



## Welcoming Wellness

BALANCING WORK AND PERSONAL LIFE CAN BE A CHALLENGE FOR EMPLOYEES, BUT EMPLOYERS THAT INVEST IN TARGETED PROGRAMS CAN HELP EASE THE BURDEN. **BY MAUREEN CLARKE**

To help employees cope with role overload, work-to-family interference and caregiver strain, organizations need benefits plan solutions that will help them to proactively address employee health and wellness. Especially in tough times, the key question is, How are the intangible benefits of wellness programs measured in order to ensure that plan members and organizations are receiving a bottom-line benefit?

Although work/life initiatives have been the subject of much corporate and public discourse in recent years, tangible measurements of their effectiveness are under-investigated in many corporations. A large body of research suggests

their work/life balance, levels of engagement and management behaviour in upholding organizational principles of work/life balance. The results were compelling.

Pre-program, 38% of participants agreed that in the past year, they had considered looking for a position elsewhere in order to address work/life balance challenges. Post-program, 86% of participants reported a high or extremely high level of engagement in the company. Additionally, 84% of participants felt that their productivity had increased and 86% agreed that they had developed concrete strategies to balance work and personal life. Also, the percentage of participants who felt they had the opportunity in the last two months to perform their jobs without conflict with their personal lives increased by 25%.

The program also had a positive impact on stress indicators. There was a 28% increase in healthy habits (such as increasing amounts of sleep and exercise, and improving nutrition), a 22% decrease in overall stress and a 14% increase in psychological well-being. Using the formula created by Johnson and Johnson that determines a savings of more than \$4 for every \$1 spent on work/family programs, the organization in the pilot averaged a savings of approximately \$6,000 per employee.

For plan sponsors and benefits plan providers, this case study provides solid evidence that there is a real connection between work/life conflict and employee wellness. Company programs must meet the changing work/life demands of the organization and its employees.

As Canadian work/life researcher Chris Higgins suggests, plan sponsors can do a lot to help reduce work/life conflict for their employees. In addition to implementing work/life programs, employers can increase perceived flexibility and management support, introduce cafeteria-style benefits packages, and facilitate job-sharing and reduced workweek arrangements when appropriate. More importantly, employers can leverage simple, innovative learning programs that teach employees the skills they need to better manage their work/life conflicts. **BC**

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that low-cost, high-value proactive work/life programming exists and can produce significant long-term results. One such approach is group coaching-based work/life programming.

To measure the impact of this type of program, an eight-week tele-learning class was developed and delivered to a group of employees in Western Canada as a pilot project. The purpose of this initiative was to address low work/life balance scores on an internal effectiveness survey and to determine the effects of work/life training on individual and organizational productivity.

The group comprised men and women from a global pharmaceutical company, all of whom had mid-level roles and were located in several different cities. Using an online stress measurement tool, each participant measured his or her own level of stress prior to the eight-week program and then again upon program completion.

Before the program, participants responded to surveys with questions on their perceptions of

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