

# WELL-BEING Practitioner

**WELLNESS AT WashU:  
POWERED BY PERSONAL  
CONNECTION**

**Plus**

**HOW TO SAY *NO*  
WITHOUT RANKLING  
THE WRONG PEOPLE**

**BOOST FOCUS AND  
PRODUCTIVITY... AND  
LIKE YOUR JOB MORE**

**YOUNGISH AND OLDER  
WORKERS MORE ALIKE  
THAN DIFFERENT**

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## HOW TO SAY *NO* WITHOUT RANKLING THE WRONG PEOPLE

Some think running a corporate wellness program is easy. That's why we often don't see the same level of scrutiny over leadership, decisions, or priorities as for new product development, international expansion, or other core business activities. That less-than-crucial attitude toward well-being services can also give rise to the notion that any and all ideas are worth exploring, especially if they come from the C-suite.

**BY DEAN WITHERSPOON**  
CEO and Founder, HES



**INSIGHT**



### TRUE STORY

HES once launched a custom wellness campaign for a Fortune 100 company that exceeded all expectations — in terms of participation and results. It was so successful that the otherwise under-the-radar wellness program suddenly attracted the CEO's attention, so he felt compelled to begin weighing in on daily health tip content and format. He was clearly out of his element; the changes made at his request were to the detriment of the service. We knew it and so did our client, but they were too afraid (or didn't know how) to say no.

Saying *no* to the CEO — or anyone above you in the org chart — can be a little scary. But scarier still is saying *yes* when you know it's not a good idea. Because in addition to it not working, and potential fallout of the mistake, you're not in

a position to explain the error. If you haven't noticed, many in the upper reaches aren't often open to accepting responsibility for failed ideas — especially in the wellness program. You're left holding the bag.

So before you concede and publish 200-word daily email tips in their entirety for 52 weeks (rather than a compelling point of interest + a link to the full tip), here are some ways to say *no* to bad ideas, allow the suggester to save face, and have them come away feeling even more confident in your ability to lead the wellness program:

- **Give it to them straight.** Some people in the C-suite may harbor an outsized ego and feel their suggestions shouldn't be questioned, but that's rare. Most get to where they are because they're smart and recognize sound logic. If you're confident what you're being asked to do isn't in the best interest of those you serve, say so, directly, with 1 or 2 succinct supporting points.
- **Avoid any ingratiating language or manner.** It can come across as lacking confidence. Convey the same respect you would to anyone at the workplace; a deferential demeanor could obscure the point you need to make.
- **Invite them to share more ideas.** This may seem counterintuitive and even risky. But something along the lines of... *Thanks for taking time to offer (idea) — it means a lot to me. I'd love to bend your ear about XYZ wellness whenever you have time for a quick walk and talk.* It says you're interested without being pushy or desperate. If you're able to get that walk, avoid word vomiting as well as asking lots of open-ended questions.

## ANOTHER TRUE STORY

Early in my career, soon after designing and overseeing the launch of a cutting edge fitness facility at another Fortune 100 company's

world headquarters, I received a call from the CEO. He asked if I could give a local high school tennis phenom — destined for the professional ranks — a tour and get her set up with membership. There were 2 problems: She wasn't an employee or affiliated with the company in any way, and I had a waiting list of employees wanting to get in; I would clearly have to break the rules for her twice. I hadn't met the CEO before that call, but here was my chance to establish myself as leader of the function — with a reputation for acting in the company's and employees' best interests. Can you guess what I did? *You bet, Mr CEO. If you have her number, I'll give her a call today and we'll get that taken care of. Is there anything else I can do for you?*

Easier said than done.

## A FINAL WORD ABOUT YES PEOPLE

Sometimes C-suite execs are guarded by yes people. Their job appears to be saying yes to all requests and making sure no friction is apparent to the exec. That's unfortunate for a lot of reasons we won't get into here, but if you bump up against someone like that who won't take *no* for an answer (when *no* is clearly correct) — even after you've explained your position — stop. Hold your ground to decline the request. Don't ask for a meeting with the CEO, don't write an email, don't lobby others around the CEO. In almost every instance 1 of 2 things will happen:

- If it's important enough to the CEO, they'll contact you directly, which is what you want.
- If it's not important enough, it will drop and you'll get to do the right thing anyway — which is also what you want.

Both outcomes are good for you and you're not risking your career or your program. In fact, it could be one of the best things you do for both. 🏆

## HOW TO TURN A DISAPPOINTED PARTICIPANT

It happens. Now and then you're not going to hit the mark on a program or service, and participants will complain. That's a good thing. You want them to vent with you rather than a dozen other potential participants. Here's how to make it right so they remain a participant and you keep your reputation intact:

- **Thank them.** Even if the comments aren't entirely appropriate, don't let the heat of the moment prevent you from keeping a cool head.
- **Paraphrase their complaint.** "Let me see if I understand you..." This gives the complainer a chance to calm down, and it shows you're listening. It also helps both of you clarify the issue.
- **Agree on something.** Even if you feel the overall argument is off base, try to find something to give on. "I can certainly see how a tardy instructor gives the impression you described... give me a chance to talk to him and correct the problem." By agreeing and fixing something, you're showing you take their complaint seriously, even if you can't repair everything that's wrong.
- **Solve the problem.** When you do, you turn a negative into a positive — not just for the person complaining, but for all those who didn't bother.

Changing health behaviors ingrained over years is tough enough without having to deal with mediocre customer service. Show you take each participant's complaints seriously, and you'll help them achieve their well-being goals while enhancing your program and services. 🏆



# BOOST FOCUS AND PRODUCTIVITY... AND LIKE YOUR JOB MORE

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Looking to improve your focus and productivity? You're in good company, and you may have several factors to overcome... like distraction, procrastination, stress. Have you ever had a big project due when you get the sudden urge to Google® the definition of absquatulate or check current airfare for your dream vacation to Kenya?

**BY BETH SHEPARD**  
Health Promotion  
Consultant, HES



## ATTENTION, PLEASE

Distraction contributes to stress — and vice versa — which can escalate quickly when you're working against a deadline. But you can sharpen concentration by pinpointing why your mind is susceptible to diversion in the first place.

Procrastination happens when you're not clear about what needs to be done, don't actually want to do the work, or are low on motivation. If you keep putting off a project, ask yourself:

- **Do I know the objectives and expectations for this?** If not, talk with the person who assigned it.

- **Is there a reason I don't want to do this?** If you have concerns about the value, validity, or another aspect, speak up... share your apprehensions with a leader.
- **What is my level of motivation, and how can I get more fired up?** If you're clear on what you need to do and there's no sound reason you're just not inspired, set a timer for 10-20 minutes and dig in. Sadly, not every project is going to knock your socks off; sometimes you just need to buck up and do it. Get some momentum going, and completion will feel more doable.

Stress makes concentrating more difficult, even under the best, non-distracting conditions. If you feel overwhelmed or otherwise anxious, ask yourself:

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“Procrastination happens when you’re not clear about what needs to be done, don’t actually want to do the work, or are low on motivation.”

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- **Do I have the support I need for whatever has me stressed?** If not, seek the right level and type of help. If you have an employee assistance program (EAP), that’s a great place to start.
- **Am I practicing good self-care?** Even well-being pros need an occasional reminder to move more, eat right, stay hydrated, unwind with friends and family, and get enough sleep. When you’re taking good care of yourself, odds are better for having the physical and mental energy to be focused and productive.
- **Is my workload too heavy, or does some aspect of my job need to change?** If so, talk with your supervisor about your concerns and ideas. Join forces to come up with a plan that works for both of you.
- **Train your brain.** Meditation is a proven way to enhance your brain’s ability to be attentive ([mindful.org/three-ways-meditation-boosts-your-focus](http://mindful.org/three-ways-meditation-boosts-your-focus)). If you haven’t tried it, look around for a mindfulness-based stress reduction class or use an app like Insight Timer. Make daily meditation practice a habit; you’ll notice a difference. High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) is another method: Work hard for 30 minutes, then take a 5-minute break.
- **Work offsite.** If you have an open or noisy workspace or just can’t squash the distractions, take your work to another environment when you can. For some, the relaxed din of a coffee shop does the trick; for others, working from home or in the hush of a library is best. A change of scenery — and disappearing for a while — might be what it takes.

## REINING IT IN

You can set the stage for better focus and productivity by decluttering your workspace, removing digital diversions, and making sure you have everything you need to get the job done. A few more ideas:

- **Take back your time.** As much as you can, block off chunks of time and make them off-limits to meetings or pop-ins so you can do deep work. Some workers use lights to signal availability (lights on, leave me alone; lights off, talk to me) or a strategically placed note. HES headquarters has this rule: *Do not disturb the developers until after 2 PM.*
- **Systematize.** Create your own structure or use a tool like Trello™ or Evernote® to capture immediate and long-range to-dos, notes, and other items you want to remember and track. Set due dates, reminder alerts, and use sharing features to loop in others.

By experimenting with ways to increase focus and productivity, you can engineer more workdays that end with a fantastic feeling of accomplishment. 🚩

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## LEARN MORE

**5 Strategies for Getting More Work Done in Less Time** — Elizabeth Grace Saunders (*Harvard Business Review*, 2019) [hbr.org/2019/01/5-strategies-for-getting-more-work-done-in-less-time](http://hbr.org/2019/01/5-strategies-for-getting-more-work-done-in-less-time)

**18 Simple Ways to Increase Productivity and Focus at Work** — Bruce Eckfeldt (*Inc.*, 2017) [inc.com/bruce-eckfeldt/18-ways-to-avoid-being-distracted-at-work.html](http://inc.com/bruce-eckfeldt/18-ways-to-avoid-being-distracted-at-work.html)

**Getting Things Done** — David Allen (Penguin Books, 2015) [gettingthingsdone.com](http://gettingthingsdone.com)

## HOW TO NOT BE A DISTRACTION

Helping the organization succeed is why employees are there... and they can’t do that if the well-being team distracts them. A few tips for making sure the wellness program touches are a net positive:

- **Streamline communications.** Coordinate with other functions/departments to raise the value and reduce the volume/frequency of wellness program emails or notifications. When it makes sense, send joint messages that include program details. Make sure all health benefit vendors have relevant information to share when they interact with employees and families.
- **Make program particulars easy to find.** On-demand communication lets employees find what they need, when they need it... when it’s convenient *for them*. Make sure your website is easy to get to and navigate; place info in high-traffic areas like break rooms and other gathering areas; create an Instagram® account to post about current and upcoming events/services.
- **Enable choice.** In choosing a wellness vendor, ask about communication capabilities. Can participants opt out or set emails and notifications to a desired frequency?



## YOUNGISH AND OLDER WORKERS MORE ALIKE THAN DIFFERENT

As more working Baby Boomers ride into the sunset and Generation Z enters the workforce — with X and Y (Millennials) dominating the middle — there's a perception that workplace well-being programs must adjust services, messaging, and delivery mechanisms to meet the various groups' needs. But those labels are an artificial way to talk about phases of life at a moment in time, propagated by marketers and lazy media.

While there are differences between these populations, we also see big differences within each group. For example, many younger Millennials (25-29) are early in their career and are trying to get a foothold. Older Gen Yers (30-39) on the other hand may have kids getting fitted for braces and are starting to wonder how they're ever going to afford college tuition.

The point: Focusing your well-being programs and services based on *differences* between people — however someone chooses to brand them — is a losing proposition. You'll have much more success, and are less likely to want to pull your hair out, if you focus on the *similarities*... starting with the things everyone wants:

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“Focusing your well-being programs and services based on *differences* between people — however someone chooses to brand them — is a losing proposition.”

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- **A safe place to work.** Physical safety goes without saying. Just as important, emotional and psychological safety is not only something we all crave, but it's necessary for workers to bring their best talents to the job and thrive throughout their careers.

In the near term and ongoing, well-being leaders can contribute to an environment that's safe in all aspects. Your tools are awareness/education programs that instill and reinforce workplace connection, gratitude, and resilience. Longer term, getting involved in organization-wide hiring, onboarding, and manager training, with an emphasis on emotional/social needs, is an opportunity to deeply influence the culture.

- **A sense of belonging.** With the proliferation of online tools for communication, project management, and career management, face-to-face discussion, problem solving, and idea leveraging have decreased. The software promises efficiency, but it can also create a distance, an aloneness, that makes work a little more transactional — do this (work) to get that (paycheck) — and a little less satisfying.

In our quest to be all things to all employees, wellness managers need to be ever-vigilant about over-reliance on software. Online-only delivery of services can lead to the HAL version of workplace wellness — a program lacking personality and affinity. You get to check all the boxes except the most important: a sense of belonging.

Augmenting online services with healthy doses of elbow-rubbing wellness activities — classes, 1-on-1 personal coaching, buddy and team interventions, demonstrations, health fairs, guest speakers, walking meetings, etc. — can help fill the need.

- **A belief their contribution matters.** Supervisors have the most direct, day-to-day impact when it comes to employee perception of relevance. But you can reinforce the understanding that each individual counts by clearly communicating the wellness program's overall mission, the goal of a specific service, and how their commitment/participation toward the goal affects the entire organization. Don't mix messages — avoid:
  - » Creating winners/losers. Rather, reinforce progress toward the goal, celebrate milestones along the way, and be available to support employees when they veer off track.
  - » Paying people to get healthy (or worse, punishing them for not doing this or that). Not a single employee in your organization was ever hired to be in your wellness program; they were hired to do a job. Their participation should be entirely voluntary, and their progress toward improved health should be recognized and reinforced, not monetized.

You can go to a lot of effort to create services geared toward a certain age, ethnicity, education level, or other perceived difference. But here's the bottom line: Those you serve are more alike than they are different. The more you focus on universal human needs the greater the chance you'll guide a well-being program that matters, to individuals and the organization. 

## OCTOBER IS NATIONAL WALKING MONTH: QUOTABLE WALKERS TRIVIA

Walking is the most popular fitness activity today. But walking for health and inspiration isn't a new invention. Here are some quotes from famous walkers. See if you can guess who said what (check your answers on the back cover):

1 A public official, writer, scientist, and printer (1706-1790), this man of many interests played a major role in the American Revolution. His advice to his son:

***“There is more exercise in... 1 mile's walking on foot than 5 on horseback... there is more in walking 1 mile up and down stairs than 5 on a level floor.”***

2 This New England writer/naturalist (1817-1862) was associated with transcendentalists and known for his ability to observe and record detail, especially in the wilderness. He believed 4 hours or more of walking each day preserved health and spirits — and commented:

***“The walking of which I speak has nothing in it akin to taking exercise... but is itself the enterprise and adventure of the day.”***

3 Often called the father of the conservation movement in North America, this Scot (1849-1914) was an avid walker, prolific writer, and passionate nature lover. At 29, for example, he walked from Indiana to Florida — 1000 miles — and kept a thorough notebook. He noted that when walking we feed on...

***“... abounding, inexhaustible spiritual beauty bread.”***

4 There's no mistaking how this popular British author (1812-1870) felt about walking. Known for tales of Victorian life and times, he gives us 2 great pieces of wisdom: “... walk and be happy; walk and be healthy” and:

***“... certain ancients, far gone in years, have staved off infirmities and dissolution by earnest walking — hale fellows, close upon 90, but brisk as boys.”***

5 As our third president and Declaration of Independence author (1743-1826), this walker used the activity to stay calm. He explained,

***“The object of walking is to relax the mind. You should therefore not permit yourself even to think while you're walking, but divert yourself by the objects surrounding you.”***



Wellness Connection Champions are a key part of the strategy to support Washington University employees where they are and create personal connections.

# WELLNESS AT WashU: POWERED BY PERSONAL CONNECTION

If you're looking for the Washington University in St. Louis wellness team, you'll find them across the diverse campuses... determining what their populations want and need to be healthy. "We're up and out — meeting employees, faculty, and clinicians where they are... in their space, literally," notes Meg Krejci, Wellness Consultant for Mindfulness. From in-person services to a growing network of Wellness Champions, WashU's aptly-named Wellness Connection capitalizes on the role of relationships, growing an impressive program in only 5 years.

**BY BETH SHEPARD**  
Health Promotion  
Consultant, HES



**SPOTLIGHT**



## ONSITE IS JUST RIGHT

As part of Human Resources' *Employee Experience* initiative, WashU's wellness program serves over 16,000 faculty and staff, spread across 4 St. Louis campuses, plus satellite clinics; about a dozen staffers work at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC. Despite the workforce size, this program offers a remarkable selection of high-touch, onsite services.

Emily Page, Employee Wellness Manager, explains that a 1-size-fits-all approach — working with a single vendor for all programs and services — wasn't the best fit at WashU. They've transitioned to onsite services where it makes sense, with backup from multiple vendors to administer the program. "Now we're getting participation from employees who just want to step away from their office — maybe with a coworker — and have a wellness experience in an hour or less."

## CHOOSE WISELY

Selecting the right vendors has made a huge difference for the program, notes Lauren Buschhorn, Wellness Coordinator. "We know what our employees want and need, and our vendors have been very accommodating to the WashU way. They work really well with everyone and have already made a lasting impact."

## EXPERTS IN THE HOUSE

"We're building a program that's based on our culture and a desire to create personal connections with experts," Emily confirms. "Employees like having somebody they get to know who understands where they live, where they work. Moving to an onsite model with a lot of our services has been really well received."



Employees can participate in brief group fitness classes near where they work.

The Wellness Connection team itself comprises accomplished well-being professionals... a unique feature of this program. “It’s more of an investment to have highly trained, experienced people; but it’s something we value.”

An agreement between Wellness Connection and a WashU faculty-directed program, *MyWay to Health*, gives employees access to personalized health coaching by WashU registered dietitians with expertise in behavior change. “We’re seeing a huge response; people like that the RDs are WashU experts and the program is rooted in over 25 years of university research.” *MyWay* Program Manager, Holley Boeger, attributes the incorporation of Family-Based Behavioral Treatment (FBT) and Enhanced Social Facilitation Maintenance (SFM+) — developed by Denise Wilfley, PhD, a WashU expert in weight management — as key to improving the sustainability of behavior change outcomes. “People need healthy habits to be as easy as possible, so we get into the details and develop an action plan for how to make change happen. We’ll even do role playing with employees to help them figure out how they will speak to their family members. It’s another way to individualize the experience.”

Meg, who has over 20 years of experience teaching Jon Kabat-Zinn’s Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program for individuals of all ages, leads the *Move Into Mindfulness*

program. She offers classes in 2 series: 7-week Basics and 7-week Beyond the Basics, as well as other formats (see sidebar on page 10).

Working alongside the Wellness Connection team is Teresa Fisher, an onsite UnitedHealthCare® Nurse Advocate with over 10 years of experience in a broad range of healthcare. Teresa provides a variety of services — from blood pressure checks and chronic condition management to health coaching and provider/resource referrals. “People are surprised when they find out I’m here; their reaction is, ‘This is great!’”

## WELLNESS CONNECTION CHAMPION NETWORK

Though extending the wellness team’s reach with volunteer ambassadors isn’t a new idea, the way WashU trains, engages, and supports their Champions is unique. “We’ve taken the time to dive into the culture within our Champion areas,” Emily explains. “Each campus has distinct departments and groups, and many times what works in one place doesn’t work in another. So we’ve tried to understand the needs and challenges and how to better support our Champions.” Connecting with WashU faculty who research worksite wellness also guides their approach. “We learn a lot by observing the interventions they design and the outcomes they achieve.” A few highlights:

- The Champion role is open to all employees interested in promoting a culture of health and well-being, serving as a liaison to their department for wellness. Employees complete a partnership agreement and get approval from their supervisor. “The Champions are our direct line of communication to their colleagues; personal connection is key to keeping people informed and engaged,” affirms Nikki Hafner, Employee Wellness Coordinator and dedicated resource for the Wellness Connection Champion Network.

- Champions are given a clearly defined mission: to *Announce* their role, *Listen* to their coworkers, *Lead* by example, and *Share* their successes. They receive ongoing communication and support: a monthly newsletter to highlight upcoming services and the work of Champions; toolkits with program details; and quarterly in-person meetings that include training plus leadership skills. Nikki adds: “We make it as easy as possible for the Champions to champion. It’s the best way to keep them engaged.”



Washington University employees enjoy sharing healthy eating tips at monthly cooking demonstrations.

- Another feature is the Champion leadership group. “This is a smaller group of Champions who have stepped up to be a sounding board... to map out strategies based on recruitment and retention, evaluation, training, and communication.”

“Part of our strategy is developing an identity for Champions and giving them a brand so they’ll be recognizable and feel proud of the role they’re taking on. This also helps us with getting support from their managers,” Emily points out. With the network growing at a rate of 15-16 Champions a year, Nikki is working on a more formalized strategy for the application process, onboarding, and orientation.

(continued on next page)

## EMPOWERED TO LEAD

A big factor in the program's success is how Champion responsibilities are applied. Examples:

- Before launching *10K-A-Day*, Champions could register a day earlier than other employees and were encouraged to be team captains to drive participation and engagement in their departments. The result? 85% of Champions participated, with 65% leading a team. In total, WashU had the highest employee participation in the walking campaign since they started the wellness program in 2014.
- The Wellness Connection team reaches out to the Champion Network as needed to raise participation for onsite events such as biometric screenings. "I emailed our Champions asking for support in promoting a mammogram screening event; appointments tripled in that location."
- Champions can request and coordinate onsite wellness services for their department and other nearby employees for convenience and a more personalized experience.

## LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

Emily emphasizes employee well-being is a priority for WashU: "As a leading academic university and medical school, we aim to foster a culture that supports healthy minds and bodies. WashU Human Resources is focused on providing a positive employee experience; our program is among several aimed at helping employees thrive." She meets with a new executive Champion group once or twice a year with a goal of reaching all leadership levels to boost Wellness Connection awareness. These senior leaders come from a variety of significant areas at WashU. "We are lucky to have the involvement

of some very busy people. They are still learning about our new strategy and considering how to provide the right support. It's about creating awareness of all that we're doing."



▲ Natalie Myers, a Wellness Consultant, demonstrates how to create nutritious and delicious smoothies featuring seasonal produce.

## ON THE HORIZON

The team is excited about partnering with school of medicine faculty to adopt a framework called *8ight Ways to Wellness*. "It's a campaign focused on evidence-based approaches to reducing risk for a whole host of chronic conditions, and we're looking to expand on that to address the mind-body connection," Emily summarizes. *8ight Ways* was developed by Graham Colditz, MD DrPH. "Our program is made for WashU, with guidance from WashU."

A new dedicated space for group fitness is the right environment for employees to focus on 1 of the *8ight Ways*: being physically active during their day. Meghann Feely, Assistant Director of Fitness & Wellness, sees this new collaborative effort as a critical step to successfully meet employees where they are. "Having dedicated spaces around your organization for employees to focus on their mental and physical well-being brings a practical, accessible way for them to make healthier choices for themselves."

## MINDFULNESS FOCUS

Mindfulness-based stress reduction is becoming highly popular at WashU, thanks to training in a variety of formats, from weekly mindfulness Basics or Beyond the Basics classes to miniseries and overview classes. Meg explains: "I customize the program for wherever the requests are coming from. It's pretty exciting to see the program grow. There is a lot of opportunity here. We're actively looking to connect the mindfulness philosophy and practice with other university priorities, including training on unconscious bias and addressing physician well-being."

WashU's beautiful campus offers several spaces for quiet contemplation or prayer. People can do walking meditations or sit on a bench to practice. "We're really making some headway with stress and also the intention to influence a culture, creating a more kind and compassionate community. In the end, we don't just practice mindfulness for ourselves, we practice it for others in our lives."

## GOING TO THE PEOPLE

The tremendous amount of thought and care that Emily, Lauren, Nikki, Meg, Holley, Teresa, and Meghann put into serving WashU employees is plain to see. And the extent of personal connections the team makes every day... in departments, staff meetings, conference rooms across campus... is an inspiration in these digital times. WashU's Wellness Connection is firing on all cylinders, and for good reason: exceptional leadership, teamwork, and outreach. 🏡

For more information, visit WashU's Wellness Connection at [hr.wustl.edu/wellness-connection](http://hr.wustl.edu/wellness-connection) or contact [emily.page@wustl.edu](mailto:emily.page@wustl.edu).

“

I loved the snow and the pictures that added on every day. It was fun and made me want to do more so I could get a better picture. My grandkids saw me logging in one day and loved seeing the picture take shape. They wanted to exercise as well so grandma could get more time and they could get more snow.

”

— *Health for the Holidays* participant

When was the last time you discovered an activity that looked like a hoot, but didn't join in — instead thinking, “No, they'll need to pay me to do that.” Never?

Fun is intrinsically motivating; we naturally move toward it... at any age. Generously wrap your well-being programs with features that are entertaining and intriguing — but not *silly* — to boost participation and engagement *without incentives*. Let's face it, the early days of behavior change tend to be un-fun. That's why it's so important to infuse a wellness campaign with an experience designed to be the opposite.

Participants might talk about how fun it was to exercise before work or eat more vegetables. But you're more likely to hear about the fun they had painting a virtual winter scene, connecting with coworkers around special Gift Box activities, going to a holiday concert, or performing random acts of kindness.

Too many holiday well-being programs scream unfortunate messages that amount to “DON'T GAIN WEIGHT! GET MORE EXERCISE!” Instead, delight people with a memorably fun experience. Give them the information and tools they need to experiment with a variety of self-care activities... and most of all, support them in enjoying the season. ❄️

INSPIRED MESSAGES



BY BETH SHEPARD  
Health Promotion  
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# HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM FOCUS GROUPS

Facilitating focus groups is a specialized skill, and one most wellness professionals can learn. In a previous column, I outlined several tips for eliciting meaningful, actionable feedback. As you grow more comfortable, you can introduce interactive techniques to dig deeper and optimize the experience for group members and for yourself.

**BY BOB MERBERG**

Workforce Well-Being  
Consultant



**COMMUNICATION**



## ENGAGE RELUCTANT PARTICIPANTS

I led a group for a large nonprofit that forgot to follow my advice on how to recruit participants; we ended up with 2 attendees whose body language screamed, “I’m not doing this.” I like to have a cross-section of “engaged” and “unengaged” attendees, but everyone present should at least want to have their voice heard. On the other hand, attendees who initially appear resistant often are withholding valuable feedback, so I respectfully give them every chance to join in.

Experienced focus group facilitators often start with an ice-breaker, and many use puzzles or games related to the topic. You can learn so much simply by listening to participants collaborate. I frequently use the 2 techniques described here to

encourage participants — especially those who may be reluctant — to interact openly and honestly.

## USE SAMPLES TO TRIGGER DISCUSSION

For focus groups on communication, samples are helpful. In advance, I have a designer sketch a mock-up of, say, a poster and a desk-drop (a promotional postcard intended to be left at each employee’s workstation). These are just tools and needn’t be perfect facsimiles of materials I’m considering using. Group members work in pairs to list what they like and dislike about each piece. Then, either or both report their lists to the group. This gets everyone involved — easing them into the discussion while I collect information about things like message tone, pros and cons of posters vs. desk-drops, impact of images, program names, or whatever I’m trying to learn about. (If participants aren’t forthcoming or get stuck on a particular feature of each sample, I’ll ask them something like, “Tell me more: Which of these would be more likely to get you to register? Why?”)

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“Maintain curiosity about employees’ opinions and ideas. Over time, you’ll discover your own techniques to draw valuable feedback from focus groups.”

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## STOP AND GO

I use a stoplight system to obtain input on existing programs or features. Each person gets green, yellow, and red cards. After we’ve talked about, for example, video promotions used to launch new wellness activities, I’ll ask everyone to hold up the green card if they believe the videos should be continued, yellow if they’re neutral, or red if they think the videos are a wasted effort. I keep this playful (if there’s time, I’ll even have participants make their own green, yellow, and red flags to jostle a different part of their brain). It gives everyone — even the most hesitant — an opportunity to be heard without going too far out on a limb or having to speak in front of others. (Note: This activity is intended only to stimulate discussion, not to be interpreted as a representative vote.)

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Maintain curiosity about employees’ opinions and ideas. Over time, you’ll discover your own techniques to draw valuable feedback from focus groups. Ultimately, because trust is so important to this process, the approaches that best reflect who *you* are will be more effective than anything you can learn elsewhere. 📺



# PROVE IT! TO GET MORE SIGNUPS

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Time, money, vanity, relaxation, health, energy — 1 or more of these 5 benefits will strike a chord with over 90% of your population — whether they’re young, old, parents, empty nesters, middle class, affluent, with a high school education or advanced degree. Your promotion content should prove your service offers some or all of these advantages to have the greatest appeal. Here are some strategies:

- **Testimonials.** You can’t have too many. Each proves your claim again; collect them, and use them generously.
- **Comparisons.** These work well as part of testimonials. For example, note participant experience with your stop-smoking program compared to other methods they’ve tried. “I’ve been smoke-free for 6 months now using ABC wellness program techniques... I tried for years on my own without success.”
- **Typical examples.** This allows individuals in the target group to see themselves in your promotion: “Here’s how a working dad or mom with 2 young children can save time and provide healthy meals and snacks for the family...”

- **Guarantees.** An iron-clad assurance demonstrates you’re not just blowing smoke. Make them and stick to them. “Our healthy cooking class is guaranteed to teach you how to prepare simple, healthy, *and* delicious meals in under 30 minutes, or your money back.”
- **Case history.** Tell the story of real people in the organization or community who’ve been successful with the service you’re promoting. Include a picture and as many personal details as possible so the reader begins to feel they know the person you’re highlighting.
- **Specifics.** Help the reader visualize success with vivid details. “Your first thought in the morning will be ‘where are my walking shoes,’ not ‘where’s the coffee’...” “You’ll be amazed at your energy as you leave work ready for activities with friends or family — and you’ll look better, too.”

Of course you not only have to prove your benefits on paper, you need to be sure to deliver on your promise. Back up your claims with quality programs and services so you can continue to promote them with conviction. 📺



## RULES TO BREAK, STARTING TODAY

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To make the most of the time, money, talent, etc. available to your well-being effort, consider breaking some of these 80/20 rules:

- **80% of your time on planning and 20% on delivery.** Planning is important, but delivery is where the rubber meets the road. The whole time you're in meetings or locked in your office organizing, you're not helping anyone be healthier. Try outlining the big picture and leaving the fine details to staff, vendors, administrative assistants, and volunteers so you can devote a bigger share of your time to delivery.
- **80% of your resources on program development and 20% on marketing.** Most of what you need in terms of products and people is available locally or through regional/national vendors. Your job is to put the right resources in place, then market the daylights out of them so the most people benefit. If you're spending more than a day/week creating your own programs, presentations, print materials, etc., your energy is misplaced. Buy what you can, develop what you must, and promote, promote, promote.
- **80% of your supervision on the lowest-performing 20%.** Whether it's staff or vendors, it's a common mistake to put your energy and time into the

“problems” instead of making the most of what's working. If fixing the problem isn't vital, cut your losses and move on to people and projects with greater potential. That sometimes means letting people go or discontinuing vendor relationships; but if you don't, they'll only drag you down and limit your success.

- **80% of your health resources on the 20% at high risk.** This is a hard notion to change. Somehow, many health practitioners have come to believe their jobs are to “fix” those who are sick or at high risk, while practically ignoring healthy people. But if you put most of your efforts into keeping healthy people from becoming high risk, you may have more impact in the long run.

For all of us there's a finite amount of time, energy, and money for well-being. Take a few moments today to decide if you need to break some of your own 80/20 rules for better program and career results. 🚀

# FALL COLOR WALKS

In autumn the trees explode in a symphony of color. But don't just enjoy the familiar comforts from your window — celebrate the season by immersing yourself in the splendor. Get out and smell, touch, and crunch through the leaves on a fall color walk. Take a brisk stroll around the neighborhood or meander through the woods. Plan autumn-themed activities like these:

- Collect particularly beautiful specimens to press and frame, or fill a vase with vibrant red, yellow, and orange leaves for a spectacular centerpiece.
- Photograph your favorite fall scenes, then frame prints for your home, or create unique gifts online.
- Visit an apple orchard and pick your own, then host an applesauce-making party.
- Plan a jack-o'-lantern party. Meander through a pumpkin patch and pick your favorite orange orb, then design and vote on the scariest, funniest, and most beautiful designs. Roast the seeds for a snack or salad topping.

Research the best places to see fall color in your area today, then reconnect with your social circle or gather your family for a day of fall walking fun.



## WHAT OTHER AUTUMN VENTURES CAN YOU PLAN?

*Activity*

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*Date*

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*Participants*

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TAKEAWAY



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### Well-Being Practitioner

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