Companies are focusing resources on identifying possible health issues in advance while promoting prevention techniques and wellness practices. In order to help our client companies and potential clients navigate the maze of Wellness options, Total HR Management offers this guide to Wellness Programs in the 21st century.

Although far from absolute, this guide will provide helpful standards and practices for your company’s navigation of Wellness Programs in the 21st century. We want you to have a confident understanding of how they can potentially help your company. By understanding Wellness Programs and their benefits, you will have the tools to make an informed and intelligent business decision.

A Wellness Program Is An Employee Health Program
To begin with, Total HR has found that many traditional executives are uncomfortable with the nomenclature. They believe that wellness means adding a new age component to their company. We promise you that this is not the case. It has been proven time and time again that Wellness Programs are about improving employee productivity.

The adoption of Wellness health programs is invaluable for organizations looking to secure their bottom line by keeping their employees healthy and happy. A study conducted by Harvard University pegged Wellness Program returns at about $3.27 per dollar spent in reduced medical costs and $2.73 per dollar spent in reduced absenteeism costs.

While successful programs can reduce health care costs and increase productivity, poorly implemented Wellness initiatives are not cost effective and drain company resources. The goal of Total HR Management is to detail Wellness Programs that have a proven history of working for companies. There is no need to reinvent the wellness wheel.

Wellness Programs Can Increase Employee Productivity
According to research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, employers spend an estimated $130 billion a year in absenteeism, decreased productivity and short-term disability-related costs,. The goal of Wellness Programs is to reduce this cost. By helping to keep employees healthy,
you naturally increase productivity.

Today’s Wellness Programs tend to have a social aspect. Social media tools and social networking sites are proving to be an excellent tool to promote these programs and communicate their goals. Why the social component of these programs? The answer is that the science of behavioral change shows that people make changes when they have the support of friends and co-workers. Rather than being a chore, healthy living should be both social and fun.

**A Guide To Our Wellness Programs**

To begin with, Total HR Management wants to describe what the benchmarks are for a successful Wellness Program. Then, we will describe how inexpensive Wellness Programs can foster employee engagement and provide a return on investment.

Next, we will present some affordable Wellness Program ideas for your company. Finally, we will tell you about an award-winning Wellness Program called Wellvolution that Blue Shield of California first instituted for their employees and now offers to all of their members.

In the beginning of the 21st century, the business Wellness Program began to gain in popularity and this positive trend has continued to grow unabated. Since health, happiness, and productivity at work are all related concepts, a business Wellness Program can be the glue that connects the three concepts and allows them to flourish as one. As a provider of HR outsourcing services, Total HR Management endorses the use of Wellness Programs as a means to ongoing success.

**Wellness Programs = Positive Health Outcomes**

There are a multitude of health outcomes of a business Wellness Program. They can include smoking cessation, weight loss and obesity prevention, diabetes, blood pressure, and cholesterol management as well as personal health and safety practices like seat belt use, and stress management. Business outcomes include lower absenteeism, higher job satisfaction and work productivity, higher employee retention, and lower health care costs.

In order for a Wellness Program to work, it can’t just be thrown together without taking into account the nature of the work environment. A comprehensive Wellness Program needs to be tailored to the needs and culture of your company. A comprehensive Wellness Program can lead to better health outcomes if it makes sense within the context of a company’s overall business model.

**Three Benchmarks of a Successful Wellness Program:**

1. A Practical Program Is Easy To Access

If you design a business Wellness Program that is impractical for your employees to implement, you are creating problems right off the bat. Comprehensive Wellness Programs should offer a variety of scheduled programs that fit into the schedules of your employees. Don’t make your employees choose between wellness and taking their lunch break.
If you can manage it, integrate your business Wellness Program into the workday and the daily routines of your office space. The more practical a business Wellness Program, the more likely your employees are to take advantage of it.

2. Make The Work Environment Health-Conscious

Does it make sense to offer a Wellness Program at a company that only has junk food and sodas in their vending machines? Healthy vending machine and cafeteria offerings help encourage healthy behaviors on a daily basis. In addition, healthy food should be served at meetings. Instead of donuts, try low-fat granola and yogurt, protein bars, or fresh fruit. If a company provides overtime meals, fast food should no longer be the option. Healthy choices in such situations truly promote a business Wellness Program.

3. Integrate Wellness Into Your Company

A key role of human resources is to help integrate a business Wellness Program into the heart of the company. Workplace safety, benefits administration and other infrastructure elements need to reflect the goals of your business Wellness Program. By embedding a business Wellness Program into the very fabric of your company, you can help ensure future success and productivity.

**ROI By Promoting Employee Engagement**

Business executives around the country are surprised that inexpensive holistic Wellness Programs actually work. Looking at the return on investment (ROI) of business Wellness Programs, it turns out that holistically driven programs that focus on employee engagement are more effective than clinical Wellness Programs that focus on biometric screenings.

Total HR Management believes a focus on lower-cost options that actually build and sustain healthy habits through employee engagement is the future of business Wellness Programs.

**ROI of Wellness Programs**

In a recent survey conducted by the Consero Group of 42 Chief Human Resources Officers of Fortune 1,000 companies, nearly half did not believe their organizations’ Wellness Programs were effective. Efforts to cut costs are putting more pressure on Wellness Programs to deliver on the promise of reducing health care expenses. The problem is that expensive Wellness Programs that focus on medical screenings are not proving to have the ROI needed.

Many employers are exploring ways to better engage workers by encouraging them to become healthier and thus more productive. These companies are finding that a holistic approach to wellness is more effective. Holistic Wellness Programs tend to address the whole employee and not just
the areas of improvement.

**Rise of VOI Wellness Programs**

“More and more, we are hearing the term ‘well-being’ instead of wellness,” explained LuAnn Heinen, a vice president at the National Business Group on Health and director of the Institute on Innovation in Workforce Well-Being. “Well-being focuses on the mindfulness of what it takes to live a healthy lifestyle, and the mission of well-being programs is to find ways that help stressed, hardworking employees lead happier, healthier and more productive lives.”

Rather than focusing on return on investment after making huge medical investments, the new Wellness Programs are focusing on the value of investment (VOI) through effective employee engagement. Heinen described the shift and how, “We are definitely hearing the term VOI much more now. While it can examine metrics such as reductions in health care costs, the VOI model also takes into account measurements such as reduced absenteeism, increased productivity, turnover, and job satisfaction of employees who participate in the well-being program.”

When employers demonstrate that they truly care for the well-being of their workers, employees tend to respond favorably. If done correctly, it is an excellent way to reach out and engage employees. Employers must be respectful of their employees and find ways to engage them. They have to take steps to address health concerns and wellness issues that make sense to both them and their employees.

**Promote Value of Investment Wellness Programs**

Such steps often can be fairly simple and cost-effective, such as providing coupons to health food stores, discounts on gym memberships, or healthy food options in the office. The goal of VOI Wellness Programs is to address the needs of the employee as a human being who wants to be healthy. When employees believe these needs are being addressed, they are more likely to follow through and actually improve the outcomes of a company’s Wellness Program. The follow through is where the value of investment shines.

**Affordable Wellness Program Ideas Easy To Implement**

The first reaction to business wellness program ideas tends to be a fear of increased expenses and a lack of return on investment. Total HR Management understands this fear, but our human resources managers also have seen business wellness programs that were affordable and easy. After all, don’t you want your employees to be healthy and happy? When your employees are healthy, they tend to be happy, and when they are happy, they tend to be more productive.

In other words, affordable business wellness programs for your company provide an awesome win-win for both employees and employers. Since holistic wellness programs reduce healthcare costs and sick days, the result often adds to the bottom line quicker than an accountant might imagine. Moreover, holistic wellness programs increase employee morale and foster employee engagement. Total HR Management believes raising employee morale through effective engagement is a great
tool for any business to implement.

As a result, here are 4 affordable business wellness programs for your company that are inexpensive and easy to implement.

4 Affordable Business Wellness Programs

1. The Fitbit Challenge

By offering Fitbits and their simple technology to employees, your company will motivate them to keep in shape. Fitbits count the number of steps a person takes. Appearing like a watch, the technology is an inexpensive and fun way to promote wellness in the office. You can implement a Fitbit element to a holistic wellness program by developing a handful of easy-to-attain goals with different levels so not everyone has to be at the same pace. Some employees might walk 20,000 steps in a day, while others might be doing well by shooting for 5,000. Your company can purchase a number of Fitbits, and then either give them to your employees or sell them for half the cost. You could also offer a financing plan so employees can pay just a few dollars per month to pay for the device.

2. The Wellness Office Kitchen

Change the nature of the fridge and pantry in the company’s kitchen by offering healthy food options. This is a very affordable option that provides quick results. Rather than sugar and sodas, employees can drink unsweetened ice tea and flavored sparkling waters. Fruits and raw vegetables like carrots and celery are great options for snacking. Filling your vending machines with healthy options makes sense as well.

3. Helping With Gym Memberships

You don’t have to have a gym or a physical trainer on site to provide this benefit to employees. Many companies reimburse employees by covering a percentage of the cost of gym memberships and fitness classes. If an employee wants to take yoga classes or Pilates, those fitness-promoting activities should be included as well. By capping the costs to a certain amount per employee like $200, you can provide the incentive while avoiding big expenses.

4. The Project Zero Contest

This is an easy and affordable program that almost everyone in the office can use. The aim is to avoid the dreaded holiday weight gain by having contestants weigh in on the first and last days of the contest. Running from mid-November until the start of the New Year, the goal is to put on zero added pounds during the holiday season.

Everyone who doesn’t gain weight gets a small bonus like a pair of movie ticket vouchers or, even
better given the context, a $20 gift certificate to a health-oriented store or restaurant. A little office competition can go a long way to promoting wellness, and it can also be a lot of fun. But always remember to avoid unnecessary rudeness and to meet employees where they are at. Wellness Programs should never be about causing undue pressure or stress.

**Thumbs Up = Affordable Business Wellness Program Ideas**
The goal of these affordable business wellness programs is to promote healthy practices. Such affordable wellness program ideas are easy to implement. More importantly, they won’t break the bank, but they will engage your employees.

**The Blue Shield Wellvolution Model**
The Blue Shield of California model that was developed for their own employees is one of the gold standards of a successful Wellness program. At Blue Shield of California’s Lodi office, call-center workers indulged every day on junk food and candy. Due to this and a number of other factors, 65 percent of them were overweight and over half of them were clinically obese.

With their health insurance premiums spiking, including a 27 percent increase in 2006, Blue Shield of California implemented Wellvolution as a comprehensive corporate program. It has been a huge success. So successful that the Wellvolution program eventually evolved into a benefit offering for Blue Shield clients on their website.

**The Success of a Wellness Program**
After five years, the effect of the program was profound. The Lodi office had changed dramatically for the better. Workers snack on fruit and raw vegetables. Several of the cubicles are now equipped with “walkstations”. A modern innovation, “walkstations” are treadmills that have phones and computers integrated into the machines. Employees can now work out in the office as they actually get real work done.

Blue Shield of California has experienced a return of one to two dollars for every dollar invested. According to health assessment surveys, the Wellvolution program yielded a 22 percent decrease in smoking and a 22 percent increase in regular physical activity. For Blue Shield of California, Wellvolution evolved into an easy, social and fun approach to wellness.

Today the Wellvolution program is offered to all of Blue Shield of California’s customers as they promote well being with a variety of offerings. Blue Shield of California simply asks their clients to “kickstart your health with Wellvolution” while Total HR Management asks you to kickstart your company with a business wellness program.

**We’ll Meet You Where You Are**
A key part of the program is the slogan that “We’ll meet you where you are”, and Total HR Management believes this is a great slogan for any company’s Wellness Program. Blue Shield of California helped to remove the intimidation factor. The Wellvolution program offers a smorgasbord of health-related tests and solutions spanning the entire wellness spectrum. What is notable today is that the...
program has an impressive 70 percent employee participation rate.

Wellness Means Better Food Offerings

Blue Shield of California structures its cafeterias to make healthy choices the most readily available as employees begin to fill their trays. Special labels designate the healthiest items and display nutritional information like calorie count and fat content. The company also prices its healthy offerings low enough to entice budget-minded browsers.

Wellvovation vending machine technology guides users through selections based on their individual nutritional specifications. Whether the employee is looking for organic fare or focusing on calorie or fat management, the machine acts as a personal dietitian for each employee. Wellvolution is not enforced by Blue Shield of California, but its sensibility is offered to the employees. Such a sensibility has evolved into all of Blue Shield of California's Wellvolution offerings.

Wellness Programs Here To Stay

Wellness Programs are here to stay. Since your competitor might already have instituted a Wellness Program, isn’t it time you consider doing the same thing? After all, business Wellness Programs have been shown to improve both Recruitment & Selection and Employee Retention. Total HR Management believes employee Wellness Programs like Wellvovation are essential for companies to ensure the future productivity of their employees.

By promoting business Wellness Programs, your company can protect your competitive advantage and help to ensure future profitability. Total HR Management hopes this guide helps you accomplish that goal. If you have any questions or comments, please let us know.