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How to Create a Holistic Wellness Program

Grace Frye

It's not uncommon to see companies that highlight employee wellness as a core value when describing culture. Especially during the past year as organizations have worked to introduce more remote friendly and accessible policies.

With the rise of wellness programming, here's how one Director of People Operations and Culture took the mantra "we care about our people" and crafted company wide policies that center and promote holistic wellbeing.

How the pandemic spurred a more intentional approach to wellness

Amanda McKay is the Director of People Operations and Culture at Checkfront, an 80-person SaaS company based in Victoria, BC (with employees across Canada), that specializes in online booking software. At Checkfront, caring about and supporting employees has always been central to the way things are done, Amanda says. And even before the pandemic hit in 2020, she focused a lot of time on prioritizing wellness.

But with the pandemic, like many people leaders, Amanda realized that the swift shift to hybrid and remote work and rising stresses related to COVID-19 were taking a toll on employees and company morale. Without the ability to see and check in with the team in person everyday it became clear to Amanda how important it is to codify the company-wide mantra "we care about our people" into policies and benefits and take the opportunity to reinvest in wellness.

Here are some changes Amanda and her team have made that center holistic wellbeing at Checkfront:

Being intentional about language

Understanding the impact of the language used when creating company policies and benefits can help to destigmatize taking a well needed day off. Amanda says Checkfront made the switch from "Sick Days" to "Health Days" in order to recognize both mental and physical health, and empower employees to take time to care for themselves.

Prioritizing mental health

Checkfront has also invested in an Employee Assistance Program and partners with a local organization that provides counseling services and will match Checkfront team members with counselors specific to their needs. By offering both online and in-person options, this program has increased accessibility to mental health resources company-wide.

Expanded health coverage

Not only can employees access counselors through the Employee Assistance Program, but also through extended health benefits. Checkfront now offers up to \$500 for clinical counseling. Amanda stresses that this allows for multiple options when approaching holistic wellbeing and gives employees additional resources as they find the right fit for them.

Creating a physical space dedicated to wellness

One unique way to show company-wide commitment to wellbeing, Amanda says, is in creating a welcoming and safe space dedicated to holistic wellness. At Checkfront, this takes shape in both how the office looks and feels, and the new private wellness room recently introduced. According to Amanda, a private wellness room is an important new initiative because it offers a tangible space that provides both a physical and mental break within the office building available to all employees. This may even be easier to set up than you think. Converting what would have been an empty or storage room allowed Amanda and her team to be really intentional as they work to actualize wellness policies.

Communicating opportunities for wellness to employees

Finally, after creating incredible programs and tools for increasing mental and physical health company-wide, Amanda says it should be a top priority that your people **know** holistic wellbeing is at the center of company operations. In order to do this Amanda documents all policies/offerings and uses tools like a monthly people newsletter to highlight wellness programs, explore monthly topics in wellness, and host inclusive and optional company events.

At the end of the day, Amanda says showing up for your employees and working towards holistic wellness is an important part of creating a safe environment in which your teams can succeed. And while there are several ways to measure the success of wellness initiatives like tracking participation rates at events, how many health days are taken, or traditional NPS scores, success will look different at the individual level. Continuing to check in with employees and adjusting programs as needed makes sure that the intent is clear and that Checkfront is living up to its mantra that “we care about our people.”

Grace (LinkedIn) is a journalist, writer, and story teller, passionate about cultivating team cultures

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