

Guide

The Top 5 Reasons Employee Wellness Programs Fail, and How To Avoid These Costly Mistakes





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The post-pandemic workplace is still reshaping. Some workplaces are trying to bring employees back to the office full time, while others have fully adapted to the hybrid workplace model. Most companies are still trying to find a balance between working from home and the office. Employees are still reporting challenges in adapting their life to the company's working style. Some have changed their living locations, moved to the countryside, or now moving back to the city, having different daily routines when working from home or on days of being at the office.

With these changes, employee wellness programs that used to work pre-pandemic are completely failing with the new environment. That means that HR and team leaders that are not adapting their strategy waste precious resources on solutions that aren't working.

By analyzing data from more than 300 teams in the past six months and interviewing 50 HR leaders of companies in different sizes, we've highlighted the top five reasons employee wellness programs fail in the post-pandemic era. We've shared them here to help you avoid them and give yourself the best chances for success.

01. Not aligning the program to your leadership's objectives.

In many cases HR leaders requested to create an employee wellness program without a real understanding of the business objectives behind it. This leads to a wrong set of expectations and, in most cases, a feeling that the program has no real impact on the company.

Be sure you ask the reason your CFO and CEO have agreed to have an employee wellness budget in the first place. It must be very clear to you. Was it to reduce insurance costs? Improve employee satisfaction? Improve remote workforce connectivity and company culture? Or just to tick a box (which is fine, as long as it's clear to everyone).

How to avoid:

- Set very clear KPIs ahead of time. Before getting started, spend time with the leadership team to understand why they are interested in investing in their employees' wellbeing. What results would they like to see and what is their timeline?
- Discuss expectations ahead of time. We often hear about leadership teams with very high expectations while allocating a minimal budget. Sitting down with the leadership to set expectations beforehand will help communicate to them what you think can realistically be achieved with this budget.
- Write it down. Be sure to write down the program objectives, timeline and expectations and share it with your leadership team. Even if your program doesn't hit the expectations, it will be much easier to make changes later and have your leadership team support. It's also more likely that what you achieve will be appreciated and recognised by them as something with a real contribution to the business.



02. Asking your employees what they want.

Henry Ford once said: "If you ask my customers what they want they will tell you a faster horse". While it sounds like asking your employees what they would like to have in their employee wellness program is a good idea, in most cases this is a recipe for disaster. Why? Corporate wellness programs have very different objectives than individual wellness programs.

Here are a few examples of misaligned goals between employers and employees:

- An employer that wants to use the program to help employees develop personal relationships with each other and enhance your company culture shouldn't offer a meditation app because it won't be utilized by many employees and also won't serve your goal. (That doesn't mean that employees who already use a mediation app won't be happy to have it paid by the employer!). We often see companies commit themselves to a yearly agreement with a well-known meditation app to find out after two months that only 2-3% of employees are actually using it.
- An employer offers free gym membership or fitness classes. It might be of great benefit to the employees, but will it activate those who don't go to the gym now? Or is the reason they aren't using the gym at the moment because they can't afford it? You might find yourself paying a gym membership for those who go to the gym anyway and not supporting those who need it the most.



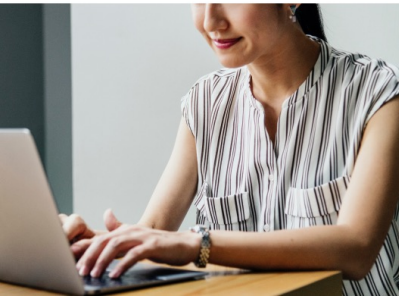


How to avoid:

- Focus on employer and employees' needs rather than wants. Satisfying all employee and employer wants is impossible. Instead, focus on their needs, since it gives them a feeling that their opinion matters.
- Plan a program that fits your goals as an employer. You'll need to do this after sitting down with the leadership and clarifying their goals and expectations we discussed earlier in #1.
- Measure the impact of your solution. You'll want to use employee feedback to make adjustments while always keeping your company objectives in mind.
- Choose the right employee wellness program. It's highly recommended not to use consumer solutions in a corporate setting because they are just not designed for the needs of corporations. There are plenty of dedicated solutions for corporations that can serve your company's goals.

03. Not communicating your progress internally

In many cases, HR leaders avoid communicating their progress because they don't feel it's successful. They have a low participation rate and minimal engagement. The leadership team ends up feeling that the program has no impact on the business and there is no recognition for what has been achieved. This is another reason why aligning the program to your leadership's objectives is so critical.



How to avoid:

- Start a habit of sending a quarterly newsletter to your supervisors. This newsletter should include the program objectives and some metrics.
- Clearly state your goals or plans for improvement. If the program is moving in the right direction, then specify what you'll do to improve it. If it's not going in the right direction, specify what you will change or what you are planning to do next.
- Share data. Provide links to example wellness reports for your leadership team. We've found that 78% of those who use the Reaction report template also report that their leadership team is satisfied with their program.

04. Not making a clear connection between what you achieve and business KPIs

Sometimes we see HR leaders report to their leadership team that 20% of the employees are participating in the wellness program. But how do that 20% make an impact on the company? Metrics that don't impact the business directly are often open to interpretation. While HR leaders know 20% participation in a wellness program is far above the industry average, your CFO might think it's a failure. Be sure to put these statistics into context for your audience.

How to avoid:

- Turn metrics into assets that contribute to your program objectives. For example, if your goal is to reduce insurance risks, you might say: "Within three months we increased the employee average daily step count by 12%, which means their diabetes risk is lower. Or you might explain that the company has 12 people participating in our online yoga class which means that we can estimate that 12 employees are more productive at work.
- Use a tool or data to back up these metrics. A good tool for calculating these benefits is the Reaction program benefits calculator ([link](#)) in your admin panel. You can also include the latest research on wellness as a way of proving your point.



05. Taking too long to build and launch the program.

Many companies spend 3-6 months building their wellness program. This process normally consists of an employee survey, interviewing vendors and products, many internal meetings and finally, the launch itself. But most of the time the reality is that some of these programs work and others don't. This is completely normal. Not all your assumptions will be correct, so why spend a long time testing them? In the post-covid era, when needs of both employees and employers change frequently, it's important to create a fast way to make assumptions, test them, and scale (or get rid of them if they aren't working).

How to avoid:

- Adopt a startup mindset. Most early-stage companies today won't build a full product before meeting customers. They will then make initial assumptions, then build an MPV (Minimum Viable Product), test it with consumers, then improve or make changes.
- Evaluate how much they are being used and take the next step. Instead of building a full program, launch small initiatives and test them.



About Reaction Club

Your Employee Wellbeing Coach Is Just One Click Away

Reaction helps you increase workplace wellness participation, retention, and engagement using tech and touch approach. A clean, easy-to-navigate user interface makes it easy for employees to join and build a personal wellness program that fits their goals and needs, and receive guidance from the world's best wellness experts. The result is individuals that stick with their programs longer and build habits that last.

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