

In recent [SBDC National Blog posts](#), we touched on the importance of employee wellness when [working from home](#) during the pandemic and provided resources on [stress management for small business owners](#). With lots of buzz over the past decade about the sometimes-amorphous concept of “wellness,” it is important to put this concept in context and pay careful attention to what strategies effectively work to support it. Growing interest in wellness has resulted in its fair share of [pseudoscientific misinformation](#) and even [harmful “wellness” trends](#). If you are interested in cultivating happier, healthier employees, read on for SBDCNet’s tips on how to create a culture of wellness at your small business.

So... What is Employee Wellness?

According to the Global Wellness Institute, [wellness](#) is “the active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health”. The keyword here is holistic. Wellness is multifaceted, comprised of multiple aspects including physical, emotional, social, intellectual, mental, environmental, and even spiritual well-being. Employers grew interested in wellness initiatives as evidence emerged that healthier employees [boost the bottom line](#) through [decreased absenteeism and improved productivity](#), among other benefits. This interest birthed many [employee wellness programs](#), with [varying levels of success](#) in delivering the desired results. Indeed, recent [research](#) by the University of Chicago and Harvard University raised questions about whether workplace wellness programs actually work at all. In reality, cultivating wellness in your small business is more than just a benefits package, a mandatory no-smoking training session, or infusing the office water cooler with lemon: experts believe the most successful company wellness initiatives view wellness as [intrinsic to the company culture](#). Transforming company culture is a more holistic approach than simply implementing wellness programs and calling it a day. Ultimately, culture determines how [employees engage](#) with programs and thus whether the programs succeed or fail.

Lead the Shift

When it comes to [company culture](#), changes must begin with a commitment from the highest levels of leadership. Cultural changes almost certainly fail without this commitment. As the owner of your small business, it is imperative that you [lead by example](#) when it comes to wellness. This means taking care of your own well-being and modeling healthy [work-life balance](#). Educate yourself on leadership strategies that can help mitigate employee stress, such as [servant leadership](#). Be sure to also avoid behaviors and leadership styles that [alienate your employees](#) or [lower their morale](#). Your commitment to wellness as a small business owner is of crucial importance - you are more visible and closer to your employees

than CEO's in big business settings. The larger the organization, the harder it is to [get everybody in sync](#) with a value system, so your small businesses' smallness is an asset when it comes to transforming and sustaining healthy company culture.

Assess Current Culture

When it comes to transforming company culture for the better, there is no one size fits all solution. You must first [assess the current culture](#) at your small business before determining how best to move it in the desired direction. To assess the current culture, consider facilitating anonymous surveys that [ask meaningful questions](#) about workplace culture. Building an effective culture of wellness requires incorporating [employee feedback](#) as part of the very fabric of workplace culture, and not trying to meet employee needs without first gauging what exactly those needs are. Assessing your current culture will give you a better picture of where the pain points are, so your efforts to improve culture can be targeted where they are needed most. To maintain the relevancy of your engagement, assessments should be done on a regular basis, typically on an annual basis.

Reinvent and Sustain a Culture of Employee Wellness

Now that you know what aspects of your company culture need improvement, act accordingly. Be prepared to give a little. If employees indicated a severe lack of [work-life balance](#), adjust your expectations so your employees can have healthy boundaries (for example, not expecting responses to emails in the evening so your employees can spend time with their families). Consider implementing [workplace wellness programs at your small business](#), if employee feedback has indicated unmet needs exist, making sure that you fully understand the [associated costs](#) of such programs. Value and reward employees who embrace the right behaviors. Intervene to course-correct when you see behaviors that run counter to your [company's core values](#). Foster open dialogues about [mental health](#) to combat the stigma, and continuously seek feedback along the way. Keep on leading by example, and don't forget that an important way to sustain a healthy company culture is to consider [culture-fit as a part of hiring practices](#).

Something to keep in mind when evaluating and adjusting your [small business culture](#), is that the ideal culture may look different for different types of businesses. The culture at a biker bar is different than a bingo hall, and that's okay. The importance of leading intentionally, incorporating feedback, and following through remains across these different contexts. And while it's true that your employees are an [important business asset](#), hopefully you are motivated to support your employees' well-being because they are human beings who deserve dignity beyond their value to your bottom line. If your employees know that

you genuinely care about them as individuals, you are well on your way to [creating a culture of wellness](#) at your small business. If you're particularly concerned about the [toll the coronavirus pandemic](#) is taking on your employees' mental well-being, check out these resources from the [US Chamber of Commerce](#) and [Forbes](#) on supporting your employees during this time.

Additional Small Business Resources

Already in business or thinking about starting your own small business? Check out our various small business resources:

- View small business help topics here: [Small Business Information Center](#)
- View business reports here: [Small Business Snapshots](#)
- View industry-specific research here: [Market Research Links](#)

Remember, you can also receive **free professional business advice** and free or low-cost business training from your [local Small Business Development Center](#)!

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