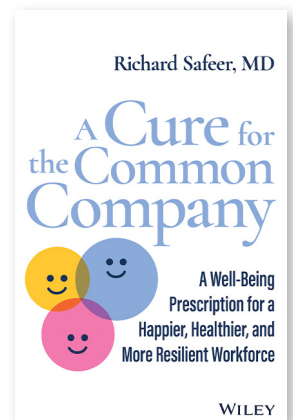


A Cure for the Common Company

A Well-Being Prescription for a Happier, Healthier, and More Resilient Workforce

by **Richard Safer**



Contents

The Case for Building a Workplace Well-Being Culture

Page 2

Shared Values

Page 2

Social Climate

Page 3

Norms

Page 3

Culture Connection Points

Page 4

Peer Support

Page 5

Leadership Engagement

Page 6

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Every day, leaders in organizations small, large, private, and public are struggling to reconcile their own well-being with their work and figuring out how to support the health of their teams. Many companies offer programs, a wellness portal, and health-promoting policies, but the environment, the people, and the business priorities aren't always aligned. Employees need more—a lot more—for their well-being.

Many executives recognize the impact of workplace culture on employee well-being, especially in light of the global pandemic. But how do we build a well-being culture and what are the culture building blocks of such a workplace? There's a prescription for a happier, healthier, and more resilient team and organization through building a well-being culture.

Leaders who take a systematic approach by using the six building blocks of a well-being culture described by Richard Safer in *A Cure for the Common Company: A Well-Being Prescription for a Happier, Healthier, and More Resilient Workforce* can impact their team's well-being and even the whole company.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The case for building a workplace well-being culture.
- Six building blocks to create a well-being culture.
- Tips and techniques for implementing each building block.
- Ways in which this work will benefit the workforce and the organization.

The Case for Building a Workplace Well-Being Culture

Our home and our community play a big role in our happiness and health as well. Yes because we spend most of our waking hours working, our thoughts and behaviors during these hours strongly influence our well-being. As a leader, manager, health promotion specialist, human resource professional, lifestyle medicine clinician, or any other professional influencing employees, you have a unique opportunity to create a happier, healthier, and more resilient team and workforce. You might even like the way it feels yourself!

There are plenty of reasons to have health and well-being goals. Foremost, in the wake of a global pandemic, there is an epidemic of mental health challenges. Our stress levels and feelings of happiness (or sadness) impact many, if not most of our other health choices. Who hasn't sat down in front of the TV with a bowl of ice cream or a bag of potato chips after a stressful day of work? The same health challenges that plagued us before the arrival of COVID-19, such as smoking, obesity and insufficient exercise, still exist—possibly worse than before.

All too often, our society praises individual achievement, while underappreciating collective efforts. Yes, sometimes teams are recognized, but this is America, the land of “rugged individualism,” and by and large, the expectation is that we make advances on our own, including with our well-being. Hats off to those who can improve their health and well-being without anyone's help. However, most of us continue to learn and understand that it is communities that have the bigger and more lasting influence on our behaviors, beliefs, and thoughts.

So why aren't organizations taking advantage of what we know to be true? We are more likely to be healthy and well when we are in a supportive group, team, and community that has aligned behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes around well-being (aka, well-being culture). Perhaps it's because we haven't previously clearly articulated the importance of organizational well-being culture and how to shape it.

Most people want to work in an environment in which they feel valued and supported. People generally know what is healthy, but they face challenges adopting healthy behaviors and getting rid of unhealthy ones. Consequently, many people in the workforce seek employers that support health and happiness, and those who already work for these employers tend to stay longer. In addition to improving recruitment and retention, a well-being culture results in

improved performance, decreased absenteeism, and thus, a positive financial picture. A well-being culture is a competitive advantage. There are six building blocks any organization can leverage to create a well-being culture.

Building Block #1: Shared Values

Shared values matter. But it's unusual for a company to put employee health and well-being on the high-priority list, alongside goals like profitability, outstanding customer service, and new product innovation. However, we have clear evidence that a culture that puts employee well-being at the top, starting with its values, will lead to success.

It's a common misunderstanding that employee health and well-being only benefits the individual or only the employer. Everyone benefits. These mutual benefits stem from shared values, the priorities that both employees and the employer embrace. When employees appreciate that their job and their employer value their well-being, then companies flourish.

A company's values serve as the beacon for how the company makes decisions, behaves, and prioritizes its resources and effort. Values = priorities. It's worth the time and energy to focus on the company values because they serve as a rudder to keep the company on course. Hopefully, when assessing your core values, you're starting from a place where values include health and well-being themes.

The themes don't have to be blatant, like exercise. An organization that values work-life balance is doing wonders for well-being by allowing families to flourish, employees to recharge before coming back to the office, and keeping stress levels down as employees deal with life's speed bumps. Exploration of shared values will help you land on some very meaningful themes. One step toward making your shared values meaningful is to translate them to a vision for your well-being culture. Your well-being vision helps employees understand what well-being ideally looks like as it pertains to the organization.

Once the health and well-being values and vision are identified and recognized, the message needs to be broadcast frequently and through a myriad of avenues to reinforce and amplify the importance of this value to the community. This is not the kind of thing you want to keep secret. The last thing your organization wants to do is spend time and energy creating shared values and letting them sit on a shelf. It will be disheartening and demoralizing if the workforce doesn't see the shared values lived.

Working in a toxic environment wrecks havoc on well-being but obviously it doesn't have to be this way.

Building Block #2: Social Climate

The social climate at some companies is sunny and warm, while at others it's cloudy and can even be downright frosty sometimes. Working in a toxic environment wrecks havoc on well-being but obviously it doesn't have to be this way. From frontline supervisors to the C-suite, leaders can promote a positive social climate by building a sense of community, fostering positive attitudes, and creating a shared vision. Leaders set the tone by making people feel included and united in their efforts. Feeling good about where you work and the people you work with is a big, big part of well-being.

A good social climate is also good for the organization. Research that goes back 50 years shows that a good social climate positively impacts the organization in the following ways:

- Improves recruitment and retention
- Enhances trust
- Increases resilience
- Lowers the cost of doing business

A good social climate contributes to happier, healthier, and more resilient teams and a more financially sound organization. It's really the essence of creating a "work family." Most of us yearn to be part of a caring, uplifting, positive community; when it's not available, we may look elsewhere. Being part of a group fills a human need. Socializing is not a "nice to have." Socializing actually reduces our risk of catching colds and developing chronic diseases and helps us recover more quickly from an illness. The absence of feeling socially connected increases our health risks as much as smoking 15 cigarettes a day!

Indisputably, those with social support will live healthier, happier, and longer. It's imperative that we create a sense of community within the workplace if we expect healthy and happy employees and a thriving organization.

Here are some ways to enhance your sense of community:

Onboarding: This is the time to set expectations for how they will contribute to the greater workplace community.

Don't leave the important message of collegiality, trust, and collaboration to a self-paced mandatory pre recorded training.

Meet and Greet: Creating spaces where employees can congregate and socialize is one way to create a sense of community.

Vulnerability and Trust: When we trust our colleagues, we feel safe, which lowers stress levels and allows us to be our authentic selves, allowing full collaboration with others on the team. One way to improve trust is to foster vulnerability by showing that we are human.

Feeling Respected and Having Our Opinions

Count: Trust enables us to feel comfortable offering an opinion. This contributes to greater levels of creativity, collaboration, and productive solutions.

Communication: If you want everyone to feel like they're on the same team, you'll have to master communication.

Having Fun Together: Organizations that integrate fun into work have lower levels of absenteeism, greater job satisfaction, increased morale, and a greater sense of team bonding.

Volunteering: Volunteering lends itself to being grateful, which contributes to happiness. It also helps bring purpose to the day, creates teamwork, and generates positive feelings about the contribution one is making.

Having a good social climate makes it easier to establish and maintain relationships. These relationships extend well beyond your immediate team when the atmosphere fosters accessibility and approachability. When a positive social climate exists, people look forward to coming to work. Consider how your organization can implement strategies that support a good social climate across the entire organization.

Building Block #3: Norms

There is power in norms to influence individual behavior when the circumstances are right and they give us leverage when trying to create a well workforce. Think about your

own struggles to adopt a healthy behavior. It's hard when our goals go against norms in our immediate social circles. Likewise, it's much easier to adopt a behavior when all the cool kids are doing it and when norms align with our own goals.

Norms are one of the key building blocks of culture. Norms are "the way we do things around here," the usual way of acting in a given circumstance, behaviors that are done without much thought. Norms also include the attitudes and beliefs prevalent in the culture that support those common behaviors and habits.

You might be thinking that you're facing a long, tough climb with certain behaviors in your workplace. The difference is that we know so much more about how to create norms and thus how to influence behavior than we once did. Norms can be shaped much more quickly now.

Norms play a big role in your team or organization, but norms can be intentionally changed or new ones can be developed. To change norms, you need to build infrastructure. Create alliances with communications, human resources, and procurement departments. Press for integration of the effort with business goals. Some norm changes are better managed over a longer time; a cataclysmic shift that happens too fast can provoke resistance.

Norms can be intentionally shaped, and that work is the crux of change management of almost any kind. Shaping norms to support healthy behaviors can be more complex because we don't have the right to dictate how people behave when it comes to their well-being. The key to remember is that in a culture of health, personal choice is respected. Norms encourage healthy practices *and* support individual discretion. Despite the subtle balancing act required, healthy norms are being developed in organizations around the world every day.

With so many unhealthy behaviors in almost any culture, it may not seem difficult to choose a few norms to shift or shape. To increase the chance of arriving at a decision that is most likely to benefit your organization, you have to be strategic and focused. Consider three fundamentals.

1. The right norm aligns with the organization's values.
2. The right norm has to be meaningful to employees.
3. The right norm needs to be meaningful to the organization.

Every culture is full of norms, whether we're acknowledg-

ing them or not. In too many organizations, more of the norms fall on the wrong side of the health and well-being scale. But this is not an insurmountable problem. Norms can be identified, and they can be changed, and when we make the effort, we can have a profound positive impact on people, teams, and organizations.

Building Block #4: Culture Connection Points

Your organization is making innumerable decisions every day that not only impact your organization's success, but also the well-being of your team and workforce at large. Many of these decisions either make having a healthy day easier or harder. The prompts can be subtle and happen throughout the day or they can be overt and have a long-term presence. Our well-being is shaped by cues and levers developed and deployed by our organization. Collectively, these culture connection points shape our behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs.

A culture connection point is defined by the intersection between the design of our workplace experience and our well-being. Culture connection points can influence healthy behaviors and attitudes, or they can be complicit in unhealthy behaviors and attitudes. Workplace levers need to be positioned to influence human behavior so that they are all pointing toward supporting the healthy beliefs and choices aimed at achieving a healthy workplace culture.

Achieving daily health and well-being practices requires examining the culture connection points and then making strategic adjustments. Faced with innumerable choices that impact our well-being every day at work, employers can design the employee experience so that it's easier to support a well-being culture.

It starts with recruitment and candidate selection. Your well-being culture can be embedded into your job announcement. Interview questions can be designed to ask how applicants will contribute to the well-being of their future team. Making culture connection points before the job is offered will set the tone for future interactions with the new hire.

Onboarding refers to mechanisms through which new employees acquire necessary knowledge, skills, and behaviors to become effective organizational colleagues and insiders. You can ensure that employees' early impressions are positive ones by explaining the wellness vision, team well-being norms, and the importance of self care throughout the workday. Actions speak louder than words so make sure

Willpower is a flawed strategy when it comes to making healthy choices.

actions are aligned with the professed wellness vision.

Some methods of communicating and sharing information are more effective than others and can make a difference. If your organization includes a physician or someone who is known to be healthy, positive, and generally a great well-being model, it can be helpful to have this person's endorsement. Leverage humor, word of mouth, and family inclusion to multiply the impact.

Communication is likely to be the most common culture connection point used in our well-being culture toolkit but communication alone won't be enough to change behavior. It's important to include several culture connection points simultaneously to foster adoption and maintenance of healthy choices.

Other connection points include:

- Benefits and programs beyond a retirement plan, days off, and health insurance such as heart rate monitors, wearable wellness devices, mindfulness programs, and more.
- Sharing stories and narratives around well-being journeys, especially that of leaders.
- Rewards and recognition that are financial and extrinsic but also ones that are intrinsic, based in fun, creative, and joyful motivation.
- Learning and training to provide opportunities for every employee to build happiness and resilience skills, including training managers to lead with a well-being lens.
- Symbols and traditions that represent the beliefs, such as institutional stretch breaks or annual fun runs or walks to create a wellness bond between employees.

Culture connection points give a plethora of opportunities to shape the culture of an organization and workplace. By using multiple ways to shift the culture in a healthier direction, you are bound to make progress. Sharing these culture connection points with a group of leaders can make it easier to brainstorm solutions for barriers to health and well-being during the workday.

Building Block #5: Peer Support

Perhaps the greatest predictor of success for adopting and sustaining a healthy lifestyle habit is whether a friend, family member, or close co-worker practices that same healthy habit. Peer support can make the difference between success and failure as peers are in a unique position to provide the ongoing support needed to achieve lasting lifestyle change.

Willpower is a flawed strategy when it comes to making healthy choices. Many people eat regardless of whether they are hungry and prompts for overeating abound. When the conference room table has donuts placed in the center of it on Monday morning, our brain wrestles with itself. We know our intent and our goals and yet sometimes we can't resist the temptation. Peers can unknowingly make it tough for you to reach your health goals.

Conversely, they can help you build healthier habits. It's easier to be happy and feel well when you're with a buddy. Peer support is not only about helping each other build healthier habits or get rid of unhealthy ones, but also about having a shoulder to lean on and a pair of ears to listen. Buddies can enhance a well-being culture. Two people are paired, get to know each other, and look out for each other's well-being in an "I have your back" way.

Buddies in such a system get to know each other by talking about work, home, life, hobbies, and family. They set up times to check in with each other and listen carefully to each other as they share experiences and feelings. They help each other and monitor workloads, stress, health, and in short, make their buddy feel safe and supported. Buddies can be used as early as onboarding to lower stress and to accelerate the newbie feeling like he or she is part of the team.

Peers can come from anywhere. They can be on our work team or a different one. They can be from the same profession or another. That's the power of peers. Obviously the more often you see and interact with your peers, the more helpful they can be in your quest to shape whatever behavior, belief, or attitude you choose. There are a growing number of lifestyle medicine programs that can be delivered in the workplace that build in peer support. In fact,

that's the secret sauce. Groups of employees with similar health goals, led by a qualified instructor, meet once or twice a week for a few months to focus on new skills, problem solve, and build healthy habits.

Take it further by offering training to those interested in providing peer-to-peer support in areas such as:

- Listening
- Helping set a goal
- Finding a good role model
- Helping eliminate barriers to a healthier, happier day
- Building trust
- Helping locate supportive environments
- Helping a peer work through a setback
- Celebrating success

Peer support is assistance provided by family, friends, and co-workers. Without such support, many people will be unable to achieve their personal well-being goals. Helping someone achieve a healthy lifestyle goal is a great way to show we care.

Building Block #6: Leadership Engagement

Leaders have the same challenges as everyone else, including attending to the health of themselves and their family members. In addition to setting the expectations for an organization, a leader also needs to be unafraid to be vulnerable. This makes it easier for the rest of the workforce to not only seek help, but to also tighten relationships over similar struggles.

You don't have to be at the top of your organization to make a difference in the health and well-being of the people you lead. There is leadership across all levels and all parts of the organization that, when applied, will create the energy needed to allow a culture of health to flourish.

Leaders play a role in supporting all the well-being culture building blocks and in addition, have special responsibilities such as:

- Setting well-being as a priority
- Managing with well-being skills
- Serving as a role model
- Leading change

If we leave the responsibility of building a well-being culture only to executives, momentum will never build, and the message will fall short of penetrating the fabric of the organization. The challenge then, is to harness the plethora of leaders that exist within an organization to exert their positive influence on well-being.

Leaders must make well-being a priority. When you start with that premise, it makes it possible for all of the other priorities to be fulfilled. If you do your job well, you'll have healthier, happier, and more resilient employees. Intentionally aligning business ambitions with well-being will make it easier for your workforce to appreciate the importance of their own well-being.

Here are three ways to show that well-being is a priority on your team and in your company:

1: Put Well-Being on the Agenda

Just like finance, customer service, and quality improvement have regular updates, so should employee health and well-being. Your agenda time can be used for more than just regurgitating upcoming events and programs. For example, you could lead a gratitude exercise where each person at the table shares one thing they're grateful for related to work. When there's a standing space for health, it forces the meeting leader to consider the content for that week or month.

2: Incorporate Well-Being into Annual Events and Other Customs

Promoting and participating in organization well-being programs, events, and traditions are a meaningful way to express your ongoing commitment to the well-being culture. This effort can be as simple as organizing a spring walk attended by your immediate team or a more ambitious undertaking, such as including the departments around yours or the entire building. The consistency of a healthy practice led by organizational leaders becomes ingrained throughout the organization and reflects its values.

3: Address Institutional Barriers to Success

It can be frustrating for your employees to keep hitting speed bumps in their efforts to participate in company well-being programs. They need to understand that you see their participation as worthwhile, so try to reduce barriers to participation. Perhaps a flexible schedule or some other arrangement can be made so that employees can participate without detracting from their work.

You now have the prescription to shape a healthy, happy, and more resilient team culture. Beyond the basic needs of survival, your job and your workplace profoundly impact your health and well-being, which in turn greatly influences those around you and the success of your organization. Just as human behavior is complex, so is workplace culture. Anything short of a comprehensive approach will not provide the results you are seeking.



For the past 20 years, workplace health pioneer and thought leader Richard Safeer, M.D. has assessed cultures, trained leaders, and conducted and explored research on the intersection of individual and organizational behavior. Dr. Safeer currently serves as the Chief Medical Director of Employee Health and Well-Being for Johns Hopkins Medicine where he leads the Healthy at Hopkins employee health and well-being strategy. He is a regular conference speaker on the topic of building a culture of health and well-being and has published numerous journal articles on the topic.

From *A Cure for the Common Company: A Well-Being Prescription for a Happier, Healthier, and More Resilient Workforce* by Richard Safeer Copyright © 2023 by Richard Safeer. Summarized by permission of the Publisher, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. ISBN 978-1119899969. Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries®. Copyright © 2023 by Soundview, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. #4511