

# Know Your Numbers



## The Top 3 Business Benefits of a Health Survey

The health of your business is reflected in the numbers. Like most companies, you probably track dozens of metrics to measure the success of each of your critical functions - for example, leads generated, new sales, account retention rates, production costs, QA failure rates, customer service call volume, and employee turnover rates. These numbers help each department meet their individual objectives, and taken together, they create a solid picture of how a company is performing.

But if you are interested in understanding and improving the health of your company, now and in the future, you must also understand the literal health of your employees. As a leader in your organization, your goal is to create and maintain a highly productive, healthy workforce and attract and retain great talent with health benefits that are not going through the roof every year. You won't be able to achieve that goal without knowing how many of your employees never exercise or whether anyone eats energy-rich foods.

You want employees that work hard, and the less healthy they are – if they're trending toward inactive lifestyles, eating sugary foods that drain their energy, developing high blood pressure and stress, and catching every cold that comes their way – the less likely you have a high energy, high performance, enthusiastic, and engaged workforce. There is a direct connection between physical health and productivity, between illness and your health costs as an employer.

## How to Learn Your Health Numbers

The tried and true method for understanding your “health numbers” is to roll out an annual health survey, also called a health risk assessment (HRA). Health surveys have been used as a standard industry component of worksite wellness programs for over 20 years and have been shown to help companies reduce healthcare costs and improve productivity. <sup>1,6</sup>



To understand the business benefits of a survey, let's first review the benefits of worksite wellness programs as a whole. If you are like most employers, your employees are having a hard time keeping their weight under control, getting enough exercise, eating right, and quitting tobacco. Unfortunately, these poor lifestyle habits are directly linked to the heavy hitters of health cost: obesity, high blood pressure, heart disease, heart attack, and general sickness.<sup>2, 3, 6</sup> The result? Soaring benefits costs. In a well-publicized survey, CEOs ranked rising healthcare costs as the biggest threat to their company profits.<sup>4</sup>

The goal of a wellness program is to get your employees rallied around an attitude of wellness, create a positive work environment, boost energy levels, reduce sick days, reduce unnecessary or preventable doctor visits, and save you money on benefits costs. In study after study, wellness programs - when conducted and evaluated properly - have been proven to meet those goals. Wellness works.

So, where does the survey fit in? The survey is essential for the following 3 reasons.

## **1** The survey provides the data to set goals and measure success.

The premise of this paper is that numbers are important. Without a baseline, a starting point, you can't tell whether any wellness effort has had any effect whatsoever. The results of the survey serve a fundamental role in all of your program planning. A good survey will identify the health habits and behaviors of participants in core wellness areas such as nutrition, physical activity, and smoking. These core areas serve as the main drivers of the health costs for most employers.

The data from the survey will be a goldmine of information used by the employee to set and manage personal goals within the context of your wellness program. Immediately after taking the survey, the employee will get a personal health action plan just for them. Personalization is a key to wellness success, and you can't get personalization without a health survey.

The survey should also uncover the motivations, barriers, and environmental factors that are essential to helping employees change their behavior. (Many surveys don't do a good job at this, so a thorough vendor evaluation is important.) The HRA should give the participant a wellness plan that suggests concrete ways to take the next step, not merely state what has to change.

For your part, the survey is going to give you an aggregate view of the health status of your employee population. These are "your numbers." Your organization will use the data in aggregate to set program priorities and evaluate the success of your wellness initiatives over time.





As the years progress, you will have an accurate, data-driven method of tracking your organization's progress. A good health survey will give you the ability to add new questions (in case you need to drill down in a particular health area) or perhaps remove questions that have not shown as much value to you. Changing the survey a little also helps prevent employees from getting bored with answering the exact same questions every year. In your launch communications, be sure to play up the new questions.

## 2 A survey is the most logical way to kickoff a new year of wellness.

The survey sets a tone. It projects the message, "Our company cares about wellness." By asking key questions, it shows very clearly that the company takes certain health factors seriously. The questions themselves begin to lay the groundwork for a culture of wellness and to establish the priority health areas within the company. The survey forces a level of introspection and makes the employee begin to reflect on all of those daily decisions that otherwise are such ingrained habits that they usually don't think twice about them.

Furthermore, the survey requires active participation, active engagement. All of the employees take the survey at the same general time, so it is easy to launch a kickoff campaign around it, and you can easily measure the results of who has participated.

Once you have your employees' attention, use the momentum from the survey as the launching step to the next series of activities - and the next, and the next, and so on.

## 3 Properly framed, a survey shows you care.

This may sound a bit touchy feely, and not what a numbers-driven organization should care about. Nothing could be further from the truth. Employees are people, and whether they are managers, executives, or entry level, they react to their fellow employees as people in very predictable ways. If you want your productivity numbers to be high, you have to earn it. Employees aren't going to go the extra mile for you, productivity wise, if they hate you.

It's a pretty simple equation. If you want your employees to care about the company, then the company has to show that it cares about the employees.

Here's how you leverage a health survey to turn it into a positive experience for all. Communicate something along these lines: "We know that many of you are looking for ways to boost your health, whether it's to exercise more, lose weight, eat better, or stop smoking. If that is of interest to you, then we want to help."





This survey will help you take stock of where you are in that process. If you are having trouble getting started, it will help you find an easy first step. The survey is confidential and the company will not have access to your individual answers. As employees, we can all use this tool to help us achieve our personal health goals.”

Notice the tone of this message - “We know you probably already want to be healthier, and haven’t been able to get there completely on your own. We’re here to help.” Making the survey optional, but encouraging them with added incentives, is the icing on the cake for this message. Once the wellness program begins and everyone is getting more active, a true sense of community is created.

A final thought - why do you provide your employees with any benefits in the first place? In many cases, it is to be competitive against organizations in your industry and to recruit and retain talent. In those scenarios, leverage your health attitude in the same way during the hiring process: “We have a well-structured wellness program here. You don’t have to participate, but our company cares a lot about our employee’s health, and if you have any goals you are trying to achieve, we have a great program in place to help. We’re an active, high-energy company. If that is what you like, we’ve got great resources for you.”

Let’s face it - if you are interviewing someone who does not respond to that message, you might want to think twice. Wellness works in that way, too.<sup>5</sup>

At the beginning of this business brief, we noted the breadth and depth of numbers that most organizations track to measure their corporate health. Hopefully, this paper has given you some ways to think about the role of employee health as well. You can’t really know what kind of shape your company is in without knowing what kind of shape the workers are in. Health is a great idea all around. And numbers are the key.

The rewards of a wellness program – grounded in the numbers – are seeing your coworkers benefit directly from a healthier lifestyle, developing a more engaged workforce, and keeping your organization’s health cost impact to a minimum.

Are you ready to know your numbers?

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Numbers**



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