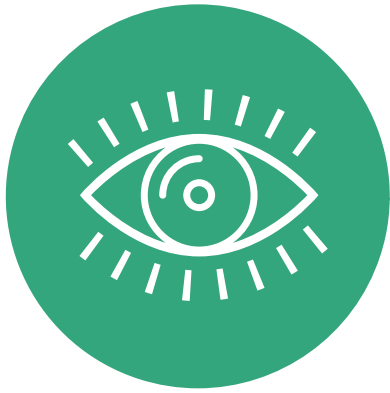
For the Body:

- Advocate for therapeutic movement, physical exercise, fitness
- Designate places to facilitate movement (and yoga) breaks — along with quiet spaces for renewal, creative thinking, problem solving, and rest
- Design stress-free work environments (optimal space, natural lighting, pure air, optional open/private work spaces for optimal focus, productivity)
- Provide flexible work-space options suited to individuals' ergonomic needs (changeable standing-sitting desks, comfortable group meeting spaces, areas to socialize and eat)
- Encourage regular "movement and exercise breaks" as part of a daily work-routine
- Offer classes — in-person or via online portals — for movement education, at-your-desk-yoga, or fitness regimes for individual needs



For Energy:

- Provide healthy and nutritious food options on your corporate campus; teach people to improve lifestyle habits and to consciously eat to keep energy levels high
- Emphasize the importance of sleep and sleep habits; offer sleep clinics, nighttime rituals, tips and sleep remedies (Note: Tony Schwartz of The Energy Project **writes** compellingly on this subject: “A recent Harvard study estimated that sleep deprivation costs American companies \$63.2 billion a year in lost productivity.”)
- Honor email/texting regulations after hours (Listen to Harvard Business School professor Leslie Perlow’s **words** on this)
- Schedule specific times for rest into the workday; implement required breaks
- Find breathing and meditation experts to offer talks on stress reduction skills everyone can initiate throughout the day
- Utilize digital technology reminders — to breathe, take breaks, eliminate wasted time on sites, social media



For Focus:

- Build a flexible workplace culture, allow (possible) freedom to work from home for blocks of focused time
- Get the entire workforce to meditate — via corporate meditation programs (See the “**T.M. Technique**”)
- Offer “attention training” skills for the whole brain; breathing rituals for body-mind recovery; relaxation techniques; live trainings or via online portals
- Help teams sequence work days for maximum focus
- Develop a culture that recommends creating blocks of time for doing one thing — versus one that only supports **multi-tasking**
- Establish “islands of silence;” designate work-space rooms for silent work — and teach employees the value of cultivating silence



For Behavior:

- Individualize benefits to meet the different needs of your diverse company base: encourage vacation/time off that is catered to individual needs and millennials who value flexible schedules
- Reward good role models — following in Google's example, let them **teach one-another**
- Institute check-in meetings to make sure roadblocks are being resolved: an **ADT report** reveals that performance increases by 25% when managers help employees resolve roadblocks and access resources
- Help people/teams manage interruptions; replace interruptions by rearranging schedules, negotiating focused work times
- Design and teach personal rituals for energy, focus and attention — show how these can be implemented throughout the day
- Emphasize the importance of stress management, teach leadership how to recognize burnout and fatigue



For Personal Growth:

- Implement personal rituals and daily routines for building immunity, increasing metabolic balance
- Regular reviews (not just annual ones) to ensure that personal goals and company goals are being met (check out Adobe's **great work** on this)
- Stimulate imagination and nurture creative thinking through workshops, think tank opportunities
- Retreats: bring in speakers/teachers to inspire and motivate
- Encourage your team to take a few minutes each day to consciously observe themselves and how they feel, in silence, to promote deeper intention
- Do Good: Initiate employee participation in all philanthropic opportunities

Final Thoughts

Building a wellness culture creates a robust, healthy, and inspired company, and may be one of the best business decisions you can make. If you invest in human resilience, agility and change, it will set you apart.

Help your people build new behaviors and habits, with ongoing lifestyle skills that will support them throughout their lives. Encourage internally designed programs where employees create their own personal success rituals throughout the day. This will protect and engage their energy and help you adapt your business in the face of disruption.

Start with an honest assessment of your company's wellness to indicate the way you're headed, communicate it to your organization, and build a foundation for your entire corporate culture of engagement.

Get ready to build a culture of wellness:

Contact Bijab

About Bija Bennett

Bija Bennett is a thought-leader and wellness advocate who has spent more than 30 years fusing together the worlds of wellness, business, spirituality, and art in her myriad roles as author, entrepreneur, speaker, and creator of innovative wellness programs for individuals and businesses worldwide.

Founder of the international lifestyle brand YogaAway LLC, Bija has brought the authentic yoga tradition to the attention of millions of travelers worldwide in a partnership with Hyatt Hotels Corporation and other hospitality brands. She has collaborated extensively with Deepak Chopra M.D., co-teaching his seminars throughout the world, and shares her insights with diverse audiences, enabling them to live a healthy, balanced, and meaningful life. Bija is the author of three critically-acclaimed books and the producer of numerous films that combine the healing and performing arts.

As a consultant for businesses, Bija offers an up-to-the-minute synthesis of ancient wisdom and modern science — revealing the path to engagement and the practical tools that allow us to thrive in this fast-paced, and often disruptive world.



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