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## Millennial Retention Through Wellness in the Automotive Manufacturing Industry

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# Millennial Retention Through Wellness in the Automotive Manufacturing Industry

A Senior Thesis Prepared by Caroline Patterson

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## Abstract

Wellness programs are known to be effective and beneficial to both companies and their employees, especially among millennials. Even more importance is now assigned to implementing new strategies for attracting and retaining millennials in the wake of the Great Resignation. This is imperative particularly for automotive manufacturing companies. Attracting and retaining millennials effectively can be done by considering and implementing holistic wellness programs that address all four of the following factors: physical health, mental and emotional health, community and family health, and financial health. Within these four pillars, a company should integrate incentives; accessibility and flexibility; diversity equity and inclusion; technology integration; and education. This thesis discusses each factor and what it looks like for the automotive manufacturing industry, as well as examines how human resources professionals can implement the best practices.

## Methodology

This thesis was produced via an extensive literature review. The research was sourced from scientific journals and databases, professional articles, online business journals, and surveys. Company information was extracted through business-specific databases and through personal interviews. It is important to note that company policies are constantly changing, and by the time of publication, could be different than what is noted here.

The recommended length of the guidebook that accompanies this research paper was obtained through a LinkedIn survey of current Human Resources [HR] professionals. All the information presented in the guidebook comes directly from this paper and research.

## Introduction

### *The Importance of Millennials*

Before we enter our discussion of millennials and their importance to the automotive manufacturing industry, it is necessary to examine some assumptions about millennials.

The first assumption is that generational cohorts are formed by shared cultural events and experiences that happen usually around a person's "coming of age" ("Doing Consumer Research...", 2022). These shared cultural experiences result in millennials having common sets of values and expectations for the workplace, according to generational cohort theory (Hurttienne et al., 2021). As such, designing a wellness program geared towards generational values can be very effective for retaining millennials as a group. However, this does not mean that every millennial is the same. There may well be millennials who do not agree with their peers on what the ideal benefits package looks like. Individuals have different preferences, and it is important to evaluate *your* workforce makeup before implementing any of this paper's suggestions. Nonetheless, evaluating general trends and suggestions is useful to obtain a better understanding of the areas to investigate.

In addition, generational cohorts are culturally defined ("Doing Consumer Research...", 2022). Since cultural events and experiences vary by country, generations do not share the same values across countries. For example, what constitutes a millennial in the United States does not necessarily hold the same values as a person of the same age in China. So, this paper deals exclusively with millennials in the United States.

It is also important to determine what exactly a millennial is. Generations are not linearly defined- as such, there is no universally agreed-upon definition of a millennial (Hurtienne et al., 2021). Some sources claim that millennials are people who were born as early as 1980, while other sources place the end of the millennial generation in 2010 (Hurtienne et al., 2021). However, most of the literature suggests that millennials are people who were born in the 1980s-1990s (Hurtienne et al., 2021; see also Dimock, 2022; Farrington, 2022; Meyer, 2022). As such, the typical millennial is in their late 20s-early 40s.

The seasoned millennials have been a part of the workforce for a while, so why are we still talking about them? Reason number one: millennial workforce participation continues to grow (Hurtienne et al., 2021). By 2030, Millennials will make up nearly 46% of the workforce, the largest generational cohort in the labor force by far (O'Boyle, 2021). This is due to a combination of seasoned workers retiring sooner, and younger millennials joining the workforce ("Why Millions of Older Americans...", 2022).

Reason number two: Gen Z- the generation identified after the millennials-, is not yet ready to take over the spotlight. While many Gen Z'ers have entered the workforce, most of them have not yet. It is also true that a significant amount of Gen Z'ers are delaying entering the workforce. Instead, they are choosing to pursue higher education, take gap years, work part-time jobs while pursuing a hobby, or travel the world before committing to a career (College Marketing Group, 2021; "Gen Z and The Gap Year Movement", 2022; Gurchiek, 2020; ).

Furthermore, adjusting HR policies and benefits for millennials can also help retain the more seasoned Gen Z'ers as well. This is true because, while the two generations have differing opinions on many topics, they share remarkably similar values in the workplace (O'Boyle, 2021). It is imperative to thoroughly understand millennials before shifting the focus to Gen Z.

Therefore, millennials remain the most significant generational cohort in the workplace and will continue to be a considerable force for years to come.

### *Why Wellness Programs*

There is a large body of literature on ways to recruit and retain millennial workers; however, much of the literature focuses on abstract ideas that are difficult to quantify, such as "good leadership" or "attractive benefits". These are very vague ideas that mean something different to everyone- there is no objective definition of what is considered good or attractive. The aim of this thesis is to provide an actionable plan for HR professionals to implement effective strategies for attracting and retaining millennials, demonstrated by quantifiable results.

Therefore, this paper focuses specifically on wellness program benefits to increase millennial retention. Workplace wellness programs are known to be useful in this regard, specifically with this generational group (McRitchie, 2018). Among all generations, millennials are the most likely to participate in and demonstrate interest for wellness programs as part of their benefits package (Ericson, 2021).

This is partly because "while [millennials] earn less than older generations, they are spending more on health and fitness" (Nermoe, 2020). They have shown a proclivity towards holistic well-being and towards selecting programs and companies that share this value. Most millennials prioritize wellness over pay, and while pay remains important, wellness is becoming one of the top factors that millennials consider when accepting a job offer. In fact, 33% of

millennials specifically cite wellness programs as a “top priority when considering a new job (McRitchie, 2018). In a response to a survey by O’Boyle, 2021 among millennials and Gen Z, the number one response when asked about what they want in an employer was that “the organization cares about employees’ wellbeing.”

### *Effect on Company Bottom Line*

It is easy to see that wellness programs are desired by employees. There are myriad benefits that employees can enjoy, including clear evidence that focusing on wellness results in “happier, more productive, and more engaged employees” (Mattke, 2021). When companies show a commitment to the holistic health and wellbeing of their employees, employees are eight times more likely to be engaged (Gilbert et al., 2020). Engaged employees tend to be happier and experience less interpersonal conflict, on average. This can lead to a more collaborative and positive environment (“Designing and Managing...”, 2021; Hurtienne et al., 2021).

That is great; of course, everyone wants their employees to be happy. But one of the most pressing questions of executives who consider these programs is if these programs can benefit the company and demonstrate a return on investment. The answer is yes. There is a significant body of literature to suggest that wellness programs do impact the company’s bottom line positively.

Employees who are engaged are more likely to “have a genuine and ongoing commitment to their employer” past five years of employment (Hurtienne et al., 2021). This is especially important in the wake of the Great Resignation, where the costs of recruiting, training, and attrition are higher than ever (Thompson, 2021; “4 Ways to Fix...”, 2020). The cost of turnover is estimated at 150% of a worker’s annual salary. There are also hidden costs to turnover, such as low productivity during the training phase and unsafe work behavior (“4 Ways to Fix...”, 2020).

Not only will your employees stay with your company longer, but they also will have a greater impact while they are with you. Having an engaged employee population has a 0.29 positive correlation with overall net profit (Hurtienne et al., 2021). This means that, while there are many other factors that contribute to net profit, the correlation is still high enough to support that employee engagement does have a positive impact on net profit. One study suggests that a single disengaged employee can represent \$1,000 lost in profit every year. This study correspondingly found that workforces with high levels of engagement experience, on average, 78% more productivity and 40% more profitability than similar companies with a disengaged workforce (Jha & Kumar, 2016). A similar study suggested that increasing the overall level of engagement by just 10% can result in a \$2,400 increase in profit per year per employee (Pena, 2020). That is nearly half a million dollars in additional profit for a plant with 100 employees. To further support the profitability of investing in employee engagement, companies with high levels of employee engagement have consistently “outperformed the total stock market index and posted higher than average total shareholder returns” (Gilbert et al., 2020).

This is due to many reasons; namely, engaged employees tend to be more creative, more focused, and more motivated during their work (Hurtienne et al., 2021; Mercer, 2018). They also tend to display higher levels of effort in their work and experience more synergy in team settings (Savuti et al., 2021). All these factors are compelling reasons to increase employee engagement in your organization.

In addition, healthy and happy employees have lower rates of burnout, lower absenteeism, higher productivity, and lower healthcare costs (Savuti et al., 2021; Kuehner-Herbert, 2017). Managing healthcare costs is very important, as these costs are rising by the most significant factor of most manufacturing expenses, and wellness programs can help reduce them (Chenoweth, 2022). As an additional benefit, under the Affordable Care Act, employers can receive an employee wellness program tax deduction if they design a qualifying program (New City Insurance, 2021).

### *Importance and Relevance to the Automotive Manufacturing Industry*

The benefits of having a wellness program sound great, but some companies tend to think of wellness programs as a new age “woke” benefit reserved for tech companies or marketing firms. That is simply untrue. Wellness programs are pertinent to all industries, including automotive manufacturing.

Automotive manufacturing faces many challenges in today’s climate and is constantly evolving to meet the demands of tomorrow’s world while dealing with today’s restraints. Between topics such as electric mobility, climate change, the COVID-19 crisis, the war in Ukraine, and corresponding global supply chain disruptions, it is evident that this industry has a lot of change and challenges to navigate. One unnamed CEO of an automaker said, “The world will not look the same two years from now... and the challenge for companies like ours and every Automaker is to stay ahead of the curve [and] stay relevant” (Purcell, 2021). The world is changing, and this industry must adapt with it to survive.

On top of these struggles, manufacturing is one of the sectors hardest hit by the Great Resignation. Employees “working in traditionally deskless jobs consistently top the quitting leaderboard”, including manufacturing positions (Shi, 2021). In addition, manufacturing is the fifth most common sector of employment for millennials (Hurtienne et al., 2021). Since millennials make up most of the people switching or quitting jobs in the Great Resignation, it makes sense that industries more reliant on millennial labor are hit harder. To add insult to injury, only 25% of manufacturing employees are engaged at work, most of whom are office workers. Manufacturing is the least engaged occupation in the United States (Swift, 2017). This is a perfect storm for catastrophic attrition rates. Luckily, as aforementioned, we know that wellness programs are effective in combating low engagement among millennials.

Automotive manufacturing companies are slowly realizing the importance of wellness programs. Both General Motors and BMW have said that wellbeing has risen higher on their strategic agendas. BMW issued a statement that said, “Health is our most valuable asset as human beings. We regard it as the basis for individual performance and personal enjoyment of life” (Purcell, 2021). This recognition of the importance of health is a good first step. According to the Society for Human Resources Management, known colloquially as SHRM, “more than 75% of high-performing companies surveyed...regularly measure health status as a component of their overall risk management strategy” (Chenoweth, 2022).

As health becomes a strategic objective, many automakers have crafted their own wellness programs in recent years- but frustration is growing as these companies are not seeing the financial return on investment that they thought they were going to get. The answer is quite simple: wellness programs that are focused *solely on physical health*, like many of them currently are, do not show evidence of increasing profitability or shaping a healthier employee



population. In fact, studies have concluded that “over-medicalized programs do not have a significant ROI over the long term” (Mattke, 2021).

Instead, effective wellness programs should be multi-faceted and holistic in their approaches. Gallup indicates that wellness programs should have five main areas of focus: career, social, financial, physical, and community wellbeing. SHRM similarly identifies four key areas: physical, social and community, financial, and mental and emotional wellbeing (Chenoweth, 2022). According to a recent survey of US manufacturing facilities, only “11.8% of companies who [had] a wellness program offered all... key elements of a comprehensive program” (Linnan et al., 2019). This is a major reason why some wellness programs remain underperforming.

In addition, employee participation in these programs was estimated at only 25% despite these programs’ popularity (Linnan et al., 2019). Millennials *say* they value these programs, but they also are the most dissatisfied generation with wellness programs, and they tend to quit participating after the first year (Muldoon, 2021). Does this mean millennials don’t truly value the programs they say they do? The answer is no. They do value wellness programs, but only if engagement is actively fostered. Many programs are not adequately designed or implemented and do not focus on the right things to generate engagement.

This is an essential issue to address. If wellness programs are not effectively implemented, then your employees will become disillusioned and disengaged no matter how excited they were about the program at the outset. The question of how to properly implement these programs, keeping industry considerations in mind, is a significant barrier to automotive manufacturers.

This thesis, therefore, seeks to synthesize the existing literature to evaluate the top factors of wellness programs and determine which factors have the highest return on investment and feasibility for the needs of this industry. Then, it will examine best implementation practices and guidelines, and discuss the role of HR in designing and supporting effective wellness programs.

Through this research, automotive manufacturers can target their efforts and improve their programs to attract and retain millennials, cut costs, and increase short and long-term profitability.

### *Factors to be Discussed*

Wellness programs are complex, and there are innumerable things to consider when creating them (“Designing and Managing...”, 2021). Each program has unique offerings and events. This is, in part, by design. A truly effective program will be one that considers the total strategic environment of your company. The factors examined and evaluated in this thesis are evaluated from a general automotive manufacturing standpoint; each recommendation should be thoroughly considered from your company’s viewpoint before implementing them.

The factors that will be discussed:

- Physical health
- Mental and emotional health
- Community and family health
- Financial health

Throughout our discussion of these factors and their implementation, the following best practices will also be examined:

- Incentives
- Accessibility and flexibility
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Technology integration
- Education and development

Concrete examples and suggestions will be provided throughout, to provide a clearer picture of the suggestions offered by the literature. If you are unable to read the rest of this paper, please refer to the guidebook instructions offered at the end of the thesis.

## **Physical Health**

The first cornerstone of wellness programs is perhaps the most obvious- physical health. Physical health can be addressed through many different approaches, but the four main methods we will be discussing are medical clinics, ergonomics and injury prevention, exercise, and nutrition.

There are many benefits to helping your employee population maintain healthier lives. Especially considering the physically demanding jobs in the automotive manufacturing industry, maintaining good physical health is vital to the success of your organization (New City Insurance, 2021).

### *Onsite Medical Clinics*

To address physical health, many employers have partnerships with local hospitals or maintain a list of doctors in-network that the employee can visit as part of their medical benefits. However, onsite medical clinics have a much greater return on investment and better overall results than referring employees elsewhere (O’Keefe, 2017). These clinics are known to help reduce absenteeism, improve employee retention, and prevent advanced-stage diseases (“Onsite Clinics: 6 Benefits...”, 2022; O’Keefe, 2017). Also, they can lower health care costs, as the average visit to an onsite clinic is less than the average visit off-campus (O’Keefe, 2017). The same study suggests that return on investment specific to health care costs within three years averages \$3.27 saved for every \$1.00 spent. In addition, these facilities are popular among millennials; as health care costs soar elsewhere, “more millennials are seeking out companies that have an onsite health clinic” (Zimmerman, 2017).

Onsite health clinics help reduce absenteeism in two ways: by managing chronic conditions and by helping injured workers return to work faster and in better shape. Younger employees can have chronic conditions, too; in fact, 44% of millennials born between 1981 and 1988 already have at least one chronic health condition (Ty, 2021). In addition, millennials have on average 11% more chronic conditions than the more seasoned Baby Boomers had at the same age (“The Health of Millennials”, 2019). This increase in chronic conditions among younger people should be considered when considering an onsite clinic.

Employees with chronic health problems miss about 450 million more days of work than healthy workers, which amounts to \$153 billion in lost productivity each year in the United States, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. To be sure, onsite clinics cannot cause someone with a pre-existing chronic condition to magically become healthy.

However, they can play a key role in preventing those conditions from developing in the first place, especially among younger millennials who have not yet developed anything. There is research to suggest that this approach- focusing efforts on keeping your low-risk employees low-risk instead of trying to make your high-risk become low-risk- is the most cost-effective and impactful strategy (Chenoweth, 2022).

In addition, onsite clinics often have intimate knowledge of the work requirements and can facilitate employee recovery easier and more accurately than offsite partnerships (O’Keefe, 2017). Not only is this the right thing to do to help keep employees healthy and out of the hospital, but it also benefits the company’s bottom line. Even just a 1% annual reduction in an employee population’s average weight, blood pressure, glucose, and cholesterol levels can save \$83-\$103 in health care costs per person (“Onsite Clinics: 6 Benefits...”, 2022). These small changes in the employee population can have large-reaching effects (Chenoweth, 2022). For large manufacturers with oftentimes thousands of employees, this amounts to huge savings.

These clinics are also much more convenient and easily accessible- millennials prefer these types of clinics due to their “high priority on efficiency and convenience” (Buxton, 2021; Ericson, 2021). Doctors at these clinics see fewer patients each day, which decreases patient waiting time and allows for a more personalized experience (“Onsite Clinics: 6 Benefits...”, 2022). When it comes to doctor visits, millennials “are most dissatisfied about long wait times, office inefficiency, arduous bill payment systems, and inconvenient availability for booking appointments” (Stahl, 2020). Onsite health clinics address all these concerns, by reducing patient load and wait times and having convenient times available, scheduled around the workday. This convenience also encourages millennial workers to receive health screenings and check-ups that up to 54% might otherwise skip, leading to earlier detection and prevention of major health concerns (Grensing-Pophal, 2019; Stahl, 2020). Additionally, with access to quick care, employees take less time off work to see a doctor across town (O’Keefe, 2017).

One concern about the efficacy of onsite clinics is the idea that people prefer to keep their current doctor. However, 50% of millennials do not have personal relationships with their doctors and indicate that they are open to switching providers, meaning they place less importance on having a doctor in-network (Buxton, 2021). They are more likely to see a doctor they have never met before at an onsite clinic than to want to go to a specific doctor.

Many companies are now recognizing the importance of onsite health clinics. For example, Kia Motors has an onsite clinic staffed by two health care providers- West Georgia Health and WeCareTLC- to “manage occupational health services” at its plant in West Point, Georgia (“Kia Motors Manufacturing Georgia...”, n.d.). Their medical clinic offers comprehensive services, including “advanced primary care, laboratory services, wellness programs, and medications- all at no cost [to the employees]” (“Onsite Health Centers”, n.d.). BMW has an Associate Family Health Center with comprehensive general care (“Associate Family Health Center...”, n.d.). Michelin has a Family Health Center that specializes in primary care and family medicine (“Michelin Family Health Center”, 2022). Clearly, some automotive manufacturers are implementing onsite medical clinics- so why is the return on investment still lower than expected?

While it is true that return on investment for these clinics generally follows a downward trend as the programs grow older, it has also been proven that the return on investment remains high when the employees are engaged in it and have their concerns addressed (O’Keefe, 2017).

As it stands now, only about 20% or less of the targeted audience ends up using medical clinics, despite their proclaimed popularity (Boress, 2019). Therefore, *how* you implement these clinics matters. A poorly run and mismanaged clinic is not going to attract or retain anyone- it is important to recognize millennials' needs and wants to establish best practice guidelines and keep them engaged in the program.

One study found that over half of participants believed health screenings “were a waste of time” because “they felt quite healthy” (Chien et al., 2020). The same study showed that many did not understand the benefits of screening for chronic conditions and taking preventive measures to improve their health. Therefore, one of the best ways companies can help their employee population take advantage of their medical clinics is through education. Millennials enjoy taking charge of their health, so arming them with information is a great way to encourage participation. “[E-mailing] daily or weekly health tips to all employees” has been shown to pique interest in the programs, keep the programs in the front of their minds, and encourage participation (Chenoweth, 2022). If your organization cannot disseminate e-mails, then putting information in high-traffic areas, such as entryways or bathrooms, can help increase interest (Chenoweth, 2022). The more a company educates its population about health, the more health screenings typically occur (O’Keefe, 2017).

In addition, as mentioned before, millennials enjoy onsite clinics for the convenience aspect. Therefore, it follows that companies should make it as easy as possible to access health information and learn about the program. Millennials value fast solutions, so one way to improve the efficiency of the medical clinic is to offer an integrative app or a telehealth option (Stahl, 2020; Zimmerman, 2017;). 46% of millennials already use some form of health and wellness solution through a device, so they may come to expect the flexibility that this offers (McRitchie, 2018). Younger generations “are accustomed to accessing information and services online, and they... prefer online wellness solutions over more traditional approaches” (“Designing and Managing...”, 2021). This study also suggests that using technology is beneficial for the company- it is more affordable and sustainable than using paper, and it helps with aggregated data collection, which is useful for getting a clear picture of the health of your employee population. A company that does this well is General Motors. They have partnered with the local Henry Ford Health System in Michigan to create a virtual care center for their employees with online scheduling and remote providers, in addition to a limited onsite staff to perform tasks that can only be done onsite such as vaccinations. General Motors reported a 91% employee satisfaction with the virtual clinic in Q4 of 2021, and an average wait time of 3 minutes (Siwicki, 2022).

Another way to provide convenience is to utilize personal health kiosks, but caution: these should be placed in low-traffic areas to address privacy concerns (Chenoweth, 2022; Schuman, 2022). This privacy concern is vital to address to increase participation. Generally, health screenings can be viewed as a privacy intrusion, and the close tie between a health care provider and the company can make people wary (“Designing and Managing...”, 2021). One way to combat this fear of privacy intrusion is to communicate openly to employees that data received from the clinic is only presented as an aggregate report, with no names, for the purpose of checking the efficacy of the program. This information “can help focus health improvement initiatives,” so it is important to collect (O’Keefe, 2017). However, it should never be tied to identifiable personal information, and should never be used to make business decisions outside of the scope of the medical clinic. The number one reason that medical clinics don’t have high

participation rates is that “employees don’t trust that their personal health data will be confidential and fear it will be used for employment decisions” (Boress, 2019). Boress also states that companies should communicate the “many federal and state confidentiality and privacy laws... and the limitations placed on employers” to make their workforce feel more at ease using these facilities.

Another way to provide comfort to your employees is to disassociate the company from the clinic. Using a third-party health care provider can help employees feel safer (Boress, 2019). As discussed later, this can also help the company avoid legal repercussions (“Onsite or Near-site Clinic Legal Issues”, 2020). Many employees also feel concerned that coworkers or bosses may see them visiting the clinic. To avoid this issue, locate the clinic in a place that has little to no traffic passing through (Grensing-Pophal, 2019). According to Boress, “clinical...activities should be separate from business offices...where a person...could be seen by their peers, managers, and supervisors.” This is true of the personal health kiosks as well; putting them near the assembly line or in an office area is a bad idea. Instead, consider putting them in a locker room, bag room, or bathroom if there is enough space and if the kiosk is out of the line of sight of other employees.

The final important consideration when implementing onsite clinics is the law. If the onsite clinic is offered to employees as a part of their benefits package, “the employer will be on the hook for compliance with a number of federal laws” (“Onsite or Near-site Clinic Legal Issues”, 2020). There are far too many complications and nuances concerning the legal requirements of medical clinics, so the number one tip is to consult competent legal counsel who specializes in health care or employee benefits laws (“Onsite or Near-site Clinic Legal Issues”, 2020). The legal counsel will be able to offer tailored advice specific to your state laws, which can vary, so it is imperative that you seek this advice first before implementing your clinic.

The most important laws (although there may be others relevant to your program and your state or city) to ask about and consider are HIPAA, ERISA, ADA, CPOM, and COBRA. Each law has different requirements and exceptions, but here are some general rules that you may consider. It is possible to reduce your ERISA obligations by limiting the services provided at the clinic to general care like BMW does (Vogt & Bassler Millar, 2017). This is not advisable from an engagement perspective, however, as more comprehensive clinics have generally better return on investment and participation (“Designing and Managing...”, 2021). COBRA can require employers to continue offering access to the clinic even after employees quit the company, which can be problematic from a security standpoint if the clinic is on campus (“Onsite or Near-site Clinic Legal Issues”, 2020). Locating the clinic directly across the street and having in-house security may be a good idea.

Comprehensive medical clinics can also “jeopardize an employee’s HSA eligibility” (“Onsite or Near-site Clinic Legal Issues”, 2020). One way to handle this is to charge market value for the clinic, although that would eliminate a lot of the benefit of having it. A better option might be to offer FSAs instead of HSAs and make sure that all tax obligations are clearly communicated to the employees. The same legal source suggests that for HIPAA, an easier way to avoid a violation is to use a third-party provider, as that provider would “be responsible for HIPAA privacy and security rule compliance,” not the company itself. CPOM can also be avoided this way; companies cannot directly hire the physicians associated with the practice.

Generally, keeping employee information confidential can avoid a lot of headaches surrounding these laws, including ADA (Vogt & Bassler Millar, 2017).

Again, the most important thing to remember is to not let these laws dissuade you from implementing a medical clinic. There are recourses you can follow if you seek appropriate legal counsel and design your program to suit your organization's legal obligations.

### *Exercise*

Another important pillar of the physical health aspect of wellness programs is exercise. This is the item most typically associated with wellness programs in the media; you may picture pure barre classes and biking excursions. While these are great ideas, there is much more to consider when it comes to creating exercise plans and classes.

Onsite exercise classes are only currently offered by 28.5% of worksites nationwide, and even fewer manufacturing companies (Linnan et al., 2019). Offering exercise opportunities is important because lack of exercise indirectly leads to more health problems and more early deaths than other risky behaviors, such as smoking (Gilbert et al., 2020). In addition, there is evidence that exercise classes increase employee engagement and satisfaction with the company and create a sense of cultural cohesion (Flynn, 2019). All of these are wonderful benefits, but not every exercise option is feasible for automotive manufacturing. There are some that do work, however, so do not write exercise off as an important aspect of your program.

On-site fitness centers, while a nice thing to have, are not particularly desired by millennials over other benefits. In addition, there are lots of drawbacks to such a center: significant overhead costs, construction, trained staff for fitness classes, and increased liability for worker's compensation often leave companies balking ("Designing and Managing...", 2021). These types of centers are also often not very inclusive. Disabled, older, larger, and minority people tend to avoid these places. Since wellness programs should "meet [people] where they are and [allow] them to be part of the conversation about what wellness looks like for them," assuming that a gym or an intervals class works for everyone is a poor assumption (Corliss, 2016).

Even so-called "gentle fitness classes", such as yoga or low-impact aerobics, require a space to use. While these classes are more inclusive for people who are not traditionally athletic, there is still a large cost upfront (Chenoweth, 2022). Chenoweth also notes that there is not much evidence to suggest that hosting these classes has a larger return than simply promoting them. Turn to education instead; have a seminar about the benefits of relaxation techniques and encourage employees to sign up for yoga at their local gym.

Manufacturing has the additional challenge of having a two-sided workforce. While office workers may have the energy to go to a yoga class after work, production floor employees are exhausted from standing on their feet all day. It is okay to advocate for doing so, but keep in mind that half of your workforce may be too tired to take advantage of yoga classes. Designing a program that does not exclude half of your workforce is important, so make sure this isn't your only option. Provide a variety of options that each consider different groups of employees.

### *Walking Trail*

There are more effective and low-cost alternatives to appeal to your entire workforce. A walking trail is a simple way to encourage healthy behavior without seeming too patronizing or

judgmental. If disability accommodations are met, this is an inclusive and gentle approach to wellness (Chenoweth, 2022). Walking trails not only help you reap the physical health benefits of exercise but also the mental health benefits of being outdoors (“Exercise, workout, and fitness...”, 2022; U.S. Department of the Interior, 2022).

Walking is also one of the most popular forms of casual exercise preferred by millennials; their positive disposition towards walking over driving has been well-documented, as has the increase in popularity of walking on the weekends compared to other generations (Bisson, 2018). In addition, walking meetings are becoming more common among millennials (Breen, 2019). All this points to millennials valuing the ability to get outside and move more than previous generations.

At your organization, create a culture of allowing walks! Allow employees to walk on the trail if they need a quick break- avoid stigmatizing or regulating it too much. This kind of open atmosphere is essential for encouraging employees to take advantage of it. Integration of wellness into the daily schedule like this can also increase interest because of its convenience (McRitchie, 2018). Likewise, encourage employees to take the stairs whenever they can, or introduce stand-up desk options. These easy, low-cost solutions can improve worker health without breaking the bank or excluding minorities.

### *Ergonomics and Injury Prevention*

Anyone who has ever worked within the automotive manufacturing industry knows how important ergonomics is to the success of the organization and to the physical wellbeing of its employees. Most major manufacturing facilities have a dedicated team for ergonomics and safety; however, over 47% of midsize and smaller sites do not (Linnan et al., 2019).

Each year, over 70 million doctors’ visits are due to a variety of musculoskeletal disorders, conditions that often occur in manufacturing environments. Basic ergonomics practices, such as job rotation, can drastically reduce the chances of an employee developing a musculoskeletal disorder (“The Importance of Ergonomics...”, 2019). Workplace design can play a role in ergonomics; for example, BMW decided to install “wood flooring in their factories rather than concrete to reduce musculoskeletal strain” (Purcell, 2021). Evaluating the types of materials used in constructing the work environment, even down to the material used to create the assembly line itself, can go a long way to reducing health care and workers’ compensation costs (Gilbert et al., 2020).

To monitor their workers on the line, Ford has a “health-monitoring system” that uses wearable technology to track their employees’ health statuses (Purcell, 2021). This carries its own privacy concerns of course, but it is an interesting idea for collecting and actively monitoring the health of its employee population at any given time. Hot spots within the factory can be identified and ergonomic efforts can target those areas to get the greatest return on investment.

However, most automotive manufacturing employers only consider the ergonomics of their production employees. Ergonomics and injury prevention rarely extends to office workers as well, but it should. Replacing static desks with standing features, as well as encouraging stretching breaks helps improve circulation and work efficiency (Chenoweth, 2022). Tables and chairs should be designed “to facilitate safe postures” as much as possible (Gilbert et al., 2020).

Special care should also be taken to ensure safe working spaces for all kinds of people. People with limited motion, walking difficulties, pregnancies, and other conditions have a much harder time navigating their workspaces. Taking them into account while designing these spaces will not only benefit those employees but will also underline your claim of supporting diversity. For example, adjustable chairs that can change the ankle elevation can greatly reduce a pregnant person's swelling and discomfort in their feet (Kiberd, 2022). Such a small detail that the company can easily implement with little to no additional cost could make a major difference in an employee's work experience and productivity.

The role of education is very important for ergonomics and injury prevention. Employees will often take charge of their own postures, stretching breaks, and so on if they are aware of the benefits of these activities. This is true of millennials as well and is important because the younger a person is when they start developing healthy ergonomic habits, the more likely it is that habit will persist and prevent injuries later in life ("The Advantages of Ergonomics", n.d.). Presenting the facts to your employees in an interesting manner, such as a quick demonstration or an engaging article through a wellness app, on the best way to sit while working can lead to increased interest in adjusting their behaviors. With items such as posture, stretching, wrist and ankle elevation, and neck angle, most employees simply do not know the best approach. They have become so used to slouching, for example, that they often do not fully understand how it is negatively impacting their bodies in the long term. Providing this information and actively encouraging employees to take charge of their own health in these small ways can lead to big results.

It is important to note that educating people about their own bad habits can often be perceived as rude, condescending, or patronizing. It is therefore imperative to implement good communication practices and to be sensitive to this when distributing the educational content. The content should focus on being positive, uplifting, and encouraging and should not scold the employees, or you risk the policy backfiring (Riika, 2022). Management should also lead by example and follow the practices themselves so that employees feel comfortable doing so.

### *Nutrition*

Nutrition is perhaps the easiest aspect of physical health to promote in the office. Change your cafeteria or snack area offerings to include healthier options and educate your employees about the nutrition of each item ("Designing and Managing...", 2021; Flynn, 2019). Surprisingly, only 23.1% of workplaces offer healthy options (Linnan et al., 2019). Healthy foods increase energy and brain function (World Health Organization, 2022).

Almost 50% of millennials surveyed value nutrition as a lifestyle choice and actively seek to educate themselves on nutritional content (Nermoe, 2020). Offering these healthier choices in easily accessible areas is a low-cost and highly effective solution (Chenoweth, 2022; Nermoe, 2020). Consider adding snack areas near the assembly line if you do not already have them and add a variety of snacks to them to encourage healthy eating.

In addition, make sure the healthy options are also filling and provide energy to your employees- production workers in particular need lots of energy to keep moving on the floor. Between a filling sugary muffin and a small pack of carrots, most would choose the muffin even if they know the carrots are better for them. So, offer whole grain snack waffles, fiber snack bars, and a large bag of cranberry and almond trail mix to give a few examples. These foods are heavy



in the healthier complex carbohydrates, as compared to the unhealthy refined carbohydrates found in muffins. These complex carbs help boost employees' energy and serotonin levels, which can also help regulate their mood (Thurrot, 2022).

One note: changing out all the snacks to healthy foods could backfire if done too suddenly and if employees are not given a choice. Do not get rid of all your chips and soda, as this could damage morale, depending upon your employee population. Simply offer *more* healthy options. Another way to promote healthy options is to use a color-coding system that indicates to employees which snacks are healthy versus snacks that should be eaten in moderation (Chenoweth, 2022). Finally, a tiered pricing system where unhealthy foods are more expensive could deter your employee population away from those snacks towards cheaper, healthier options. These pricing strategies are often used in schools and have demonstrated that people will, in general, start making healthier choices (“Pricing Strategies...”, 2019).

Remember to integrate technology if you can; nutrition tracking apps and virtual nutrition coaching are popular options among millennials (Lewellen, 2019). You don't need to develop your own app; there are plenty out there. Choose one, vet it, and promote! For example, Tesla uses the integrative health app Gympass which offers a myriad of wellness activities, including “live-streamed classes, one-on-one virtual personal training sessions... mindfulness, therapy, [and access to] gyms and studios”, in addition to nutrition (“2022 Benefits Guide”, 2022). The nutrition portion of the app provides easy, healthy recipes for employees to make at home, as well as educational content with practical suggestions (Campanella, 2022).

## **Mental and Emotional Health**

Physical health is only one piece of the puzzle. A study shows that millennials “want a holistic approach to health and wellness that goes far beyond weight loss challenges, tips to quit smoking, and disease management” (Lewellen, 2019). What is included in holistic wellbeing? Approximately 90% of millennials want emotional and mental well-being support from their employers (Shi, 2021; Stahl, 2020). Millennials simply will not tolerate high stress levels and work-related depression like some previous generations have (O'Boyle, 2021). They do not want to ‘live to work’, they want to ‘work to live.’

In addition, the millennial generation has the most mental illness diagnoses of any generation; this statistic is to be taken with a grain of salt, as it could be the result of better diagnostics and less stigma instead of simply more mental illnesses (Stahl, 2020).

However, either way, one thing is certain: mental health matters.

### *Onsite Stress Management*

Managing stress is an integral part of any mental health-oriented program. More than 50% of millennials “are a flight risk due to work-related stress”. This means they spend only an average of 2.8 years in a position, often citing stress as the reason for departure (“Employee Tenure...”, 2022; Pennic, 2019). In addition, 73% of millennials believe that the onus for preventing stress rests with the employer (Pennic, 2019). This speaks to the importance of not stopping with physical health only when designing your company wellness program.

Some companies have creative ideas for managing stress onsite- from Google's nap pods to Nike's meditation rooms, there are lots of ways to implement relaxation into the workday (“Clocking off...”, 2022). Unfortunately, most of these suggestions are not feasible for the

manufacturing sector. Such a fast-paced, dynamic field does not allow a lot of time for naps or sauna trips during the day, especially if you are working on the production floor.

Onsite stress management techniques can be practiced by the employee whenever they feel overwhelmed, most of the time without needing to leave their desks. Effective techniques for office or production workers include progressive muscle relaxation, positive visualization, deep breathing practices, engaging the senses, repetition of helpful phrases, mindfulness meditation, and using humor to alleviate tension (Corliss, 2022). These highly effective techniques are simple and easy to learn and do not require heavy capital investment.

However, your employees do not know what they do not know. So here again, turning to education is the key. Inform your employees of the benefits of these relaxation techniques, practicing self-care, and other methods of reducing stress. Communicate the importance of using the walking trail, getting outdoors, and using lunch breaks to relax. Or follow the example of Ford Motor Company and form clubs or committees that address stress management topics.

Ford offers a Ford Mindfulness Club to its employees and centers its company values around the ideas of compassion and humanity, key concepts in mindfulness. The club itself centers on both hosting meditation sessions, as well as discussing mindfulness books the group read about each week. This no-cost book club allows employees to read educational material about mental health and discuss it with each other, thereby enhancing a sense of community at work as well. Ford said they believe that these lessons in mindfulness help reduce personal stress, enhance both customer and employee experiences, and improve their bottom line (“Ford Fosters Mindfulness at Work”, 2022; Ford Mindfulness Car Concept, n.d.).

Many companies already practice these techniques as a part of their annual leadership retreats for C-suite executives, but few offer this knowledge and opportunity to all their employees. The reason Ford’s model stands out is that mindfulness is a continual commitment across all levels of employees and is not gatekept by the senior team. Allowing all your employees to engage in this kind of stress management all year round can have a huge impact on your employees’ mental health, productivity, absenteeism, and retention (“Designing and Managing...”, 2021).

Another important note is that these techniques are meant to be reactive to stress that already exists. If your company continually has stress management problems, you should also consider reducing the stress that exists in the first place. To do this, employers should also look at stress reduction options outside of wellness programs such as training management effectively, evaluating job utilization levels, adding more job cards where needed, re-evaluating harsh performance management standards, and adjusting takt time to reduce stress. These suggestions are not part of wellness program offerings, so we will not go into detail here, but they are important for your company to investigate if you are serious about reducing stress.

### *Workplace Design*

Something as simple as workplace design can also affect stress levels. It has been demonstrated that “music, motivational signs, and physical improvements (such as carpeting and artwork) increased stairwell use...and quality of life” (Chenoweth, 2022; Gilbert et al., 2020). Millennials prefer working environments that “enable collaboration and innovation”, thus fostering a greater sense of community (Hurtienne et al., 2021).

Most manufacturers dismiss workplace design as something that can only be done for office workers. Ironically, this is where workplace design is perhaps needed the least. Remote and hybrid work makes workplace design less relevant to office employees. In addition, most offices are inherently more comfortable, welcoming, and collaborative spaces than production areas already. If you can implement workplace design practices for both types of employees, great! But in your attempts to design better office spaces for your employees, do not neglect the needs of the production worker.

For production floor employees, consider beautifying entryways to promote a positive start to the day. Use proper lighting- natural when it is available- and minimize noise as much as possible (Gilbert et al., 2020). Create social spaces conducive to community building; for example, instead of a long row of lockers, build the lockers in a circle or square with a bench in the middle. The presence of designated break areas away from the assembly line improves mental health (Chenoweth, 2022). Such simple design changes can help workers feel less isolated on the floor.

“Lack of control over work processes and workspace” is a significant contributor to stress (Gilbert et al., 2020). This study suggests giving the worker back some control over their area (Chenoweth, 2022). For automotive manufacturing, this is more difficult given the nature of the work. There are some things you can do- poll the employees and ask them where they want their break room. Ask them what improvements they have in mind. Take their requests seriously and make them happen if they are feasible requests. In addition to making their lives a bit easier, asking them questions about their comfort and satisfaction helps improve morale. It shows that you care about your employees’ well-being. Given that many manufacturing employees feel like a cog in a machine, showing that you care about their opinions goes a long way in increasing engagement (Chenoweth, 2022).

### *Employee Assistance Programs*

73% of employers globally use Employee Assistance Programs to provide mental health resources to struggling employees (“Designing and Managing...”, 2021). These programs are often partnerships with therapy groups or psychiatrists. However, these programs are not as pervasive in the automotive manufacturing industry. Oftentimes, HR professionals themselves are having to help employees talk through their family stress and counsel them in times of grief and bereavement, for example. But HR professionals are not mental health professionals. It is imperative that employees have access to professionally trained resources to address their mental health needs (Mitchell, 2017).

There is a wide body of literature supporting the efficacy of Employee Assistance Programs- when privacy concerns are addressed. Several studies affirm the physiological and mental benefits of these programs as they help employees navigate work and non-work-related issues (Milot, 2020; Wang et al, 2022). Furthermore, there are indications that these programs “help strengthen the [overall] relationships of employees with their organizations and enhance their emotional attachment to the organizations”, thus having a positive effect on turnover (Wang et al., 2022).

Toyota does this well. Their Employee Assistance Program is personalized and uses trained counselors to provide “one-on-one help for employees to deal with their fear regarding health and safety, loss of control and uncertainty, loneliness due to isolation and social

distancing, or frustration and distress due to changed routines” (Purcell, 2021). This level of personability and accessibility with most sessions offered via telehealth is very appealing to the millennial population. In addition, Toyota recognizes that “minority populations- including those in the LGBTQ+ community- are at an increased risk [of mental illness] during a pandemic” (Purcell, 2021).

Two things to consider when choosing to provide Employee Assistance Programs are addressing confidentiality concerns and how to promote the programs. First, employees could be apprehensive about seeking mental health services with a therapist associated in any way with their company. The point of these programs is to help employees with sensitive topics, such as family stress, work stress, suicidal thoughts, depression, death in the family, and so on. As such, many employees do not feel comfortable opening up about these and related issues when the confidentiality of their sessions is not assured. Make sure to communicate to your employees that the program is run by a third-party vendor and that their information will never reach the company (Milot, 2020). Educate them on your federal and state patient-provider confidentiality laws, or provide them the resources to educate themselves, so that they can feel safe in confiding in their therapists.

In addition, promoting the Employee Assistance Programs is essential. Obvious though it may seem, organizations that do not actively encourage employees to use the programs see a much lower utilization of these programs and have typically more stressed employee populations (Wang et al., 2022). By lending management’s support to these programs and to their utilization, you can help create a culture wherein employees feel safe seeking help. Harlow, 1998 discussed the detrimental effect an unsupportive culture can have on EAPs, stating that employees may not seek assistance if they perceive that will have a negative effect on their career trajectory. Feeling as though colleagues will judge you for seeking help drastically reduces the chances of an employee using an EAP (Milot, 2020).

### *Work/Life Balance*

Among all the mental health aspects of wellbeing, work/life balance is perhaps the most important to millennials. 49% of millennials “consider maintaining a work/life balance to be part of their health and wellness” (McRitchie, 2018). Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic began, people are realizing that time with family and friends is much more important than being stuck in an office. Some argue that “the pandemic may have downgraded work as the centerpiece of [millennials’] identities.” (Thompson, 2021). Millennials want to work to support their lives, but they don’t want to work at the expense of their lives. “Not enough free time” is listed as a major career concern among younger people (Nermoe, 2020).

There are many suggestions in the literature on how to address this concern. Policies such as flextime and telecommuting are proven to have a positive impact on blood pressure, quality of sleep, mental health, and fatigue (Chenoweth, 2022). They also give the workers back control of their workday. In particular, millennials highly value the option to work remotely at least part of the time (Rochman, 2018). Mitchell (2017) suggests that “offering flexible work schedules...could establish more permanent and sustainable health behaviors [than financial incentives].” This is especially true since the price of gas has gone up; many millennials feel that the stressful and expensive commute simply isn’t worth it.

How does this translate to wellness programs? It is simple: design your programs to be flexible. Workers do not want to do homework, so to speak, cutting into their precious time off with their families. So instead of forcing the program down their throats and taking chunks of time out of their day, offer flexible approaches to participating in the wellness programs. For example, many millennials prefer doing wellness activities on the weekends (Corliss, 2016). Making the wellness program accessible during off-time, via an app, for example, is a great way to allow your employees to choose where and when to participate.

This is also extremely beneficial when applied to production floor employees. As briefly discussed before, production employees are often physically and mentally exhausted after their long shifts. If you design a wellness program with mandatory activities or with points you must earn to get a bonus, but these activities can only be done onsite during workdays, you can expect to have very low attendance and enthusiasm. Instead, offering remote and flexible options can bolster the success of your program (Shi, 2021; Corliss, 2016).

In addition, do not forget that every employee has differing needs. Being understanding and allowing employees to adjust the program to suit their goals, needs, schedules, and abilities is a good strategy. This ensures that everyone can participate in your program without feeling mentally taxed. The strain added to employees by rigid, uncompromising programs contributes to the stress and mental exhaustion already experienced by many at work and is bound to cause resentment towards your program, in addition to having negative effects on the company. Flexibility counteracts these effects.

Finally, using flexible goals can help ameliorate your employee's sense of work/life balance in addition to being inclusive. Remember that the goal of wellness programs is to *improve* the overall health of your employee population- not for every individual to achieve "perfection". After all, what is perfection? Therefore, allowing each employee to establish their own goals within your framework enables them to not only take charge of their own health but also to set reasonable boundaries.

To better visualize this concept, consider this scenario. Employee A is a self-proclaimed fitness nut and really wants to lose 50 pounds by exercising 10 hours a week while addressing her anxiety issues via telehealth Employee Assistance Programs. Employee B knows that their home life is very busy and that 10 hours of exercise isn't feasible. Rather, they would prefer to attend a few financial seminars and eat a nutritious lunch each day. Some workplaces would be tempted to say that Employee A is more committed and is taking larger steps to address her health. But that is not necessarily true! Employee B is also addressing their mental health by knowing their boundaries with their work time and personal life. If dedicating 10 hours a week to the family is more beneficial to this employee's mental health than exercising 10 hours a week, then that is great! Both employees here are taking measured steps towards improving multiple facets of health, and that is the goal. Do not get so tied up in determining what health looks like for everyone that you forget how important work/life balance is as well.

This is why employers should not set pre-determined goals for all employees. Flexible goals allow the employee to determine not only what to focus on, but also how much time they can handle committing to without losing their work/life balance, a key element of mental health.

### *Encouraging Inclusion*

Inclusion and a sense of belonging are imperative parts of mental health while at work, especially to millennials. According to a survey by O’Boyle (2021), “DEI [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion] is not a ‘nice to have’ for [Millennials]; it’s an imperative that is core to their personal identities”. In addition, Corliss (2016) argues that “those who design workplace wellness programs need to work with all stakeholder groups” for a successful program. This can only be done through inclusion. Fortunately, there are lots of ways to weave inclusion into your program, several examples of which have already been discussed.

Recognizing and not penalizing differences is the key point here. However, there is another element of inclusion that has not yet been discussed- actively promoting inclusion through the wellness program itself. The wellness program can be a vehicle through which to encourage employees to take inclusive attitudes back to their teams and homes. For example, using inclusive language in financial seminars, making underrepresented groups visible in advertising and educational materials, and creating events designed specifically for minority groups are all ways to reinforce the program’s, and by extension, the company’s, dedication towards inclusion.

As aforementioned, using flexible goals- a sort of Management by Objectives approach to wellness programs- can help tremendously when it comes to inclusion. Working parents, for instance, have constantly changing schedules and may not be able to find childcare to attend certain activities. Allowing employees to take control of where and when they participate in your program would greatly help working parents manage their households and health. That is just one example of a group that can benefit from flexible inclusion, although there are many others. Keep them in mind when creating a program that works for everyone.

Employees who feel actively included and advocated for are not only happier and mentally healthier, but they are also more productive and successful in their long-term career trajectories (Corliss, 2016).

### **Community and Family Health**

Millennials also place a high emphasis on positive relationships and knowing that their work makes a positive impact on their families and communities (O’Boyle, 2021; Pennic, 2019). After years of corporations lying or greenwashing for publicity, millennials “want more than the legal minimum or executive platitudes. They expect bold action” (O’Boyle, 2021). In the world of the Internet, it is easy for millennials to fact-check corporate promises and to see through facades. And they do. Millennials have a “dedication to being socially conscious”, so much so that many go out of their way to research company backgrounds, initiatives, charitable contributions, and environmental protections (Hurtienne et al., 2021). If you make a promise but don’t follow through, it will be noticed.

The number one tip for community and family health is: if you say you are going to do it, do it.

### *Community Service Projects*

Surveyed millennials specifically identified “the importance of giving back to the community” as a factor contributing to their level of engagement at work (Hurtienne et al., 2021). Many large employers, including automotive manufacturing companies, already

contribute to large national charities. Stellantis does an excellent job of this; they are known for their contributions to large organizations such as No Kid Hungry and United Way (Stellantis, n.d.). While this is nobly done and should not necessarily be tossed aside, it is important to note that more focused offerings lead to a greater degree of employee satisfaction than general donations. Participating in charitable activities or events that directly affect the community surrounding your facilities results in improved employee engagement in up to 90% of your employee population, while general donations only result in an increase among 10% of the employee population (“The Benefits of a Community Service Policy...”, 2022). Fortunately, Stellantis does this as well. In 2020, their employees volunteered 4,800 hours during working time assisting their communities despite the logistical difficulties COVID presented (“2020 Sustainability Report”, 2020).

Some automotive manufacturers surveyed, including Ford and Daimler AG, spoke of their commitment to include community work as a part of their human capital strategy (Purcell, 2021). For example, in this survey, Ford spoke about launching a project to revitalize a low-income Detroit neighborhood, using home repair grants, providing economic support, and employee volunteers to build homes. They issued a statement that provided the reasoning behind this project: “to preserve the cultural heritage of existing neighborhoods while creating modern, sustainable mixed-use spaces that foster innovation and community engagement” (Purcell, 2021). The use of employee volunteers here is key. Millennial employees want to see their direct, tangible contribution to the community- how much more direct of a contribution can you have than seeing a house you helped build? Activities such as this help create a strong culture within volunteer groups and add to your employees’ pride to work at your company.

Hyundai is also a great example of how community engagement can help your product sales. Hyundai renovated abandoned gas stations into public spaces with electric charging stations (Purcell, 2021). Not only was this an excellent way to boost volunteerism at their company, but it also helped promote the sale of electric vehicles. 49% of Americans fear buying an electric car due to poor charging infrastructure (“Fact From Fiction...”, 2022). Here, Hyundai is creating its own infrastructure and using it as a dual opportunity to strengthen its company culture and its surrounding communities.

Community engagement can also be done by promoting other aspects of health, such as physical or mental health. Partnering with community leaders to “help reach people and deliver health information or health programming” to the surrounding areas not only improves the health of the community but increases engagement within the organization itself (Corliss, 2016). This can be a great way to extend the reach of your wellness program, and to get families involved, the importance of which will be discussed later.

### *Environmental Projects*

Another way to engage with the community and create pride in your employees is by addressing environmental concerns. Climate change and the environment is one of the most important challenges of our time, and one that millennials are increasingly concerned about (O’Boyle, 2021). In addition, wellness programs themselves have been demonstrated to be “more... effective if they incorporate an ecological perspective” (Chenoweth, 2022).

Hyundai offers a great example of appealing to the millennial desire to protect the environment. They hosted a monumental event that planted 30,000 trees in a landfill using

employee volunteers to help absorb pollutants. This effort helps sequester nearly 130,000 kg of carbon dioxide every year (Purcell, 2021). Hyundai also did a great job internally advertising this event and its impact so that even employees who could not participate in the event itself could experience an increase in their company pride.

Stimulating and abetting environmental education within the community is another way to address environmental concerns. In 2020, Stellantis donated nearly \$230,000 to the Chandler Park Conservancy, an organization located near their new plant in Detroit. This donation led to the construction of “Detroit’s first community-based environmental education plaza” (“2020 Sustainability Report”, 2020).

These efforts are stunning and have had great results. Smaller companies are often dissuaded by the high costs of these events, but not every company has to do something extraordinary. Partner with local tree farms or landscaping companies to source a small-scale tree planting event at low cost. Send employees to volunteer to run an Earth Day celebration at a local elementary school, where volunteers can make educational presentations and highlight your organization’s environmental efforts.

Millennials are not focused on the numbers so much as they are focused on the effort put forth by the company and seeing the impact. Involving them in making a positive change to the environment around them is what is most important.

#### *Community Leadership and Stewardship*

Community service and environmental projects are excellent ways to make a positive impact on the community and to engage your millennial employees. However, it can be easy to relegate these projects to once or twice-a-year events.

Equally important as these events is ongoing, year-round stewardship of the community. Volvo sets a good example here in the Lowcountry of South Carolina. They have partnered with community leaders, the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce, and an advisory group to assess their impact on the economy and environment. This initiative, called the Good Neighbor Collaborative, also sources suggestions from nearby residents for what types of service projects to invest in. Past service projects have included painting and landscaping in local communities, community book drives, baby supply drives for struggling parents, and a health and wellness fest open to all members of the community (“United Way Day of Caring...”, 2021). Volvo has been praised for having an “immediate and continuous positive impact on metro Charleston [through] their integration into multiple local communities” (Chikomo, 2017).

Allowing millennial employees to steer these kinds of groups and coordinate with their communities can be an effective, low-cost way to encourage community health. Employees who assist with service-planning in organizations like this tend to report higher rates of job satisfaction, particularly among the millennial demographic (“The Benefits of a Community Service Policy...”, 2022). As a bonus, this could inspire a sense of ownership and encouragement to millennials, since taking initiative to drive these activities could lead to promotional opportunities and positive visibility.

#### *Volunteer Time-Off*

An additional way to offer community engagement with more flexibility is to provide paid time off for the purposes of volunteering. Some employees have specific things they are



passionate about and would rather choose which organizations to give their time and money to. This is particularly true about millennials. Being more socially oriented than previous generations, they often have stronger opinions and passions for certain issues. They would appreciate the option to choose how and when to volunteer (“The Benefits of a Community Service Policy...”, 2022).

To do this, employees would have to demonstrate that the time off was used for volunteering, usually by filling out a form and taking a selfie of themselves doing the work. As such, it would require some verification efforts to be carried out by HR and the paid time off must be accounted for, so there is some cost involved. However, this option is considerably less expensive than organizing and planning events on company time.

### *Family Involvement*

Family is a very important aspect of people’s daily lives. The inclusion of family- and the design of wellness programs around families- can increase engagement and program participation (Chenoweth, 2022). This is because many people find motivation for health improvement through their families. Family is a “strong motivator for healthy change” and family involvement typically offers support to your employees (“Designing and Managing...”, 2021). The more supported your employee feels, the more likely they are to participate in the program (Hurtienne et al., 2021). For example, not only do participation rates in lifestyle management and therapy services increase by up to 40%, but long-term improvement in these areas also increases with family involvement (“Designing and Managing...”, 2021).

To stimulate family involvement, consider having events specifically geared towards families, such as a Family Day or encouraging employees to bring their families to community service events. This can be a good, low-cost way to encourage families to take interest in the employee’s work and to reach mutual goals together, which is important because doing so is known to affirm familial support for personal goals (Whetton & Cameron, 2019). For example, if an employee’s family helps plant trees at a community event, they are more likely to support the employee in their financial health goals down the road. In other words, working together strengthens psychological bonds between people that leads to greater future support.

This works beyond community service projects. Encourage employees to involve their families in their physical health goals, such as walking together after work. The more families are involved, the more previously set goals are reached, on average (“Designing and Managing...”, 2021;Whetton & Cameron, 2019).

It is also important to consider the needs of people with families in the design of these programs. A working parent, for example, may not normally be able to attend a 7:00 am team-building weekend 5K, but could maybe attend if childcare was provided. Stellantis offers childcare at some locations for their workers during the workday- consider doing this and extending the childcare to wellness program activities if they are offered outside of working hours (“2020 Sustainability Report”, 2020).

Alternatively, offer a variety of community events that working parents or elderly caretakers could attend. For example, planting trees around a playground or bringing food to a nursing home might be activities these employees would be more amenable to. The main point is to consider the diversity and the needs of your workforce since a well-designed wellness

program should “speak to all the interests and concerns of employees” (“Designing and Managing...”, 2021).

### *Other Benefits of Community Health*

It is worth mentioning at this point that community and family health addresses more than just engagement. While higher engagement has many positive side effects that have been discussed before- higher productivity, higher creativity, more motivation, less absenteeism, lower healthcare costs, and so on- there are additional benefits to including community and family health in your wellness program (Chenoweth, 2022).

For example, community service is a large part of the B Impact Assessment. This report is a major tool used to determine a company’s sustainability efforts and is increasingly used by investors and creditors alongside more traditional financial statements to make monetary decisions. A section entitled “Civic Engagement and Giving” is focused entirely on volunteer hours donated by employees, having an official community service policy, and other hallmarks of volunteerism (“The Benefits of a Community Service Policy...”, 2022). Therefore, including community and family health as a pillar of your wellness program can have a direct impact on the ability of your company to receive any necessary capital investment.

### **Financial Health**

With inflation at a 40-year high, soaring student loan debt, gas prices setting new records, and home ownership increasingly harder to achieve, it’s no wonder millennials are feeling significant levels of financial stress (Alban, 2021). In fact, 58% of millennials say the main source of their stress is their finances. 72% of all survey respondents who answered that they had financial stress were millennials, indicating that this generation is more impacted by financial worry than any other generation (Cuadra, 2022).

Beyond simply providing a nice paycheck to attract workers, why should companies care about holistic financial health? Interestingly, employees spend an estimated 25% of the workday worrying about their finances (Place, 2022). Financial stress also has a positive correlation with absenteeism, as employees may skip work to juggle second jobs. This lost productivity and increase in absenteeism have a cost estimated at \$2,412 per employee per year (Cuadra, 2022). Therefore, increasing your employees’ financial security and peace of mind can have a positive benefit on your bottom line. In addition, 82% of workers, most of whom are millennials, want financial wellness programs in the workplace (Wooldridge, 2022). Millennials generally find free online financial resources untrustworthy and exhausting to comb through, so the impetus falls onto the employer to offer these programs (Alban, 2021). Failure to provide these may result in higher turnover rates as employees leave to find companies that do offer financial health programs.

Financial health is an interesting pillar when considered in a wellness program context. Many financial topics such as salary and bonuses are part of a typical compensation package and, while they are important elements of millennial retention, they don’t necessarily fit into the conversation about wellness program packages. There are other financial elements, however, that do- which we will discuss here.

### *Financial Education*

Financial education is perhaps the most important offering presented in this section. It does not matter how many amazing savings plans or retirement accounts a company sets up for its employees if the employees are not educated on how or why to use them. The same can be said for salaries; 36% of people who report salaries of \$250,000 or more, nearly five times as much as the median salary in the US, still say they are living paycheck to paycheck and experience high amounts of financial stress (Dickler, 2022). Why is this? Because “wealth, not income, is the primary driver of economic security” (Miller, 2021). To generate wealth out of income, money must be invested, saved, and stewarded well. If employees do not know how to do this, no matter how much you pay them, they will still experience financial stress and hardship. This need for financial education is critical- only a measly 24% of millennials understand basic financial concepts (Houlis, 2019).

This kind of education, due to liability surrounding giving financial advice from non-experts, is the type that needs to be outsourced. Many companies use personal finance videos with permission, such as the Dave Ramsey Show, or partner with a wellness app that offers financial seminars. For example, General Motors offers a program called KEYS that offers “classroom-style workshops designed to bring financial concepts to life”. To allow for flexibility, KEYS can be done either in-person or virtually. If an employee prefers a quick read instead, they have access to a library of financial articles, featuring topics such as “Why Use a 529 College Savings Plan”, “Your Top Credit Questions Answered”, and “9 Ways to Have a Budget-Friendly Vacation” (“Our Financial Wellness Program”, 2022).

In addition, many companies in other industries, such as marketing and tech firms, also provide free sessions with a financial counselor- a model like Employee Assistance Programs for mental health but geared around finances instead (Otto, 2020). While this approach has yet to become popular in the automotive manufacturing sector, automakers should consider taking a deeper look into it, as the convenience aspect will certainly appeal to their millennial population.

Each method you use should ideally incorporate some technology for convenience and should be customizable to appeal to your millennial population. Easy and personalized access to this information has been demonstrated to improve your employees’ financial health (Corliss, 2016). A good option to consider for achieving this is the financial wellness app LearnLux. In a 2022 study, employees who were given access to LearnLux through their companies showed considerable progress towards their financial goals. For example, 72% of participants increased their savings, 64.2% began retirement funds for the first time, 55.6% started investing, and 26.4% put aside money to pay for student debt (LearnLux, n.d.). LearnLux also says they have the option for employees to consult Certified Financial Planners virtually to discuss how to reach their goals.

Financial education is essential for all millennials, but especially for minority workers. There is a major wealth gap that exists across racial and gender lines. This wealth gap exists even in companies that pay equal incomes to minority employees and their white male counterparts. These populations are more likely to encounter cultural barriers to saving, such as the expectation to support extended family units. For example, among many Latinx populations, it is seen as shameful to “hoard” money for oneself instead of giving it away to family (Ballas-Traynor, 2022). Showing that multiplying wealth can be done without sacrificing familial

support can be a great way to convince minority employees of the benefits of putting time and care into growing their assets.

In addition, financial literacy is often much lower among minority populations. Providing the tools to learn how to generate wealth from their income can have a great effect on minority assets (Miller, 2021). Studies have confirmed that, “unequal access and unequal information worsen the racial wealth gap”. Financial literacy seminars can be a great, low-cost way of evening out this disparity in access to information.

### *Benefits Education*

Standard benefits, such as 401(k)s, do interest millennials; in fact, millennials have often demonstrated a preference for companies with retirement savings plans and health insurance. However, in an apparent contradiction, millennials are the least likely of any generation to use these benefits (“Health Insurance Status...”, 2022). This could be, in part, due to the general lack of understanding among millennials about benefits, or a preference for a better work/life balance at the cost of more valuable benefits. 72% of millennials reported feeling confused about what benefits the company offers, making them the most likely of any generation to not understand what is available to them (Miller, 2016). Among the most confusing aspects of benefits is the lexicon- millennials, in general, have a lesser understanding of the vocabulary used when discussing financial matters- for example, ‘deductible’, ‘IRA’, ‘premium’ etc. -, and it is therefore very difficult to evaluate which plan is right for them (“GetInsured Survey Reveals...”, 2020; Wall, 2016). It is also often difficult to find someone willing to teach with the right information- just using Google sometimes gives confusing answers on health care and benefits information and is not tailored to your company, so if your company does not provide quality benefits education, many people may simply give up.

Therefore, it would be immensely helpful to your employee’s financial health to include benefits education in your financial education seminars. Make sure your employees know what benefits you offer, and how to utilize them effectively. Most employers do this already, but they do it either with a long, dry presentation during new hire orientation or with a confusing pamphlet sent out around annual enrollment. This type of communication does not work with millennials. Instead, consider communicating frequently throughout the year via written communication (Miller, 2016). Use modern modes of communication, such as text reminders or videos, to explain the financial advantages of utilizing 100% of your company’s benefits.

### *Student Loan Assistance*

As briefly mentioned before, most compensation topics are not typically involved in discussions of wellness programs. However, unique methods of compensation are slowly gaining traction among employers seeking to retain millennials. As most of these new or revitalized initiatives are not considered part of the standard compensation package, organizations are turning to the financial health pillar of the wellness program as the umbrella under which to offer these initiatives. One element of compensation that many employers are beginning to add to their wellness programs is student loan repayment.

One in eight Americans is struggling with outstanding student loan debt, most of whom are millennials despite being nearly middle-aged (Cuadra, 2022). In addition, female employees are twice as likely as men to say that student loan debt repayment plans would encourage them to stay with their current company- this is due to a staggering 60% of female workers reporting

unpaid student loan debt compared to 28% of men (Carlisle, 2022). Helping with student loan debt could therefore help enhance your DE&I initiatives regarding female employees.

While only 3% of employers nationwide have so far offered a defined student loan repayment plan, it is gaining in popularity among other industries (Rochman, 2018). The automotive manufacturing industry is behind the curve on this financial benefit but should consider it. While this industry has a relatively low rate of people who hold debt, 35%, compared to other fields like finance, typically those who do have debt in this industry have relatively very high amounts of debt. 52% of automotive manufacturing employees with student debt chose student loan repayment as their most preferred financial wellness benefit, even over matching 401(k)s (Fried, 2018).

If an official repayment plan is too expensive for your company, consider offering refinancing with a partner third party. Tesla offers its employees student loan refinancing and consolidation through SoFi. When a Tesla employee uses this benefit, they get a \$400 welcome bonus from SoFi towards their loan repayments (“2022 Benefits Guide”, 2022).

### *Financial Incentives*

As briefly mentioned earlier, providing additional financial incentives, beyond ordinary compensation, is another way to not only improve financial health but also to encourage participation in your wellness program. Nearly two-thirds of companies that currently have wellness programs already use some form of financial incentives, but many don’t use them properly and are throwing money down the drain (Chenoweth, 2022). It is equally, if not more, important to make sure that the financial incentives are designed effectively.

Examples of financial incentives can include cash prizes, employer contributions to a health savings account, or reductions in the employee’s health insurance premium (“Designing and Managing...”, 2021). When choosing what financial incentive to offer, remember that it must be something your employees find meaningful- if your employee population doesn’t value cash prizes, then it is fruitless to offer them. In general, research has shown reductions in health insurance premiums tend to be the most effective financial incentive over time (“Designing and Managing...” 2021). This is true among the millennial population as well because millennials are increasingly concerned with their healthcare costs (Miller, 2016).

This changes when considering one-time events or challenges that are part of the wellness program. In these cases, one study indicated gift cards are the most desired incentive; however, multiple other studies suggest that cash prizes are generally the most effective, especially among millennials (Chenoweth, 2022). Cash is, therefore, a good bet when it comes to millennial populations, but an even better approach would be to survey your employee population. Involving your employees and communicating with them about what they want is going to provide you with a clearer picture of what your company values (Chenoweth, 2022).

7% of companies with wellness programs use financial incentives and 34% use financial penalties directly tied to health performance standards (Pollitz & Rae, 2020). However, tying bonuses to these kinds of targets could be problematic. Corliss (2016) says that “programs that fail to acknowledge...barriers are unethical if there are rewards tied to program participation or meeting targets”. There is no one universal health standard, and even existing standards that we do have, BMI for example, are controversial and have many limitations. If your program ties running mileage stats to financial compensation, you could be setting your company up for a

discrimination lawsuit against your wheelchair-bound, pregnant, post-partem, fat, arthritic, or asthmatic employees, to name a few possible conditions this policy could affect.

While these kinds of policies are rarely ever intentionally discriminatory, there is a clear disparate financial impact, which opens your company up to litigation. In fact, a recent lawsuit ruled that Yale University violated the ADA and GINA Acts when it required employees who opted out of their wellness programs to pay a \$25 weekly fee (Miller, 2022). The foundation that represented the employees issued a statement that said, “We believe participating in a wellness program should be entirely voluntary, with no element of coercion, financial or otherwise.” The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Biden administration issued a set of regulations in early 2021 surrounding the proper use of financial incentives in wellness programs in response, but these were quickly withdrawn (Miller, 2022). This could, however, set the precedent for future government regulations. These should be watched carefully by your organization when you are considering financial incentives.

Also, when setting financial incentives, consider your goal. If your goal is merely to help your employees become healthier, why do you assume that running a lot is the ideal picture of health? It is important to note that health, like disability, can take many forms (Corliss, 2016). Instead of defining health and creating arbitrary set targets for your employees, consider rewarding progress instead. Progress is much more accessible and attainable than pre-determined targets. It also shows your millennial employees that you value diversity, including disability, and that you took care to design an inclusive program.

Before deciding on potentially costly financial incentives, keep in mind that financial incentives are not always more effective than non-financial incentives. Consider using a mix of both financial and non-financial to achieve optimal short-term and long-term participation and engagement (Chenoweth, 2022).

If you do decide to implement financial incentives, there are a few additional guidelines to follow. It is recommended that these incentives start at low amounts and gradually increase over time. If you cannot commit to maintaining or increasing your financial incentive for at least the next three years, then don't do it. As aforementioned, employees will resent having incentives either reduced or taken away. The best way to avoid this is to start with small amounts that you know you can afford to increase later (Chenoweth, 2022).

Second, be transparent about what is required of the employee to obtain the incentive. You are setting your employees up for disappointment if you are not clear on how to receive the benefit. Misinterpretation can cause employees to pursue undesired behaviors, all the while thinking that they are going to receive something they're not eligible for.

Third, follow through on your promises. Too often, vague instructions leave employers loopholes to disqualify employees from receiving the benefit they thought they were working towards. While this strategy may save costs in the short run by reducing the number of bonuses or prizes given out, think of how discouraging and de-motivating this is to your employees. If you plan on doing something deceptive like this, it is better, in the long run, to not offer financial incentives at all (Herrick, 2020).

## How to Implement

Now that the four health pillars of effective wellness programs- physical, mental and emotional, community and family, and financial- have been discussed, it is important to consider the proper manner in which to implement them. Many well-designed wellness programs have failed due to poor implementation and management. Don't make this mistake, and instead, focus on utilizing the following key principles to ensure a smoother experience.

### *Senior Management*

Leadership is crucial to any kind of change management, especially when the support comes from the top (Flynn, 2019; Swift, 2017). It is also one of the most important factors in the long-term success of a wellness program (Rojas, 2021). It does not matter how well you design your wellness program if the leaders of your company do not show their support. A wellness program must be viewed as an integral part of your company culture, as opposed to a passing fad, to succeed in the long-term. For your program to become part of your culture, your leaders must demonstrate commitment. As O'Boyle (2021) states, "If your managers aren't [also] doing it, then it's not your culture". Managerial support and effort are paramount to increasing participation rates and engagement levels. Maximum engagement in wellness programs is achieved when senior management and respected leaders of the company lead by example (Mattke, 2021). Wellness programs should be considered by senior management to be an organizational priority, which drives both employee engagement and enthusiasm (Rojas, 2021).

This does not mean that senior management needs to join the weight management program or show up to every mental health seminar. It means, at a minimum, they need to voice their support for the program and align their strategies with wellness. A program that promotes mental and financial wellness will fall flat on employees' ears if top leadership decides to call mandatory overtime and cut pay in half the next day, for example. One study remarked that "Many [millennials] resent being told just how healthy, productive, well, low-risk, flexible, engaged, or empowered they should be in a climate where substantial cost-shifting and increased workloads are the norms" (Chenoweth, 2022). Company policies need to reflect the culture change towards wellness for employees, especially millennials, to take it seriously. Otherwise, these programs are seen as lip service and that is especially damaging to your company's image among your employees.

On the bright side, showing the support of leadership is a relatively easy, low-cost thing to do. Nothing impedes senior management from releasing a short statement about how excited they are to announce a program. The most important part is to follow through on their commitment to holistic health through their other decisions, but while this involves more effort, this too is possible.

It can be done by simply keeping your employees and their wellness in mind when making high-level business decisions and making sure they know that they are at the forefront of your planning. Of course, there are going to be decisions that you must make to keep the company afloat that may not help your employees in the short run. So, tell them! If employees do not know why decisions that hurt them are made, they will assume that senior management doesn't care about them and their health. Engagement and morale will fall, and the wellness program may not be as effective. However, simply communicating the reasons behind decisions, when not confidential or restricted for another reason, helps employees realize leadership's true intentions. For example, if you institute a hiring freeze that caused workloads and job utilization

(and thus, stress) to increase, tell your employees that you did it so that you did not have to lay anyone off due to the semiconductor chip shortage and anticipated downtime, for example. Your employees are more likely to feel appreciative and understanding if you simply communicate (Chenoweth, 2022). In addition, employees are three times more likely to agree with and accept decisions such as hiring freezes, bonus cuts, more overtime, etc. if they know the reasons behind them (Flynn, 2019).

### *Metrics and Data*

One of the main barriers to gaining top leadership approval in the first place is the lack of metrics and support to back up the need for a wellness program. Top leadership may feel like competing business demands are more important than a wellness program initiative; many executives tend to dismiss wellbeing programs as not being a true asset to the firm. HR's role is to actively combat this notion, arming themselves with as many metrics and program evaluation results as they can (Linnan et al., 2019). Emotional appeals and intuitive logic will not be sufficient to generate a sustainable commitment to such a program.

Chenoweth (2022) insists that "Today's business climate calls for practical, cost-effective assessment and evaluation protocols that generate solid, strategic information." It is up to HR to collect, analyze, and present this data. The importance of metrics in creating an effective wellness program cannot be overstated. Keeping track of how your program is performing is imperative to continue to justify its cost to senior management. How do you know if you are seeing any return on investment if you do not monitor the data? Sadly, when companies need to cut their budgets, one of the first things to go is the wellness program; this is because data is often not readily available to justify keeping the program to senior management and board members.

This also happens because while wellness programs can begin showing some positive impacts on employee behavior and company finances right away, the most accurate return on investment data is going to be realized after three to five years ("Designing and Managing...", 2021). If your program is not generating bottom-line savings after the first year, do not give up! Cultural shifts towards wellness are gradual and take time. In fact, oftentimes the most effective wellness programs are the ones introduced gradually- fast, sudden change is much harder to manage (Chenoweth, 2022; Flynn, 2019).

The best mindset to have while looking for the impact of your program is that of continuous improvement ("Workplace Health Promotion", 2022). Automotive manufacturing is no stranger to this practice in many other departments- so implement it with your wellness program, too! Monitor the data coming in, evaluate what your program strengths and weaknesses are, and adjust accordingly.

These objectives should also extend beyond mere participation. Participation is great and should be tracked, but it only tells one part of the story. Participation rates on their own don't provide a good picture of what is going on within your company. Consider adding some of the following data points, such as ROI and health improvement measures.

Only 57.2% of workplaces with wellness programs collect any data relating to return on investment, and 46% collect data on the impact on overall employee health (Linnan et al., 2019). Of all these workplaces, a measly 24.7% actively monitor the data that is being collected, demonstrate program results, and adjust according to the data they are gathering (Linnan et al.,



2019). The purpose of gathering data is to analyze it so that continuous improvement can be applied to the program. There is no feasible way to know how successful or unsuccessful the program is if data is only gathered and not analyzed.

In addition, cost data is critical to evaluating the ROI of your program and good cost management is essential for the survival of the program. 57.5% of companies with wellness programs indicated that the cost of these programs was “extremely challenging” to manage, although a closer look revealed that most of them did not create budgets at the outset (Linnan et al., 2019). It should come as no surprise that a program without a budget is difficult to manage. There are cost-effective ways to design these programs, as we have discussed, but it is still important to keep a record of all costs that go into the program. Create a budget and go from there (Flynn, 2019).

The last major piece of data that is critical to examine is health data. Before designing the program, the best practice is to also conduct a health risk assessment to determine your population’s specific needs (Chenoweth, 2022). Use this data to inform your program design. A blanket approach to wellness may not be as effective as one that is personalized and tailored toward your specific employee population. For automotive manufacturing, a manual survey is not practical. Instead, use technology to randomly select employees’ emails for the survey, or put the survey link in your internal communications network. This will also appeal to your millennial tech-savvy population.

There is more data that would be useful to examine, but these are a few critical pieces that must be considered for an effective program.

#### *Consider the Strategic Environment*

Another key element to remember is that strategy is a function of your environment. Automotive manufacturers have many environments to consider- company culture, home country culture, host country culture, political and legal restrictions, competitors, the market environment, the condition of the economy, and more. To design an effective program, you must take your strategic environment into account. What works for one company may not work for another.

The recommendations in this thesis are general, and not geared towards any company. Take time to review each of the recommendations in your company’s context, to make a smart business decision.

#### *Human-centric Design*

While you are considering your financial, political, and legal options and so on, do not forget to consider your people. Many companies spend years planning the technically “perfect” wellness program that fits their financial and legal needs, but they then fail to consider how the program suits the needs of the employees. That defeats the purpose of the program, and your engagement is not likely to increase. Instead, focus on the needs of your employees and fill in the technical details around them.

Include your employees in the design of your program and ask them what they need for their wellness. This increases the efficacy of the program and increases the chances that these employees will participate and become engaged once the program launches (“4 Ways to Fix...”, 2020). In addition, simply reaching out to them, regardless of their responses, will increase

engagement on its own. Manufacturing employees, production floor employees especially, often “don’t feel like they can enact change, and nothing kills motivation like feeling your voice isn’t valued” (“4 Ways to Fix...”, 2020). Give them this opportunity to voice their concerns and offer suggestions.

Some practical ways to do this include setting up a suggestion box. In 2018, Audi sourced 25,000 ideas from their employees and implemented 13,500 of them, which resulted in a cost savings of \$109 million at two of their German sites (“Audi Saved Nearly...”, 2019). Automotive manufacturing in general often has avenues for idea generation and suggestions sourced from employees to contribute to the culture of continuous improvement. Use these avenues or create new ones to apply to wellness programs.

Another option is to conduct roundtable meetings with your employees and ask them questions directly. Encourage honest responses and include a variety of employees (for example, choosing one employee from rework, the door line, production planning, finance, etc.) to hear a host of different perspectives and avoid catering to any one area to the detriment of the others. At this point, keep in mind that the wellness program is designed to be most effective for millennial workers, so seeking millennial opinions may be more valuable in that sense. However, you should not choose only millennials to survey, as all generational groups should be heard.

These are not the only things to consider when implementing your program, but this is a great way to start and will help improve your program’s effectiveness.

### **The Role of Human Resources**

Throughout the process of creating, implementing, and re-evaluating these programs, HR plays a critical role. The following three sections enumerate ways HR can help make the process smoother for both upper management and employees while setting up the program for success.

#### *Advocate for Measurable, Strategic Objectives*

HR must partner with senior management to establish measurable and strategic objectives for the wellness program (“Designing and Managing...”, 2021). Goals help keep the purpose of the program in sight and allow HR to measure its progress. In a study, irrespective of whether the set goals were achieved, “employers that set measurable engagement goals experienced 63% higher engagement rates” (Chenoweth, 2022).

Use the SMART method (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) to set appropriate goals. Present these goals before senior management and have all members of the project commit to at least one goal of their own, as well as team goals. Frog elaborate and source, check textbook.

#### *Communication and Feedback*

Communication among all levels of employees and management is a key function of HR during this kind of change management. To be successful, “input and engagement must be solicited at all levels” (Chenoweth, 2022). Numerous studies point to continual and transparent two-way communication as essential for wellness program success (Hurtienne et al., 2021; Shi, 2021; Stillman, 2021). Seeking the input of millennial workers is also proven to increase their feeling of acceptance in the workplace, a trait that is highly valued and correlated with millennial engagement (Hurtienne et al., 2021). Not only do employers need to transmit information to their employees accurately and quickly, but employers also “need to commit to listening” (Shi, 2021).

Too many companies dump information on employees without ever asking for their input and this creates a disconnected atmosphere in your workplace. Combat this by actively soliciting input before, during, and after the design process. Continue to ask for feedback and ways to improve throughout the lifetime of the program- and use this data to justify any future changes you need to make (Harikkala-Laihininen, 2022)!

Stellantis does this well. They use a variety of tools to capitalize on communication, including “town halls, engagement surveys, employee meetings, team-building events, department meetings, and the...global employee portal” in addition to the WCM program that led to the collection of 1.5 million employee suggestions worldwide (“2020 Sustainability Report”, 2020).

### *Program Promotion*

Another key function of HR in this process is promoting the program. While HR could partner with Marketing to create the materials for promotion, HR should not defer all responsibility for this function. If employees are interested in the events going on, HR employees should be able to answer any questions they have. If HR is completely separated from the promotion, this will be much harder to achieve, and a communication breakdown could occur.

While there are myriad ways to internally promote the program (such as paper brochures, advertisements on screens in a cafeteria, speaker announcements, word of mouth, etc.) one of the most effective ways to promote the program is to create and advertise a wellness calendar (Rochman, 2018). The calendar should list all upcoming events or activities as well as types of health resources available, so that employees can plan for activities they wish to participate in. This is part of inclusion- working parents and people with busy social lives may find it harder to participate if they’re constantly finding out about events last-minute. Releasing a 6-month calendar is the most effective method, as opposed to a monthly or yearly calendar, and could help encourage participation (Rochman, 2018).

Keeping in mind that millennials prefer convenient access, it may be beneficial to create an e-wellness calendar that employees can access from home. Incorporating it with their employee portal would be even better, as that requires less hassle.

### *Navigating Potential Barriers*

HR also plays a critical role in navigating potential barriers to effective implementation. Firstly, professionals should use empathy and communication skills to address concerns surrounding privacy and trust. Employees are often wary of the privacy surrounding their health information, as they should be, so sensitivity to these concerns is key to showing your employees that you are committed to a program that is suited to their needs and is also a great way to encourage employees to participate who may have otherwise been hesitant (Wadyka, 2020). Employees will not “buy in” to your message if they feel that they cannot trust you or come to you with questions. Creating a culture of inclusivity and trust is paramount to ensuring adequate participation and interest.

Another barrier to implementation is the legal restrictions put on programs of this nature. While briefly discussed already, it is worth noting that HR should be an active business partner to the legal department in ensuring that all legal requirements are met. They should advocate for adherence to these laws and constantly evaluate the program for compliance. They should stay up to date on HR law changes and respond quickly to the changing legal environment

(“Designing and Managing...”, 2021). This type of proactive partnership with the legal team will improve overall implementation in the long run.

Third, designing and implementing an effective program takes a lot of time. Many HR professionals are Altman, 2021 as it is; 67% of surveyed HR professionals have had their workloads increased in the past year and say that it is a significant contributing factor to their chronic exhaustion (Altman, 2021). 42% of HR teams report underperformance due to the “weight of too many projects and responsibilities” (Ladika, 2022). HR burnout is clearly a problem everywhere but given that manufacturing is the industry with the second-highest burnout rate behind just hospitality, it comes as no surprise that this issue is exacerbated among automotive manufacturing HR departments (“Health Insurance Status...”, 2022).

A large and ongoing project such as a wellness program is not an assignment that can be handed off to someone already covering the work of two jobs. Given the overwhelming financial benefits of wellness that have been discussed, it is well worth the company’s resources to invest in hiring a designated Wellness Program Coordinator. HR cannot invest in your employees if you do not invest in HR first. This will require time and money upfront but will be well worth the investment over time.

While there can be many initial barriers to creating and implementing a wellness program, the research clearly shows that the payoff can be immense. So, don’t let these barriers dissuade you from investigating the potential benefits of a wellness program for your company.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, automotive manufacturing firms are facing high rates of millennial attrition, which poses many challenges for the future. If these firms are to succeed, they must find a way to attract and retain millennial talent.

Wellness programs are one of the best, most cost-effective ways to do this. However, these programs only work if each of the four main factors is addressed (physical health, mental and emotional health, community and family health, and financial health) using the best practice guidelines appropriate for millennials. To reiterate, these best practice guidelines are the use of incentives, accessibility and flexibility, diversity, equity, and inclusion, technology integration, and education. These guidelines should be implemented wherever possible throughout the lifecycle of your wellness program.

HR plays a crucial role in designing, implementing, advocating for, and evaluating these programs, but they should not act alone. Use cross-functional collaboration (with the legal and marketing departments, for example) and visible support from senior management to bolster the effectiveness of the program.

In doing so, your company will be able to positively impact not only the holistic well-being of your employees but also your organization’s bottom line. In a world of uncertainty and change, one thing is certain: adaptation has never been more important. Adapt to the millennial playbook and create your wellness program.

## **Availability of a Guidebook**

*A short, easy-to-read guidebook is available for distribution free of charge for HR professionals seeking advice about millennial retention through wellness. This guidebook*

*summarizes the main points and important statistics from this research paper in a format more conducive to the average working HR professional. It takes about \_\_\_\_\_ (frog fill out) minutes to read and is a great way to elevate interest within your HR department on wellness programs or to simply contribute to HR lifelong learning initiatives.*

*Email the author, Caroline Patterson, at [car.patterson.21@gmail.com](mailto:car.patterson.21@gmail.com) for your own copy of this guidebook.*

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