

"THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF OUR WORKFORCE HAVE A DIRECT LINK TO OPTIMAL WORKFORCE PERFORMANCE. WHETHER THE JOB IS DONE AT A WORK LOCATION OR AT HOME, SICKNESS, INJURY AND STRESS CAN AFFECT A PERSON'S ABILITY TO PERFORM AND CONTRIBUTE EFFECTIVELY."

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# Creating a wellbeing culture: Lessons in Leadership

written by Karen van Geelen

This is the fourth in a series of articles that explores the role of leadership as being the essence of a wellbeing culture.

THE INTERACTION EXCELLENCE SERIES

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Who doesn't love the idea of a staycation? That thing we used to do when we simply wanted to leisurely play tourist in our backyard and enjoy the comfort of our own homes. For me, and now many others, COVID-19 and the resulting lockdowns have taken the shine off that little treat.

I've lost count of the conversations I've had with my friends this year where they have lamented how tired they are. Without the imperative to beat the rush hour traffic, it's too easy to spend longer hours at our desks, and with travel off the agenda many are less inclined to take annual leave. It seems staycations aren't so appealing when there's no option but to stay home.

While exotic vacations may not be accessible at the moment, that doesn't mean we should eschew breaks altogether. With opportunity for travel limited, a minibreak might be just the right alternative. Granted, it may not have the same regenerative benefits as two-weeks leave, but it still gives people something to look forward to, and a much-deserved reprieve from the stressors of the workplace.

## It starts and ends with leadership

Interaction, like many workplaces, encourages employees to take a minibreak once every couple of months and uses data to measure employee uptake of this initiative. It is just one component of our wellbeing strategy that embeds organisational health at its core.

We approach wellbeing from a systems perspective that identifies workplace strategies, policies and procedures; organisational culture; and leadership as essential to a vibrant wellbeing culture. Organisational design and workforce planning strategies should enable people to work in jobs that are well designed and adequately resourced. Diversity and inclusion strategies should create a culture of belonging. Work health and safety strategies should contribute to a physically and psychologically safe workplace. Purposeful learning and development programs should build capability and capacity within work teams; coaching and mentoring programs should provide guidance and support; and performance management programs should be a collaborative process.



These examples are not all encompassing, but illustrate when wellbeing is approached from an organisational health perspective, you have a framework that establishes a culture where people feel valued and empowered.

Interwoven through the framework; the glue that holds it together, is leadership. A leader whose actions role model collaborative and inclusive behaviours, and who seeks to set the right tone across the work team, has the power to change the culture. The leader who listens actively and communicates effectively, who is present and attuned to the pulse of their organisation—who looks to the data, both quantitative and qualitative, to see whether people are taking regular breaks or accessing the Employee Assistance Provider (EAP) in greater numbers—this leader has the power to change the culture. By leading with compassion and trust, leaders can create an environment that provides workers with confidence that they are supported and this the heart of a wellbeing culture.

**Man. Because he sacrifices his health in order to make money. He then sacrifices money to recuperate his health.**

**The Dalai Lama when asked what surprises him the most about humanity.**

Forming the outer layer of the framework are the support mechanisms that reinforce an organisation's commitment to wellbeing—EAP, crisis helplines, diversity groups etc. And then there are the wellbeing programs and activities such as resilience workshops, social groups, or group exercise programs. These last initiatives can be powerful and rewarding experiences, but they are not the wellbeing strategy - they are elements of the strategy to build skills and contribute to building communities at work. In isolation they won't build a sustainable wellbeing culture. If leaders don't advocate and role model wellbeing behaviours then the culture will keep reverting to default settings.

## **Contact us if you want more information**

If you would like to learn more about wellbeing the team at Interaction have extensive expertise in wellbeing, leadership development, facilitation, coaching and consulting. Contact us on us on 02 6282 9111 or email [icg@interactionconsulting.com.au](mailto:icg@interactionconsulting.com.au) or visit [www.interactionconsulting.com.au](http://www.interactionconsulting.com.au).



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