



## WELL-BEING : CREATE A LONG-TERM MODEL FOR CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

There is a ghostly toxin that lives in some form or another in most organizations today. What's more alarming is that it is multiplying and lurking into our homes, families, and communities. The impacts are as devastating as a hazardous killer oil spill on the environment.



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Building a Sustainable Model for  
Corporate "People" Responsibility*

But the human toll is far more difficult to detect and tabulate, which would explain why we are not jumping up in arms to protest this injustice.

This toxic waste manifests itself in polluted work environments and it lives and breeds where inefficient business practices, ineffective bosses and toxic employee attitudes are allowed to roam and run free. Make no mistake about it, where it lives and grows it is a force to be reckoned with and trying to contain and stop the poison from spreading is a tricky challenge.

This phenomenon is also nothing less than a company killer – even if it is a death by a thousand cuts – and that of course affects people. As strategic HR practitioners, how can we influence organizational effectiveness when confronted by such a devastating hidden organizational force? It begins simply by systematically and methodologically identifying the toxic sources (business process and people alike) and neutralizing

or eliminating them from the workplace. There are lots of elimination methods like education, accountability for actions and consequences, or helping unchangeable (by choice or capacity) toxic people and bad business process right out the door.

It is still the eternal mystery why we would subject people who are our top talent and our “steady Eddies” required to deliver on the business plan to this churn and dysfunction. Yet we allow it to continue. The reason is of course quite complex. Often it's the system itself that protects and enables this dysfunction primarily because people tend to prefer to ignore the issues and hope that “it” will “just go away.” It's also hard to detect and pinpoint precisely what the issues are and we tend to have inherent biases to make exceptions to the rules – oh it's just Joe or it's just Sally, and they are really quite brilliant, and they really don't mean to act that way, and we really can't live without them. Well guess what – you can live without them,

and in most cases, live even better without them. If the rules don't apply to everyone, and if we as leaders don't uphold the rules and policies, toss them out because they are meaningless. In fact, rules and policies that are just "paper based" create a significant risk and liability issues for any organization.

In today's rapidly moving and ever-changing world, traditional HR methods are no longer effective. Even today, the HR profession has its roots firmly planted in the industrial relations era and most core HR programs were designed primarily in the 1950s. We've renovated these programs with new paint and duck tape, but with the realities of the business world today, these programs are no longer efficient and effective. That is also the source of strong criticism of the HR profession as it is perceived to be a block that slows down business operations and transformation. HR programs and services have to be re-engineered to accommodate the speed of business change and further, to get ahead of the curve to enable business sustainability and provide the support to an organization that it was designed to deliver.

Human transformation and business transformation are both equally difficult to achieve, but are remarkably inter-related. If you improve business processes and the work environment, people respond remarkably well. If we improve our personal health, we have more energy to benefit organizational work productivity. The fundamental principles are so simple, it's stupid. Yet while the principles are incredibly simple, executing them is remarkably hard.

As an example, everyone knows that following the Canada Food Guide and introducing an active lifestyle are the keys to improved health. But there are a million and one reasons and excuses why we don't do it. The same can be said for organizational health. We all know what needs to be done, but it's just too hard and time-consuming to do it—and there are a million and two reasons and excuses why we don't do it.

So what's the spark that will ignite us to action for wellness promotion both on a personal and on an organizational level? The key, quite simply, is accountability and sustainability. If we examine a simple analogy, consider this—as our clothing gets *tighter* we have two choices: (1) incur additional *costs and buy* a new wardrobe, or, (2) implement an action *plan to reduce* our weight. So as our organizational budgets get tighter as a result of escalating costs due to disability, lost productivity, etc, we also have two choices: (1) incur additional costs to buy new programs and fund existing ones, or, (2) implement a plan to reduce dysfunction and waste.

support around why this is not our responsibility. However, consistently aligning accountability with the "rightful owners" is paramount to inspire and engage action for healthy sustainable work environments, and for healthy people.

There is another counterforce that we need to address—as a society we just love to play the blame game. Often we play this game without any knowledge or real information, perhaps because we are simply too lazy to gather the facts or the facts just don't fit our belief system and we just don't want to invest the time to learn anything new. This results in situations where employees

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The hidden cost bleeds in organizational budgets are staggering. Lost productivity, lost engagement, inefficient work flow and duplication of effort, and the laundry list goes on and on while the dollars continue to fly off the clothes line. The laundry list of personal health issues is also as exhaustive. At the root of this, both for organizational and for personal health issues, stress manifests itself as a symptom. Typically we react and find quick-fix programs to address the symptoms versus identifying and investing in the cure of root causes.

Traditionally, we've focused a lot of our wellness efforts on stress management, but that's just the symptom. We need to dig deeper to identify and solve the causes of stress. Often this means identifying who is accountable for what, and placing that squarely on the employer's or employees' shoulders to address. That is difficult and sure we all squawk about it and try to rally

and employers alike blame everyone else for their problems refusing to take ownership and be accountable for their own actions and decisions.

For instance, there is a tendency for some employees to bring their personal problems into the workplace and try to off-load them as employer problems. Often the "walk-in" style medical community will add to this complex situation by validating employee perceptions (after all, it's a one-sided story). To compound this even further we add complex legal systems that are geared to giving "air time" to these often lopsided complaints, and that often have competing regulations. Conversely, employers can also tend to blame employees for missed deadlines, productivity shortfalls and impose unrealistic expectations. Dysfunctional work flows and processes in a complex environment compound these problems even further. No one is working together to address the real



## • THE CONCEPT OF WELLNESS CAN BEEN “BRANDED” INTO THE HEART OF ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- design systems and programs for employee ownership;
- invest in learning to teach people how to be self sufficient and give people the right tools; to contribute and add value;
- create fun, healthy and challenging learning environments.

issues, so it's no wonder that this is a recipe for disaster and costly recoveries.

Solving the “blame game” syndrome is a challenge, but it's not impossible. If we are to help employees who are plagued by this disease, the cure is most often a good dose of reality and to stop enabling the dysfunctional behaviour. Some think this harsh, but in actual fact, doing exactly that means we are finally treating these people with respect. Have the honest conversations so that these individuals are not the only ones who don't know that their behaviour stinks. If we can achieve the rehabilitation of these people to engage in more productive activity, isn't that the ultimate goal?

If we are to help employers with this challenge, we can start by establishing a blueprint plan for building and integrating a sustainable model of workplace wellness. This can be daunting because it covers the realm of culture change, fostering employee and manager accountability and defining the workplace as a competitive advantage. This begins to pave the road and build a framework for Corporate “People” Responsibility which delivers hard profits that are worth achieving.

Corporate People Responsibility means investing in the protection of our work environments to enhance engagement, productivity, reduce costs, and add hard dollars to the bottom line. It's ensuring that we design and create people programs that engage the mind and spirit to leverage the vast human potential and talent that exists in our organizations, and measuring the ROI.

People are complex with complex needs. There is no longer a “one-size fits all solution.” In our desire to create “equity or equality” we've actually designed workplaces that generate apathy and complacency. Creativity has been squashed and people have been led to believe that they have no control over their work and therefore have become completely disinterested and disengaged. Just check the stats on how many North Americans said they “hate their job.” It's alarming, disheartening, and unhealthy for people, organizations, families and communities.

Even in positions of authority we find the “decision making by committee” syndrome – who's accountable? Who takes responsibility? All we are left with is a lot of finger-pointing and the system encourages that to occur. That type of environment is an early death sentence for both employees and organizations.

It's time to change the world of work environments to ignite passion, re-engage brains and leverage human potential. Just as it is time to pioneer a new course for the HR profession to help organizations:

- eliminate or minimize poisonous behaviours and dysfunctional work processes and organizational structures;
- hold people accountable and drive accountability throughout the organization;
- increase leadership and management accountability;
- design jobs around people's strengths to leverage talent;

By “integrating” HR solutions to meet business requirements, and when applied in collaboration with business leaders, we have the power to transform both people and business. The concept of wellness can be “branded” into the heart of organizational development to increase productivity, foster engagement, and generate a culture of innovation and sustainability.

This is the new frontier of strategic and value-added HR. 