



WORKING WELL: HOW COMPANIES  
ARE CREATING CULTURES THAT  
SUPPORT AND SUSTAIN MENTAL,  
EMOTIONAL, SOCIAL, PHYSICAL  
AND FINANCIAL WELLNESS

AN INTERVIEW WITH KAREN MANGIA  
VP, CUSTOMER & MARKET INSIGHTS  
AT SALESFORCE



## Amit Patel Of *Mythos Group* On How Companies Are Creating Cultures That Support & Sustain Mental, Emotional, Social, Physical & Financial Wellness

An Interview with Karen Mangia  
May 10, 2022

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**Financial Wellness** — The U.S. is currently experiencing record inflation, record gas prices and record housing costs. At the start of 2022, 64% of the U.S. population was living paycheck to paycheck according to a recent report done by LendingClub. Even 48% of those who earned six figures said that they're living paycheck to paycheck. The financial wellness of the average American is in a truly perilous place.

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*The pandemic pause brought us to a moment of collective reckoning about what it means to live well and to work well. As a result, employees are sending employers an urgent signal that they are no longer willing to choose one - life or work - at the cost of the other. Working from home brought life literally into our work. And as the world now goes hybrid, employees are drawing firmer boundaries about how much of their work comes into their life. Where does this leave employers? And which perspectives and programs contribute most to progress? In our newest interview series, *Working Well: How Companies Are Creating Cultures That Support & Sustain Mental, Emotional, Social, Physical & Financial Wellness*, we are talking to successful executives, entrepreneurs, managers, leaders, and thought leaders across all industries to share ideas about how to shift company cultures in light of this new expectation. We're discovering strategies and steps employers and employees can take together to live well and to work well.*

*As a part of this series, we had the pleasure of interviewing Amit Patel.*

Amit Patel is the Founder and Managing Director of [Mythos Group](#), a boutique management consulting firm that specializes in Strategy, Digital, HR and Organizational Transformations, Leadership and Executive Coaching and Talent Management. Amit has broad-based expertise in building and leading strategic global transformations resulting in cost savings, enhanced organizational efficiency, and improved productivity. Amit has extensive experience helping clients reinvent themselves to take on new challenges and has enjoyed working with Fortune 500 organizations, start-ups and public institutions.

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**Thank you for making time to visit with us about the topic of our time. Our readers would like to get to know you better. Tell us about a formative experience that prompted you to change your relationship with work and how work shows up in your life.**

Early on in my career, I had an opportunity to work with a global telecom client. As a solutions architect, I participated in numerous business strategy workshops that were focused on introducing new and innovative customer-centric products and services. Working closely with the client, I gained in-depth insights into their pain points, and it inspired me to find forward-thinking solutions that were holistic and transformative. I was hooked. This exposure and experience made me realize that my true passions were strategic planning and transformational change. So, I furthered my graduate studies in these disciplines at the Johns Hopkins Carey Business School and subsequently opened my own consulting firm.

The personal connection that comes from strategy and transformations, whether they be digital, HR or organizational, is deeply gratifying and validating for me. Any type of change is an emotional journey, and I found that I excelled in guiding clients through those transformational experiences in a positive and pragmatic way. This is the moment when the saying, "live to work instead of work to live," finally resonated with me. I had found my calling, so-to-speak, and I left



solution architecting to devote my life to facilitating strategic transformations. To this day, I still find my consulting work to be profoundly purposeful and meaningful.

**[Harvard Business Review predicts](#) that wellness will become the newest metric employers will use to analyze and to assess their employees' mental, physical and financial health. How does your organization define wellness, and how does your organization measure wellness?**

Like many things in business, I think it's beneficial to be pragmatic about wellness. At Mythos Group, we know that employee wellness is directly related to the overall health and success of our business. We also know that wellness goes beyond physical health. Last year, [Gallup published an article](#) that explored what they found to be the five elements of well-being that characterize a thriving life: Career, Social, Financial, Physical and Community. If a person doesn't exhibit all five types of well-being, then they're not actually thriving.

To tie that back into business, Gallup compared people who exhibited all five types of well-being to those who were only physically well. They found that those who only reported physical well-being missed 68% more work each year for health-related problems, were three times more likely to file for worker's comp, were five times more likely to look for new jobs within the next year and were two times more likely to actually change jobs. That has profound implications for talent management for any organization, ours included.

At Mythos Group, we define wellness in holistic terms, but I think wellness in general means the ability to balance personal, professional and social responsibilities and to successfully handle the pressure and stress that these responsibilities can cause. As business leaders, we need to prioritize our employees' work requirements in a way that won't add undue professional pressure and stress. In turn, we measure the wellness of our employees by the holistic health of our business, and we counsel our clients to do the same in their organizations.

Pragmatically speaking, investing in employee wellness can produce measurable return on investment (ROI) in terms of reduced costs and increased profits, but it can also produce substantial value on investment (VOI) as well. VOI may include benefits such as higher employee morale, higher employee job satisfaction and better employee engagement. These are all just as important to an organization's bottom line, but they're not as easily calculated as dollars and cents.

**Based on your experience or research, how do you correlate and quantify the impact of a well workforce on your organization's productivity and profitability?**

As I mentioned in my previous response, there are certain things you can measure and there are certain things that are abstract when it comes to the benefits of employee wellness. But both are important when it comes to correlating and quantifying the impact of a well workforce. According to the Gallup article I mentioned earlier, about 85% of companies have some sort of employee wellness program. Burnalong, a company that helps implement



employee wellness programs published an [ebook](#) about this very subject that I found to be instructive.

While putting a number to your ROI is pretty straightforward, assigning metrics to your company's VOI can be tricky. Burnalong's guide suggests assigning quantifiable numbers to things like higher customer satisfaction ratings, increased productivity, lower turnover, fewer workplace injuries, lower levels of shrinkage, fewer missed workdays and fewer product defects in addition to increased profitability and lower healthcare claims costs.

I want to emphasize that frequent, open and honest communications with your employees are key. At present, workers are being very vocal about what they want out of their jobs in order to attain a better work-life balance. This honest feedback is a great gift to business leaders if we choose to accept it. Any company can implement a wellness program, but if their workers are experiencing stress and burnout from not feeling validated or from being denied a flexible work arrangement or opportunities to progress within the company, then a plug and play wellness program is not going to help as much as structural changes to the business and the corporate culture would.

The leadership at Mythos Group practices what we preach when it comes to communication, and we counsel our clients to always communicate with their workers first in order to create a comprehensive inventory of all the factors affecting employee wellness. Once that's done, it's easier to see what initiatives can be assigned key performance indicators (KPIs), what factors must be given a more qualitative analysis and what organizational strategies can be implemented to improve a company's overall corporate culture.

**Even though most leaders have good intentions when it comes to employee wellness, programs that require funding are beholden to business cases like any other initiative. [The World Health Organization estimates](#) for every \$1 invested into treatment for common mental health disorders, there is a return of \$4 in improved health and productivity. That sounds like a great ROI. And, yet many employers struggle to fund wellness programs that seem to come "at the cost of the business." What advice do you have to offer to other organizations and leaders who feel stuck between intention and impact?**

If business leaders aren't motivated by the positive outcomes and potential ROI from implementing wellness programs, they might be motivated by the negative consequences that can come from ignoring employee wellness. During the months of April through August in 2021, almost 20 million people quit their jobs according to the [U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics](#). The Great Resignation, as it is now known, was fueled by several factors spurred on by COVID-19. Of the four factors that Anthony Klotz, who coined the phrase The Great Resignation, gave for the phenomenon – a backlog of resignations, worker burnout, pandemic epiphanies and the desire to work remotely – three are related to employee wellness.

According to the [World Health Organization](#) (WHO), burnout is a syndrome resulting from workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. A [study](#) done by the American

Psychological Association (APA) in 2021 showed that 79% of employees experienced work-related stress in the month before the survey, and nearly 3 in 5 (or 60% of) employees reported negative impacts of work-related stress. [The Harvard Business Review](#) found that workplace stress cost the U.S. economy more than \$500 billion dollars each year and 550 million missed workdays. And that was in 2019 before the pandemic started!

An article that appeared in [Forbes](#) cited a Gallup poll that described how disengaged workers (workers who are “unhappy and unproductive at work and liable to spread negativity to coworkers”) have a 37% higher rate of absenteeism, an 18% lower rate of productivity and a 15% lower rate of profitability. They translated those percentages into dollars and found that the costs to the company for a disengaged worker can be up to 34% of their yearly salary. That would be \$3,400 for every \$10,000 that they’re paid.

In addition to these numbers, research done by the [American Psychological Association](#) (APA) has found that companies without systems in place to support the well-being of their employees face a higher rate of turnover, lower productivity and higher healthcare costs. As business leaders, we’re always engaging in cost-benefit analyses. With the costs of ignoring worker well-being this high, the question of, “How can we afford a workplace wellness program?” easily gets reframed as a question of, “How can we afford not to implement a workplace wellness program?”

**Speaking of money matters, [a recent Gallup study reveals](#) employees of all generations rank well-being as one of their top three employer search criteria. How are you incorporating wellness programs into your talent recruitment and hiring processes?**

That’s a great article, and I couldn’t agree more. No matter the size or industry, at the heart of every company are its employees – its workforce. Employee well-being directly contributes to the success or failure of an organization, so I think it’s of the utmost importance to keep this in mind during the hiring process. When we bring people on at Mythos Group, we look for likeminded individuals who share our core philosophies and principles. We look for those who will thrive in our work culture.

That being said, it’s important to have a thriving workplace culture in place. In their [2021 Global Culture Report](#), the O.C. Tanner Institute defined a “thriving” workplace culture as one that possesses six essential elements: purpose, opportunity, success, appreciation, well-being and leadership. The report goes on to show that employees who were members of “non-thriving” workplace cultures were 81% more likely to experience Covid-19-related burnout. Employees in “thriving” workplace cultures were only 13% more likely to experience Covid-19-related burnout.

It’s important to evaluate your corporate culture in these terms before you begin recruiting new talent. Part of that is having leaders that are all philosophically aligned and who are all committed to having an inclusive, happy and healthy environment as well as a shared vision. At Mythos Group, we partner with our clients to identify areas where there is an opportunity for

improvement, and then we collaborate to implement strategic change. If a wellness program makes sense in this context, then we'll work with senior leadership to find the right wellness program to address their specific challenges.

**We've all heard of the four-day workweek, unlimited PTO, mental health days, and on-demand mental health services. What innovative new programs and pilots are you launching to address employee wellness? And, what are you discovering? We would benefit from an example in each of these areas.**

- **Mental Wellness:** I've written a lot about mental wellness this year. COVID-19 has had profoundly negative effects on people's mental health. [Research shows](#) that around 20% of adults have experienced some type of mental illness in their lifetime. Mental health isn't an isolated issue, and unsurprisingly, it is [closely tied to physical health problems](#) such as diabetes and heart disease, sleep issues, and addiction or substance abuse disorders. Those physical problems inevitably decrease employee output as well as increase sick days. We're still waiting to know what the true mental health costs of the pandemic will be, but we already know that they will be greater than at any other time in recent memory.

When working with a client, we suggest two main ways to improve the mental health of their workforce. The first is to make sure they provide access to mental health treatment. Over half of adults with mental illness don't ever receive treatment, and [11% of people](#) with mental illness can't afford treatment because they are uninsured. As an employer, you should seriously consider adding mental health treatment to your benefits if you haven't done so already. It's imperative that your employees can get treatment for mental health issues when they arise.

As I've already mentioned, the other strategy that we preach, inside Mythos Group and outside to our clients, is communication. We must maintain a transparent and ongoing conversation about mental health. Business leaders need to be open about this topic and get the conversation started within their own spheres of influence. As leaders, you can strive to model healthy behaviors like having a work-life balance, understanding the importance of holistic health, and normalizing the need for getting help through therapy or counseling. Remember, you set the precedent for your employees. When your workers see you walk the talk, they will be more likely to follow in your footsteps and do the same.

- **Emotional Wellness:** Emotional wellness is really tied into all of these other forms of wellness. If a person is suffering in any of these five areas, it will lead to emotional distress. One of the newer ways I've seen of ensuring an employee's emotional well-being comes from research done by the [Limeade Institute](#). They show that "experience activators" are mindsets that greatly influence the well-being of the individual.

According to the Limeade Institute, experience activators, “generate energy and expand our capacity to improve overall experiences and quality of life.”

When they studied over 500,000 employees in 2019, they found that people with high levels of experience activators have lower levels of stress as well as higher levels of engagement and productivity. Different experience activators play roles of different sizes in an employee’s overall well-being, but the eight that they find necessary for positive outcomes are self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, openness, gratitude, purpose, mindfulness and emotion regulation.

This can be a useful starting point to assessing your employees’ emotional states, and it can be instructive when implementing employee assistance programs (EAPs) or wellness programs. If you’re seeing trends in your workers that show they are lacking in purpose, that can mean that your organization’s failing to adequately adhere to a meaningful mission statement. If you’re seeing trends that show a lack of mindfulness, then leading mindfulness workshops or giving all employees access to free mindfulness apps might be beneficial.

- **Social Wellness:** It’s been cited often that people will spend an average of 90,000 hours of their life at work. That roughly equals about one third of a person’s overall lifetime. Therefore, the workplace environment is extremely important for a person’s social wellness. This is another area where it’s important to analyze your corporate culture to make sure that there aren’t instances of racism, unequal pay, toxic office politics, the inability to progress inside the organization or having inflexible policies or office hours.

In addition to an organization’s workplace culture, an employer must make sure that their employees are maintaining a good work-life balance. This means that employees at all levels are able to have enough flexibility to take care of children or elderly family members, to attend classes or take advantage of other forms of continuing education, to have adequate vacation and sick days, and finally, to maintain friends and attend social functions outside of workplace friendships and events.

I really like the idea of flexible work schedules and four-day work weeks, but I think one of the most important steps employers can take is simply to give their workers space to be off the clock. That means having well-defined boundaries in terms of when managers are allowed to email, text or call their team members. Once these boundaries are in place, they must be enforced, and business leaders at all levels must lead by example. In the past 10 years, smartphones have become ubiquitous, allowing employers to have easy access to their employees 24/7, but I think this is unhealthy and unprofitable as it often leads to fatigue, stress and overall job dissatisfaction.



- **Physical Wellness:** Physical wellness is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. You may offer discounted gym memberships to your employees, but if they have physical limitations that make exercising difficult or if they have childcare or senior care responsibilities outside of the office, they may not have time to spend an hour a day at the gym.

With that in mind, I like to suggest healthy initiatives that can be utilized easily by all employees. For example, many offices have a snack closet or a vending machine that's loaded with cookies, candy, chips and sodas. If this is what's available at your office, this is what your employees are going to eat. Simply switching out junk foods for easily accessible fruits, vegetables and other healthy snacks can make a huge difference in the physical health of your employees.

Holding meetings outdoors where employees can get some fresh air and sunlight can also have positive impacts on physical health. The sun is a major source of vitamin D, which is necessary for healthy immune function and regulating calcium absorption. Spending time outdoors can also function as a mood booster, which helps emotional and mental wellness as well.

- **Financial Wellness:** Financial wellness ultimately comes from a person's ability to pay for food and shelter, with income left over for saving and discretionary spending. This comes from making a living wage. Therefore, it's incumbent on businesses to pay their employees a competitive rate. That's step one. Step two would be to offer your employees a savings or retirement program, like a 401K, and then give them the information they need to educate themselves on the benefits of the different savings programs offered.

This may not seem innovative, but most employers don't choose to take these very basic steps. However, financial stress and insecurity can lead to poor productivity, absenteeism and high employee attrition, both of which will cost your business and affect your bottom line. A [survey](#) done by PricewaterhouseCoopers showed that 38% of workers say that they have less than a thousand dollars in their savings at any given time. This is far less than most families need in order to deal with emergency expenses like car repairs or medical bills.

We've seen EAPs rise in popularity over the last few years, and I often counsel our clients to not only have these EAPs in place, but to also communicate clearly and often the ways in which their employees can take advantage of these programs. Having a safety net in place for your workers if they stumble upon hard times increases the overall well-being of employees and serves as a valuable tool for talent acquisition and retention. These programs can offer the individualized counseling that people need to manage their finances successfully in a discrete and meaningful way.



## **Can you please tell us more about a couple of specific ways workplaces would benefit from investing in your ideas above to improve employee wellness?**

It's impossible to overstate the importance of employee wellness in a post-COVID-19 world. The well-being of any organization's workforce will be the most important factor in whether that organization succeeds or fails. And, the biggest change that needs to be made to support employee well-being is to change our wellness policies to be proactive and holistic rather than reactive and additive.

The saying, "Your health is your wealth," is true of companies as well as individuals. To their credit, the Millennials and Gen Zers are embracing this philosophy at greater rates than Gen Xers and Boomers. According to a [study](#) done by LifeWorks, young adults, aged 20 to 29 are nearly twice as likely as those over 60 to say that they prioritize their mental health. In addition, half of millennials and 75% of Gen Zers cite mental health as a reason to leave a job.

These younger generations are the future of business and they're demanding that their employers take their mental health and overall wellness into consideration. Any organization that moves forward without comprehensive and holistic wellness programs in place does so at their own peril. Ignoring employee wellness will significantly affect employee retention and talent acquisition in the coming years, and those companies that can establish themselves as a pro-wellness employer will effectively win the war for talent.

## **How are you reskilling leaders in your organization to support a "Work Well" culture?**

At Mythos Group, we are fortunate to have a leadership team that is fully aligned in supporting wellness initiatives. As consultants, we have the benefit of decades of experience seeing what works and what doesn't for organizations. And, while every business in every industry is different, there is one thing that remains constant – no matter who you are or what you do, your most important assets are your employees. Always!

Employing education and implementing new policies to reskill workers is appropriate when necessary. However, I'm a firm believer that the best way to teach someone is to lead by example. In this case, what that means is that the senior management in an organization needs to show their subordinates what wellness looks like. Corporate cultures are often established from the top down. Once a culture of wellness has been established in the C-suite, then it's easier to hire likeminded directors and managers who will be a good fit for a well workplace.

## **Ideas take time to implement. What is one small step every individual, team or organization can take to get started on these ideas - to get well?**

To piggyback off my last answer, I think the one step that everyone can take is to lead by example. Wellness is a very personal journey, and it starts with the individual. And while we advise our clients that those in senior leadership roles need to serve as good examples, the fact



of the matter is that when each person models wellness to their co-workers, bosses and subordinates, it creates a ripple effect.

I think there's a shared responsibility when it comes to having a well workplace culture. Individuals need to commit to being well in order for the team and organization as a whole to function as a well workplace. You can look at it like a ballroom dance. You may have the dance floor and the music, but you still need two partners who know the steps. And, much like two dance partners, the individuals and the organization as a whole need to communicate with each other as they move along.

A holistic wellness program is one that is intertwined betwixt and between every individual on every team in every department, from the bottom up and the top down. It may sound like an insurmountable task, but just like a virus, wellness is contagious. Engaging in open and honest communication as well as exhibiting empathy and compassion will empower employers and employees to not only commit to wellness, but to also exemplify wellness.

**What are your "Top 5 Trends To Track In the Future of Workplace Wellness?" (Please share a story or example for each.)**

There are so many new innovations going on in the field of workplace wellness. It's a really exciting time to be doing this kind of work. Even though new ways to ensure a well workforce are popping up every day, these are the five that, in my experience, are gaining the most traction. Some of these initiatives have been on the table for a while, but the coronavirus pandemic has given their adoption greater immediacy, and we are likely to see their broad implementation soon.

1. **Financial Wellness** – The U.S. is currently experiencing record inflation, record gas prices and record housing costs. At the start of 2022, 64% of the U.S. population was living paycheck to paycheck according to a recent report done by [LendingClub](#). Even 48% of those who earned six figures said that they're living paycheck to paycheck. The financial wellness of the average American is in a truly perilous place.

Just last month, a [new survey](#) was released that showed that 51% of employees are more stressed about their finances than they were a year ago. These employees reported that they spent around 25% of their workweek dealing with financial issues – that's one quarter of the time they spend working! The study also found that 86% of employees say that their financial stress impacts their productivity, 84% reported that it affected their job satisfaction and 80% said they it was having a negative impact on their mental and physical health.

So, what can companies do to bolster their workforce's financial wellness? Employers need to understand the financial burdens that their workforce is bearing and implement

targeted solutions aimed at lifting those burdens. Employers need to not only offer comprehensive benefits that include savings options like 401K plans, pension funds, stock options, and health and emergency savings funds, they need to educate their workers about the benefits of saving, budgeting, investing and keeping cash on hand for emergencies.

When I was a managing director at a Silicon Valley start-up, we were incredibly proactive at ensuring the financial health of our team members. To that end, we created a culture of equity and inclusiveness where everyone had a share of the success of the company. We issued stocks to every single hire, and we offered them the opportunity to buy more stock through Employee Stock Purchase Plans (ESPPs). We also contributed an equal match up to 6% to their 401K plans. And last but definitely not least, we paid top salary to employees at all levels. This gave us an edge over our competition when it came to attracting and retaining the best talent.

Taking proactive steps to ensure the financial health and wellness of your employees will pay dividends in the long run by reducing turnover, having less missed workdays, lowering healthcare costs, exhibiting higher employee morale, seeing higher company loyalty, enjoying increased productivity and experiencing an overall healthier and happier corporate culture. Not to mention, employees will be able to stop focusing on their short-term financial insecurity in order to focus on their long-term financial stability.

2. **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) Initiatives** – Ted Colbert, an executive at Boeing, is famously quoted as saying, “The best workforce is a diverse workforce.” This statement couldn’t be any truer. Diversity has the ability to make any workforce more dynamic, more creative and more innovative. I have seen firsthand how people from different cultural, geographical and generational backgrounds can work together to solve problems in a way that a one-dimensional workforce cannot.

In my career, I have found that it is consistently the groups with the most diversity that perform the best. I’ve had the opportunity to work with many international clients and because we’re working with global teams, they were often diverse by default. What I found over and over again was that when you get different perspectives involved in strategizing and problem-solving, you end up with better business outcomes, easier implementation and more innovative solutions.

As a naturalized American citizen, I know firsthand how beneficial DEIB efforts can be for the wellness of the employee as well as the wellness of the organization. In order to have a thriving work culture, employees need to feel valued for their unique ideas and contributions. And they need to feel like they belong. Microaggressions, bullying,



racism, inequitable pay structures and lack of mobility within the company cause marginalized groups a great deal of stress and mental fatigue. This has been called the “emotional tax” of being a minority in the workforce, and it can lead to worse health outcomes and higher instances of mental illnesses.

We are at an incredibly exciting place in time where we have the most diverse workforce in history. Not only do we have every race, gender, religion, culture and background represented, but we also have five generations of people working together at the same time. Investing in DEIB initiatives now, can make a huge difference in the wellness of each of these individuals and the wellness of an organization as a whole.

- 3. Flexible and Hybrid Work Models** – When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, who would have thought that over the course of several weeks, the majority of the global workforce could and would go online? When we look back at the past two and a half years, this change may be the most profound shift that occurred, and it may prove to be the change that stays around the longest after the pandemic is truly over. As it turns out, many of those who were forced to work from home during the pandemic found that they enjoyed that flexibility. According to a [Future Forum Pulse survey](#), remote workers feel two times better about their work-life balance and 2.4 times better about their work-related stress. This is especially true for working mothers, people of color and other marginalized employees.

In reality, working from home 100% of the time isn’t possible or even desirable for 100% of employees at 100% of companies. To address the need and want to go back to the office, companies are coming up with some really innovative hybrid work models where employees work from home part of the time and work from an office part of the time. At Mythos Group, we were working four days in the office and one day remote before the pandemic began, so we were already experiencing the benefits of a hybrid work model, and we continue to lead by example for our employees and our clients.

One of the types of flexibility that employees currently need the most is caregiving and family-focused flexibility. Part of attaining a work-life balance is having enough time to spend with your family. The skyrocketing costs of childcare and eldercare also leave many workers, especially women, acting as caregivers for family members in addition to their full-time jobs. With almost a million deaths from COVID-19, we’re also seeing family members struggle to make and pay for funeral arrangements. Employers must be cognizant of these extra familial obligations, and they must give their workers the flexibility to take care of them in a way that doesn’t cause undue stress.

When it comes to offering flexibility and hybrid work models to your employees, it’s important to really listen to what your workers are telling you and support them where you can. If your employees are working primarily at home, offer them home office



allowances to offset the costs of increased use of personal technology and home utilities. Check in with them to make sure they're staying active. It may seem like working from home would allow more time for workers to be active, but we've found the opposite to be true. Workers tend to be more sedentary when they work from home.

As a final note, if you truly need for your employees to work from your offices instead of from home, and you're experiencing pushback, take the time to find out why. You may find that your employees feel like they get more done at home because there aren't as many distractions. If that's the case, designing your offices with designated quiet workspaces or meeting-free time blocks might be helpful. Employees are vocalizing what they want from their employers, so it's important for their employers to listen.

4. **A Four-Day Workweek** – This has been in the ether for years, but for the first time, it's gaining serious traction in the U.S. and I, for one, think it's about time. The 40-hour workweek has been the standard practice in the U.S. since the 1920s when Henry Ford found that his workers performed best when they worked at or around 40 hours a week. Today, there is no official full-time workweek, but the [Fair Labor and Standards Act](#) does require overtime to be paid to nonexempt employees who work in excess of 40 hours. However, in the wake of the pandemic, more and more employees are voicing their desire for the move from five days to four days in order to have more flexibility and a better work-life balance.

A [survey](#) done in September of 2021 found that out of 1,000 workers, 95.4% wanted a four-day workweek, 90% believed that the five-day workweek was outdated, 97% felt that they'd be more productive working four days a week and 98% believed that their mental health would improve if they only worked four days a week. Additionally, the survey found that in order to get a four-day workweek, 38% would give up unlimited paid time off, 43% would give up free company-provided healthcare, 58% would give up an eight-hour day by working two more hours per day during a four-day week and 74% would give up their current job to have a job that only worked four days a week.

Now whether you agree with those surveyed or not, it's obvious that a four-day workweek is in heavy demand. And it's not just in the U.S. [Belgium](#) is the latest country to experiment with a four-day workweek. They just introduced a reform package that would give employees the power to request a six-month trial of a shorter workweek from their employer. Funded by the Scottish National party, Scotland also trialed a four-day workweek where workers would have their hours reduced by 20% but would receive the same pay. Spain has announced a similar program. In Japan, Microsoft trialed a program called the "Work-Life Choice Challenge 2019 Summer" where they gave the company's 32,000 employees the option to choose from a variety of flexible



work styles, including a shorter workweek. The results of the program showed that the Microsoft workers who took part were happier and 40% more productive.

In April of 2022, California introduced [AB 2932](#), a bill that would change the definition of a workweek from 40 hours to 32 hours for companies with more than 500 employees. The bill would also require that employees be paid overtime if they work longer than four full days a week. All-in-all, the legislation would equal a 10% increase in pay for those who were affected. In the absence of legislation, many private companies have already conducted their own four-day workweek trials. Basecamp, Kickstarter, Panasonic and thredUP are just a handful of well-known companies that are offering or planning to offer their employees a shortened workweek.

As I mentioned above, I think that it's important to listen to what employees are saying that they need right now in order to stay mentally, physically and emotionally well. Anecdotal evidence points to a shortened workweek having benefits such as increased productivity, a reduced carbon footprint and reduced operating costs and expenses. I'm counseling our clients to run a test program with a limited number of employees and analyze the results. There's a very real possibility that it could be a win-win for everyone involved.

5. **Reimagined Employee Benefits** – Now is the time to reimagine the standard corporate benefits package. Like it or not, our world has changed and what worked before COVID-19 will simply not work in a post-pandemic world. Workers are facing new and different challenges and they have new and different priorities. The benefits that employers use to attract and retain talent need to reflect this new reality. The organizations who embrace these reimagined benefits are the ones who are likely to have a competitive advantage in the talent marketplace for years to come.

One of the ways in which benefits need to evolve is in the area of paid time off (PTO). More PTO has always been high on employees' wish lists, but many employers have considered it to be a frivolous request. We're now starting to realize that the reasons workers need more time off are anything but frivolous. Take sick days for example. Before the pandemic, many workers would power through a cold or the flu, coming into work and exposing their officemates because they didn't want to waste their precious PTO. In the age of COVID-19 and with the threat of emerging variants and new pandemics, coming to work sick is a huge liability for an organization.

In addition to more sick days, workers desperately need more family leave to take care of new babies, sick children, ailing parents and deceased relatives. Maternity, paternity and family leave needs to not only be acceptable, but it also needs to be encouraged. One of the five main types of wellness we mentioned earlier is social wellness and a large part of a person's social wellness is familial wellness. I have seen, throughout my

career, that organizations that had policies in place to support and include a worker's family had higher employee engagement, satisfaction and loyalty.

Healthcare benefits have always been appreciated by office employees, but it's time to expand them to include part-time and blue-collar workers as well. Healthcare inequality was laid bare by COVID-19. Marginalized, low-income and rural communities had much worse health outcomes during the pandemic. The single best way to protect these workers and to improve healthcare equity is by providing the whole of the workforce with access to affordable healthcare.

In addition, these standard healthcare benefits need to be expanded to include coverage for mental health, preventative medicine and telehealth. Mental health benefits could include corporate counselors, corporate help lines, mindfulness apps and holistic mental wellness programs that encourage self-care, exercise and healthy eating. Telehealth solutions can be used to foster wellness by delivering useful and timely health education and information, fostering better clinician-patient relationships and making it easier for people to seek out medical care when they need it by attending virtual visits.

### **What is your greatest source of optimism about the future of workplace wellness?**

My greatest optimism about employee well-being in the future comes from the fact that speaking out about things like wellness and mental health are no longer taboo. The toll that COVID-19 has taken on our overall health and well-being is undeniable. I believe that the focus on wellness that we're seeing now will continue to grow in the wake of the pandemic, and I think that we should appreciate that focus for the silver lining that it is.

Now, more than ever, people want a good work-life balance with flexible schedules and enough compensation to thrive instead of just survive. In some vocations, it's been acceptable to work 60 hours a week at multiple jobs for minimum wage. That is no longer acceptable because as a society we've come to understand that it is not sustainable. It's unhealthy for the workers and it's unhealthy for their employers. Moving forward, I believe we will see this validated again and again. The companies that make the shift to a holistically well workforce will be the companies that will continue to grow and prosper in a post-pandemic economy.

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**Thank you for sharing your insights and predictions. We appreciate the gift of your time and wish you continued success and wellness.**

Thank you! It was my pleasure as always.



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