Human Resources & Health and Safety

Do you employ staff?

Promoting Health and Well-Being in the Workplace

With April being National Stress Awareness Month, as well as containing National Walk to Work Day (5th April) and World health Day (7th April), we felt it would be beneficial to publish a newsletter focusing on the encouragement of health and well-being in the workplace.

Why is it Important?

The recent survey "Working Well: A global Survey of Workforce Wellbeing Strategies" conducted by New York based HR Consultancy, Buck, has shown that only 26% of UK firms have an employee well-being strategy. The international average is much higher, at 42%, which begs the question why the UK is trailing behind other parts of the World, especially when 97% of employers taking part in the survey could recognise the benefits a well-being programme can have on employee health and work-life balance. *(Churchill, F. People Management, April 2019)*

Over recent years there has been growing evidence that shows the need to support employees' well-being and provide not only a physically safe working environment, that won't result in harm, but a working environment that is considered nurturing to the employee's emotional well-being. Advances in technology have helped businesses across the world tremendously, but they have also helped to create an "always-on" culture where people are accessible via email 24/7, working long hours in front of the computer, both of which have caused stress levels to rise and physical health to decline. One of the ways to address this issue is by implementing an Employee Well-Being Initiative, which would help you to foster a company culture that focuses on the needs of the employee as well as the needs of the business. A job can do more than meet an employee's basic financial need, it can give their life meaning and purpose. It can bring a person a level of satisfaction, enjoyment and pride. As an employer, you have the opportunity to create a positive workplace that enriches the lives of employees. Whilst this may sound a bit fanciful, it stands to reason that when people are happy and well, they are more likely to thrive. When we consider

this in the context of the workplace, a happy and healthy employee can only mean good things for the Company as a whole.

How Can We Promote Health and Well-Being?

The most effective way to promote employee health and well-being is to develop a strategy that tackles this issue from multiple angles and is embraced in all different levels throughout the Company. Simply putting up a few posters in the office canteen that promote healthy snack choices and no-smoking will not be enough to increase the well-being of your employees. There needs to be consistent thinking and actions throughout the Company, with buy-in from all tiers of management, so that the focus on employee health and well-being is considered as important as performance management or health and safety. Research shows that by focusing on employee well-being in this way is significantly beneficial for the business as a whole.

It is recommended that a holistic approach is taken, as all employees have individual needs. Having only one approach may benefit some employees but have no effect on the lives of others, which is why you should attempt to promote health and well-being via a multi-pronged strategy. Common components of an Employee Well-Being Initiative often include:

- **The Promotion of Healthy Eating**. Whether this is by supplying free fruit, displaying educational posters, ensuring that meetings / events are catered by companies who provide healthy and balanced options, or simply having a map in the staff room that directs employees to the nearest places to purchase healthier food, this is one way to help employees fuel their bodies positively, providing energy that will last the day.
- **Providing Mental Health Support**. By including stress in risk assessments, having a stress management policy, operating an open-door culture with regular one-to-ones between management and employees, placing posters in commonly used areas, signposting employees to support services within the community, and offering to fund short-term counselling programmes, you will be helping to create a culture where employees feel able to discuss any mental health issues they have, free from judgement and shame. Employees who feel able to discuss their mental health issues are more likely to be able to address their issues and recover / learn to manage any condition they may have.
- **Encouraging Physical Activity**. Whether it's by initiating a cycle to work scheme, encouraging employees to ditch the car at least one day a week or use the stairs instead of a lift, starting a lunch time walking group / morning running group, or offering a Company gym membership, encouraging individual or group activity is definitely something that will help improve the physical and mental health of employees, which is something that would benefit them both in and outside of work.
- **Organising Team Building Activities**. People are, by nature, social animals. We like to feel part of a community and connected to those around us, and therefore it makes sense to encourage friendship and camaraderie in the workplace. It can be difficult to do this when everyone is focused on the day to day activities, which is why organising regular team building or social activities is a fun and rewarding way to encourage a more community feel in the workplace, where people will hopefully feel happier and more productive.
- **Initiate a Smoking Ban**. Whilst employees are entitled to a personal life and you cannot stop them smoking entirely, you can ban smoking from the workplace. Not only will this improve the health of employees who smoke, but it will prevent the dangers of second hand smoke to other employees and customers, as well as

preventing any unpleasant smells in the workplace. However, if you wish to be a supportive employer, you may also consider signposting employees to local services that can support them if they wish to quit smoking completely, which is something that can be difficult to do unsupported.

- **Offer a Life Enrichment Payment**. Some employers choose to offer employees a sum of money that can be used towards their own personal development. For example, you could provide employees with an amount of money each year, to be spent on something that would develop the employee, whether this was an educational course, learning to play a musical instrument, or learning a martial art. The employee would need to provide evidence of how the money was spent, but by encouraging employees to start new hobbies or learn a new skill they have always dreamed about, you would be helping them to become a better and happier version of themselves.

- **Take Part in National or International Awareness Days**. There are many awareness days, both nationally and internationally, that focus on important issues within society. Many of these awareness days are focused on improving physical and mental health, with many activities taking part across the country / world and being shared online, to raise awareness for the cause. It would be very easy to encourage your employees to take part in these awareness days by, for example, holding standing meetings on the 26th April for "On your Feet Britain", or encouraging walking to work during Mays "National Walking Month". By taking part in these events your employees would likely improve their physical and mental health and they would also benefit from knowing they are taking part in a larger event and contributing to a worthy cause.

How Can We Help?

If you have any queries relating to any of the above, please don't hesitate to contact us at hradvice@hasslefreehr.co.uk