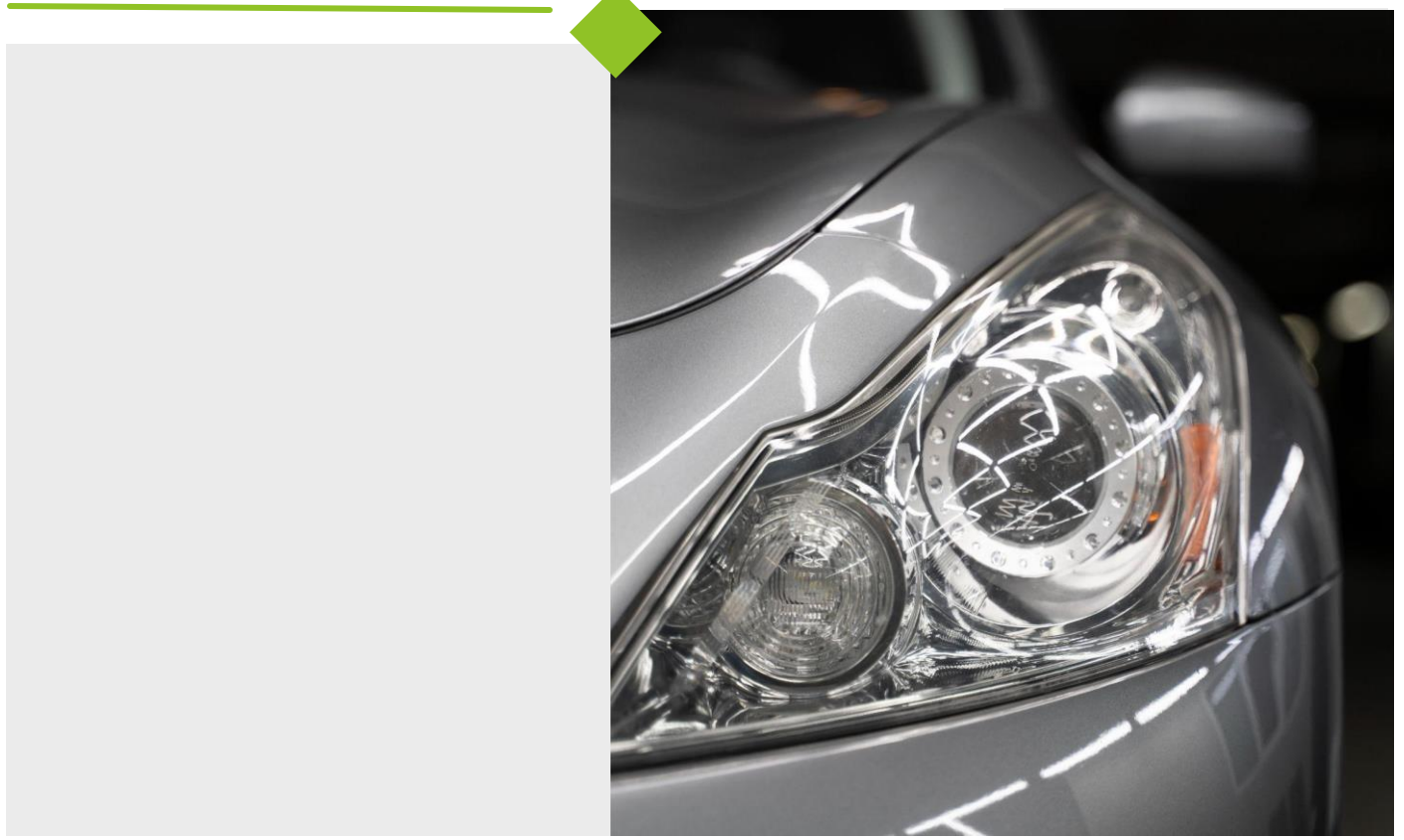


Millennial Retention Through Wellness in the Automotive Manufacturing Industry



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The Case for Wellness Programs

Why are Millennials and Wellness Programs Important?

By 2030, Millennials will make up nearly 46% of the workforce, the largest generational cohort in the labor force by far (O'Boyle, 2021). Especially when manufacturing was one of the hardest-hit sectors during the Great Resignation, it is imperative that automotive manufacturing companies evaluate new strategies to attract and retain their millennial employees (Shi, 2021).

In a response to a 2021 survey by Gallup4Things among millennials, the number one response when asked about what they want in an employer was that “the organization cares about employees’ wellbeing”. Wellness programs are a popular benefit among millennials and there is clear evidence that they can benefit your company’s bottom line.

Impact of Wellness Programs on Company Bottom Line

Effectively designed and implemented wellness programs result in “happier, more productive, and more engaged employees” (Mattke, 2021). High levels of engagement have been demonstrated to have a .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 still suggests that increasing employee engagement has a positive impact on net profit. This is due to many reasons; namely, engaged employees tend to be more creative, more focused, and more motivated during their work. They also tend to practice safer behaviors and display higher levels of effort in their work (Hurtienne et al, 2021). Similarly, a study found that highly engaged workforces had, on average, 78% more productivity and 40% more profitability than similar companies with disengaged employees (Jha & Kumar, 2020). On an individual level, a 10% increase in engagement level has been shown to result in an average of a \$2,400 increase in profit per year per employee (Pena, 2021). All these factors are compelling reasons to increase employee engagement in your organization.

Summary: Millennials are the largest generational cohort in the workforce and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. They value wellness programs, and wellness programs have a positive impact on profit, happiness, satisfaction, engagement, and creativity.

The Four Pillars of Effective Wellness Programs



Physical Health



Mental and Emotional Health



Community and Family Health



Financial Health

In the implementation of these pillars, the following best practice guidelines should be considered wherever possible: *accessibility and flexibility, DE&I, technology integration, education, and the use of incentives.*

Discussion of the Four Key Pillars of Wellness Programs

Physical Health

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).

Below are some of the recommended physical health options for your wellness program.

Onsite Medical Clinic	Nutritious Food and Snack Offerings
Personal Health Kiosks	Tiered Food Pricing System
Telehealth Options	Color-Coded Nutrition Labels
Walking Trail	Physical Health Wellness Apps
Ergonomics Education	Health Education
Ergonomic Workplace Design	Flexible Desk Offerings (Stand-up, etc.)

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” (Lewellen, 2019). Approximately 90% of millennials want mental and emotional well-being support from their employers (Stahl, 2020; Shi, 2021). Mental health matters.

Here are some recommended options to consider for addressing mental health concerns in the workplace.

Work Redesign for Stress Reduction	Flexible Goal Setting
Relaxation Techniques	Mindfulness Education
Workplace Design for Mental Health	Soliciting Ideas and Feedback
Employee Assistance Programs	Work/Life Balance
Flexibility	
Encouraging Inclusion	

Discussion of the Four Key Pillars of Wellness Programs

Community and Family Health

Millennials also place a high emphasis on knowing that their work makes a positive impact on their families and communities (Pennic, 2019; O'Boyle, 2021). After years of corporations lying for publicity, millennials “want more than the legal minimum or executive platitudes. They expect bold action” (O'Boyle, 2021). Direct action in the local community is more effective regarding engagement than general donations are (“The Benefits of a Community...”, 2022).

The list below includes some cost-effective ways to raise employee engagement through community and family health.

Community Service Projects	Family Involvement in Projects
Volunteering Working Hours	Family-Friendly Community Events
Volunteer PTO	Goal Setting with Family Support
Environmental Service Projects	Childcare Options/Benefits
Environmental Education	
Community Leadership and Stewardship	

Financial Health

58% of millennials say the main source of their stress is their finances. Also, interestingly, 40% of all workers say they could be more productive if they were not worried about their personal finances on the clock (Cuadra, 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).

Financial Education
Online Seminars
Minority-Focused Financial Education
Benefits Education
Student Loan Assistance
Financial Incentives Not Tied to Health Performance Standards

Best Practice Guidelines

There are several best practice guidelines to consider when tailoring your wellness program to appeal to millennials and encourage participation.

Accessibility and Flexibility

Millennials place a “high priority on efficiency and convenience” (Ericson, 2021). Your wellness program should be designed to be as accessible as possible (Stahl, 2020). It is also important to consider how different populations are affected by the design of your program. For example, disabled and older people tend to avoid onsite fitness centers, so a truly inclusive program may not involve a large investment in a site that will not be fully utilized (Keller-Guenther, 2016).

Technology Integration

Millennials value fast solutions, so integrating technology wherever it could increase convenience is a good idea (Stahl, 2020). Technology also allows for easy data collection for the company- monitoring the progress of the wellness program is essential for continuous improvement and to keep a pulse of the effectiveness of the program (Ladika, 2022).

Incentives

The use of incentives, both financial and non-financial, can be a good way to encourage wellness program participation (Ladika, 2022). But be careful. Tying incentives directly to health performance standards can be problematic because you could be setting your company up for a discrimination lawsuit (Keller-Guenther, 2016). Instead, consider tying incentives to making progress or to goals that the employee has a say in setting. Health looks different for everyone, so people should not be punished for not having the same body type or abilities as someone else.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

DE&I is “an imperative that is core to [millennials’] personal identities”, so it is crucial to integrate it into the wellness program (O’Boyle, 2021). This can occur through using inclusive language in educational materials, creating events geared towards minority groups, or allowing flexibility to meet the needs of all groups. For example, working parents are mostly excluded from events that occur on school nights, so consider varying the times of your events. Another way that you could be mindful of differences is through minority financial literacy. For example, Latinx people generally experience cultural barriers to financial literacy. Creating a financial seminar addressing how to be financially savvy without sacrificing cultural practices could have a large impact on the financial wellbeing of your Latinx employees (Ballas-Traynor, 2022). The above examples are not exhaustive, but they are meant to illustrate the varying ways people can be impacted by your wellness program’s design.

Education

Your employees do not know what they don’t know. Educating them on healthy habits, if done in an engaging and non-condescending way, can go a long way towards improving your employee population’s health. For example, educating employees on the benefits of healthy snacking in the office has been shown to increase purchases of healthy snacks (Rachmach et al, 2021). In addition, teaching stress reduction and mindfulness techniques has a positive impact on stress levels (Corliss, 2022).

How to Implement

Here are several tips to keep in mind while designing your program for maximum engagement and effectiveness.

Senior Management

The importance of senior management support cannot be overstated. Leadership is crucial to any kind of change management, including wellness programs (Flynn, 2019). In addition, it does not matter how well your program is designed if the leaders of your company do not help establish the program as a core part of your culture. Wellness programs should be considered an organizational imperative to your senior leaders in order to most effectively drive employee engagement and enthusiasm for the program (Rojas, 2021).

Metrics and Data

One of the main barriers to gaining leadership support is the lack of metrics to back up the need for a wellness program. HR's role is to actively convince leadership that wellness programs are assets for the firm, and they can do this most effectively through metrics and data (Linnan, 2019). While financial results can occur quickly, it typically takes 3 to 5 years to see the most accurate readings on your program's performance (Ladika, 2022). So, it is important to give the program time to get established before making any major decisions about cutting the program based on financial data.

Strategic Considerations

Not only should senior management voice their support for the program, but they also need to integrate the mission of the wellness program into their strategic objectives. "Many [millennials] resent being told just how healthy...or empowered they should be in a climate where...increased workloads are the norm" (Chenoweth, 2022). This means that company policies need to reflect the culture change towards wellness for employees to take the wellness program seriously.

Human-Centric Design

Many companies spend years planning a technically "perfect" program that fits their financial and legal needs, but fail to consider their people. Instead, focus on the needs of your employees and ask for their input throughout the process for best results ("4 Ways to Fix...", 2020).

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR HR PROFESSIONALS

1. Advocate for measurable, strategic objectives.
2. Constantly solicit communication and feedback from employees throughout the process.
3. Promote the program.
4. Explicitly address privacy and trust concerns.
5. Consult with your legal team about relevant laws and restrictions.
6. Invest in a position dedicated to the design and facilitation of the wellness program, such as a Wellness Program Coordinator.
7. Do not jump in straight away. Take time to thoughtfully design the program before planning implementation.
8. Continue to monitor and measure progress throughout the program's life.

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Important Note:

This guidebook was created as a convenient way for HR professionals to learn more about designing and implementing wellness programs in the automotive manufacturing industry with the goal of engaging and retaining millennial employees.

The guidebook is an abridged version of the thesis publication [Millennial Retention Through Wellness in the Automotive Manufacturing Industry](#) by the same author, Caroline Patterson. The thesis is more expansive and more detailed, discussing each of the recommendations in detail.

If you are interested in learning more about the topics presented in this guidebook, please email the author at car.patterson.21@gmail.com for your own free copy of the thesis.