

**employee
benefits**

2019

Employee Wellness

A healthy new year

January 2019

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HEALTH INSURANCE

Editor's comment

Kavitha Sivasubramaniam | editor
Employee Benefits

Contents

Healthy habits	4
<i>Reaping the benefits of health-related resolutions</i>	
Financial health	7
<i>Helping employees plan for short and long-term financial goals</i>	
Beating the blues	10
<i>Supporting employees with their mental wellbeing in January</i>	
Fairness and transparency	12
<i>How can organisations promote employee motivation?</i>	
Engagement and motivation	13
<i>Maintaining productivity and happiness in the first quarter</i>	

It is usually during this time of year, immediately after the indulgent festive period, that people start thinking about self-improvement and healthy new beginnings. Whether it is to do with their physical, financial, mental or emotional state, the start of a new year is traditionally a time for self-reflection and making changes for the better.

For this reason, it is also an ideal moment for employers to consider how they can support employee wellness. After all, having healthier employees often results in a reduction in absence rates, and having a workforce that is mentally, as well as physically, present at work equates to higher productivity.

When it comes to physical health, there are numerous initiatives employers can put in place to help staff with their resolutions; these might include improving fitness, reducing alcohol consumption and stopping smoking. The success of these programmes should then be measured and fed into a strategy to reduce sickness absence.

Post-Christmas, many employees also suffer from the 'January blues', and need help with their mental health. Engagement and motivation are also problem areas at this time of year, so organisations should look at the different reward and recognition approaches that could engage staff, the role of communications in boosting their motivation, and the provisions that can be made to support psychological wellbeing.

During this time of increased financial strain, there are several ways employers can assist those who want to plan for both the short and the long term. Programmes can be tailored to specific workforce demographics and can signpost employees to the various financial resources they need. However, employers must also be mindful of how best to communicate about these supports, to ensure engagement and take-up in an area that many still consider taboo.

Of course, forward-thinking employers today would do well to remember that taking a holistic approach to wellness, which addresses all aspects of employee health and happiness, will pay dividends in the long run. 



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Industry insight
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Physical wellness

Focus on communicating health benefits to retain staff in the new year



Mark Marriott | director of client relationships
Bluecrest Wellness

January and February are well known for being 'depressing' months. After the highs of the festive period, reality tends to bite as the credit card statements arrive, resolutions are broken, and the dark days seem never-ending.

As adults spend around one-third of their life at work, creating a positive work environment is crucial for employee health and wellbeing.

A simple answer is to ensure staff are making the most of their benefits. According to the *Employee Benefits' benefits research 2018* report, published in May 2018, 86% of respondents offer support for employee health and wellbeing. The new year is the key time to highlight those provisions.

Using this quick-fire guide, employers can undertake a five-day plan to cut through the negativity and ensure 2019 starts with a bang.

DAY ONE: IDENTIFY THE RIGHT BENEFITS

Employers should focus on health and wellbeing benefits first. These will have the most impact at this time of year, particularly those with a focus on prevention.

These benefits are likely to fall into certain categories: money, physical and mental health, holidays and leisure. Organisations should work

out which are the best to promote, and what the key message is for each. There will not be time to push each benefit individually, but a clear message for each area will do the trick.

DAY TWO: IDENTIFY THE AUDIENCES

The next step is to outline key audiences, remembering that these may not be broken down by department, and to prioritise those that are likely to gain the most from a renewed focus on health and wellbeing.

Are there any particular areas of the workforce that are more susceptible to poor health in January? This might be smokers or unhealthy eaters. It can help to build audience personas and key characteristics to help bring them to life.

DAY THREE: THINK ABOUT THE MESSAGES

Employers will probably want an umbrella message that can cover the campaign and be used for posters and general promotion. In addition, however, they should think about what to say to each specific audience.

Convincing a 30 to 39-year-old employee that a health screening is a positive step towards maintaining a healthy body and mind will likely

require a different message than when encouraging a 55 to 60-year-old audience.

DAY FOUR: ORGANISE THE CHANNELS

At this point, the time has come to implement. Key line managers should be briefed on strategy, outlining the challenges employees might face at this time of year. This is also a good time to remind them of some of the softer approaches that can help to encourage their reports to take breaks, get outside, eat a healthy and balanced diet, and take some exercise.

This is the stage at which employers should create generic posters and materials for the display on noticeboards and the intranet. In addition, email is likely to be the key channel to get targeted messages out to each audience, so marketing teams should help ensure that segmentations are set up correctly.

DAY FIVE: GET COMMUNICATING

Once all of this is done, it is time to push the new campaign. Employers should be sure to keep track of email open rates to measure the first line of engagement, as well as the general reception.

Hopefully, these steps will have created a buzz with staff, starting the year with a focus on building a positive, engaged and happy workforce, set to last through the darker months and beyond. [ob](#)



Healthy habits

Reaping the benefits of health-related resolutions



Sam Barrett |
freelance journalist

Whether getting fit, cutting back on alcohol or stopping smoking, January is the prime time to think about improving health and wellbeing.

Providing effective support can help staff stick to their resolutions, while also delivering benefits for the employer in the form of increased productivity and reduced absenteeism, among others.



NEED TO KNOW

- There are many options employers can offer to help support healthy resolutions, including gym memberships, health cash plans and free fruit.
- Buy-in from senior management can create a supportive culture and ensure the success of a programme.
- Support for employees' health improvement in the new year should be part of a wider wellbeing programme.

EDUCATING AND FACILITATING

Support from an employer might take the form of education and information. This could cover everything from healthy diets and fitness regimes to building up resilience and boosting wellbeing in their workspace.

Employers can also encourage good habits through benefits and perks, such as gym memberships, smoking cessation programmes and health cash plans.

Technology can be a boon, particularly considering the availability of apps that enable staff to track their health, or even compete against their colleagues.

Bupa Boost, for example, provides employees with support around mindfulness, nutrition, relaxation and fitness. Dr Petra Simic, interim medical director at Bupa, says: "Employees can use this to improve their health in these areas. It makes health and wellbeing fun and engaging."

WORKPLACE SUPPORT

There are changes that can be made in the workplace to make it easier for those trying to adhere to their resolutions. Free fruit, lunch clubs and healthy meals in the canteen can help staff improve their diet, for example, while walking meetings, stair-climbing challenges and lunchtime walking or running groups can boost activity levels.

Given the diversity of employees' resolutions, offering a wide range of support is a must.

Matthew Carlton, founder and principal consultant at Shine Workplace Wellbeing, takes this a step further: "I encourage [employers] to let each employee decide how they want to spend [an individual budget]. Gym memberships might work for some, but others might prefer to improve their fitness by spending it on a pair of running shoes, swimming lessons or putting it towards golf club membership."

Although workplace initiatives and encouragement are important, Camilla Lewis, health management consultant at Aon, recommends taking a relatively gentle approach.

“Don’t expect employees to transform their health overnight,” she explains. “Health improvement is about changing behaviour, so [employers should] provide support and goals that are easy to achieve and won’t put them off altogether.”

HEALTHY CULTURE

Beyond providing gym memberships and fitness classes, employers should ensure that the wider working experience facilitates a healthy lifestyle.

Allowing employees to take longer lunch breaks, or come in early, so they can attend a fitness class at lunchtime, for example, will make it easier to stick to a resolution, while also reminding the employee that their health and wellbeing is important to their organisation.

When it comes to creating a wider culture, the importance of management buy-in cannot be underestimated, says Dr Arup Paul, deputy chief medical officer at Axa PPP healthcare: “Senior management need to get involved, as this will create more

camaraderie and loyalty. If a director says it’s rubbish, there’s no way employees will take it seriously.”

MEASURING WIDER BENEFITS

While the primary objective of these initiatives should be to improve employee health, there are significant benefits for the organisation.

Alex Heaton, founder and chief executive officer at digital wellness platform LiveSmart, says: “Healthier employees are more engaged and have lower sickness absence. Creating a workplace in which people can thrive also fosters employee loyalty, driving down staff turnover and the costs associated with it.”

It can be difficult to clearly measure the benefits of improved employee health. However, regular health risk assessments will highlight improvements, and employers can also track data for sickness absence, employee engagement and staff turnover.

To reap the maximum benefits from employee health improvements, this support needs to last beyond employees’ January resolutions.

“Any support an employer provides shouldn’t be tokenistic,” says Paul. “Make it fun and engaging, and part of a broader health and wellbeing programme, and it will get groundswell. The return on investment can be significant.” **eb**



Case study | DCB Group

Offering employees health initiatives to start the year right

DCB Group is a communications specialist in Manchester, employing 52 people across three business centres. The organisation offers health and wellbeing initiatives throughout the year, but the power of supporting employees’ resolutions became apparent more than 10 years ago.

David Beale, chief executive officer at DCB Group, says: “I gave up smoking in 2007 and encouraged others to join me. Seven of us did it together, supporting one another when it got tough. Taking five minutes out to walk round the block or have a chat to someone going through the same thing made a big difference.”

The success and camaraderie this generated lead to further health initiatives based in January, including the launch of a weight-loss programme four years ago. As well as support and information around healthy weight loss, this involves regular weigh-ins, which can be public or private depending on the employee’s preference.

Beale says this programme proved extremely popular in its initial run, with around a third of the organisation getting involved. As a result, it is now available throughout the year. “If an employee wants to lose weight, they can lay down a challenge to the rest of the staff,” he explains. “It’s much easier when others are doing the same thing.”



Health resolutions will also be on the agenda for DCB Group in 2019, with the launch of a walking club planned for January. This will encourage employees to get out of the office at lunchtime.

“We’re going to launch a challenge to see how many miles employees can cover,” Beale explains. “If we manage 1,000 miles in January, we’ll celebrate with a company lunch. Our employees are our number one asset, so it’s important we support them and help them look after their health.”

Industry insight
supplied by**SALARY
FINANCE**

Healthy finances

Start the year by helping employees on the road to financial fitnessDhiren Master | chief marketing officer
Salary Finance

YouGov's New year survey, conducted in December 2017, found that the UK's top three resolutions are to eat better, exercise more and spend less. Poor financial wellbeing can have a hugely negative impact on an individual's daily life, so it is understandable that monetary fitness is among the most popular goals.

The employer's guide to financial wellbeing 2018-19, published by Salary Finance in October 2018, explored the attitudes and behaviours of more than 10,000 employees, aiming to understand how an individual's relationship with money affects their wellbeing.

The survey asked whether respondents had worries in the following areas: relationships, health, career and finances. Money worries were consistently the greatest contributor to overall stress levels, no matter which way the data was cut.

The research found that those who were worried about money were 8.8 times more likely to have sleepless nights, 7.6 times more likely not to finish daily tasks, and 5.7 times more likely to have troubled relationships with colleagues.

THE ROAD TO FINANCIAL FITNESS

The aim of any resolution is to turn a good intention at the start of the year into a habit that improves wellbeing in the long-term. In many ways, the steps to achieve this financially are similar to those for physical fitness; to be successful, individuals should make one resolution, be realistic, tell friends and family to make them accountable, and celebrate progress.

Picking the right financial fitness routine can be just as important as choosing one for exercise; going from the sofa to a seven-day gym routine is hard to sustain, and the same is true for any drastic change in an individual's approach to personal finances.

TAKING THE RIGHT STEPS

Financial goals typically fall into three categories, focusing on either coping, resilience or freedom.

Coping is the first step toward financial fitness and includes paying off high-cost debt as well as building an emergency fund. Salary Finance's research found that 34% of people regularly run out of money before payday, so these steps can make a big difference in employees' ability to manage through the

month. Benefits which allow access to earned pay in real time can also be helpful in this context.

Goals related to resilience involve paying off all debts and building up a more substantial savings buffer, ideally equivalent to three months' outgoings. Achieving this can take a long time, so the more employers can do to help good habits stick, the better. Providing saving and borrowing options where deposits and repayments come direct from salary can help, as they reduce loss aversion. More specifically, employees are not able to 'miss' the money because it is deducted before their salary is deposited into their current account.

Finally, the aim for financial freedom is to help employees build assets that will prepare them for later life; increasing pension contributions, taking advantage of workplace Isas and participating in share schemes all have a role to play.

SUSTAINABLE HABITS

A resolution is not meant to serve as a catalyst for drastic lifestyle changes; rather, it is a time to reflect on past behaviour, be honest, and commit to making positive, sustainable habit changes.

From the employer's perspective, helping staff achieve their wellbeing goals can have many positive effects, including motivation, engagement, productivity and loyalty. So, just like promoting a healthy workplace, helping staff build positive financial wellbeing habits is important and worthwhile for employers, in addition to being valued by employees. [ab](#)



Financial health

Helping employees plan for short and long-term financial goals



Jerome Smail |
freelance journalist

In the period following Christmas, employees are more likely than ever to face tightening purse strings. In turn, the start of the year is a popular time to plan for the future and make positive behavioural changes when it comes to money.

The financial health of the workforce has direct and significant effects on the success of an organisation. *The Employee financial wellbeing report*, published in January 2017 by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), found financial worries had negatively affected productivity for 25% of employees.

Jeanette Makings, head of financial education at Close Brothers, says: “Positive financial wellbeing benefits employers in numerous ways, [including] increased engagement and productivity, lower absenteeism, and greater staff retention and loyalty. Improving the financial wellbeing of employees is a differentiator when recruiting talent and ensures more preparedness for retirement, allowing smoother succession planning and transitions.”

It is therefore in the interest of every employer to help staff manage their money effectively and achieve their financial goals.



NEED TO KNOW

- The new year is a time for positive financial changes, and employers should embrace this, as monetary wellbeing translates directly into happiness and productivity.
- Rather than just focusing on pensions for the long-term, organisations should consider all aspects of financial wellbeing, including short-term items like loan repayments.
- Communications should be tailored, varied and targeted, to ensure they reach the widest audiences.
- Employees' needs will change over time, and employers should ensure they are provided with an array of options for support.

FINANCIAL PILLARS

According to the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau, there are four pillars of financial wellness: control over day-to-day finances; preparing for the unexpected; freedom to make choices in life; and staying on track for the future.

These pillars can help employers focus on the issues that matter, says Neil Atkinson, head of proposition at Thomsons Online Benefits: “[A] thematic approach can be applied regardless of age, levels of wealth and levels of engagement.”

Budgeting tools and workplace lending can help employees to gain control over day-to-day finances and relieve the stress associated with bills or debt. Savings products, financial protection or flexible benefits can provide security against unexpected expenses. Guidance and financial health checks can give workers the freedom to make the right choices and better decisions. Finally, pensions play a key role in keeping employees on track for the future.

BEYOND THE BASICS

Auto-enrolment means that every employer is now required by law to help staff with retirement savings. However, the rise of the multi-generational and job-hopping workforce means that pensions are no longer enough.

“Employees, particularly younger ones, are battling rising rents, student debt, and inflating living costs, and can little imagine retiring,” Atkinson says. “We’re seeing an increasing number of employers offering student loans schemes, workplace [individual savings accounts (Isas)] and workplace loans, all designed to engage a cross-section of employees by helping them achieve shorter-term financial goals.”



Employers should consider whether their benefits offering is conducive to sensible financial choices in the short term, particularly following the excesses of the festive season. For example, offering a discount scheme might be attractive, but could encourage employees to spend more money.

COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION

Regardless of whether goals are immediate or long-term, education is key, says Ben Hollingdale, head of partnerships at Smarterly: “With short-term goals, such as looking to buy a house, [employees] need to understand how getting a mortgage works. Longer-term goals, such as retirement, require people to understand how total assets and liabilities will combine and contribute towards their retirement income.”

Financial education needs to be tailored and targeted, in addition to reaching as many audiences as possible. Although face-to-face communication tends to be the most effective, it might not always be practical, so recorded webinars and videos can be integral.

SHORT AND LONG-TERM CHANGES

Just as the new year is a time when employees are likely to be receptive to savings communications, timing is of the essence throughout the year, according to Peter Briffett, chief executive and co-founder of Wagestream.

“Communicating with staff on the best ways to save when they’ve just been paid or explaining how payday loans cause more harm than good the week before payday will motivate staff to action healthy financial behaviour and fulfil goals, as they’ll already be in the right mindset,” he explains.

In addition, employers should consider the long-term fluctuations in employees’ needs as the year goes on. A financial benefit that lacks relevance today might become suddenly integral tomorrow, notes Heidi Allan, head of employee wellbeing at Neyber.

“It really is about signposting employees to options,” she explains. “Allowing flexibility for employees to utilise those options 24/7, 365 days a year means they can choose what’s right for them when life changes.” 



Case study | Ovo Energy

Helping employees save for the future with a workplace Isa

Ovo Energy is a growing energy supply organisation based in Bristol. It launched a flexible benefits proposition with Thomsons in 2014, through which it provides employees with 4% of their salary for investment. In October 2017, it added a new dimension in the form of a workplace individual savings account (Isa).

Joanna Fairweather, reward manager at Ovo, explains: “The thing we were hearing increasingly was that people were looking for broader ways to plan and save for the future. Our workforce has quite a unique demographic, in that its average age is 28 and just over 80% of the workforce are under 35. We were hearing concerns from employees about getting on the housing ladder and they were asking how we could actively help them to do that.”

While pensions had high engagement within the organisation, it became clear through focus groups that there was demand for a shorter-term product to help employees with milestones and life goals.

In collaboration with Thomsons and financial services organisation Smarterly, a workplace Isa was designed to give employees the option to invest their 4% benefits allowance. This is available to all employees once they pass their probation period, meaning that 1,400 are currently eligible.

“We launched it with a series of communications, both digital and face-to-face,” explains Fairweather. “We’ve continued the



awareness campaign throughout the year and held a benefits fair to coincide with the first anniversary of the launch, where people could meet experts and have their questions answered.”

Also coinciding with the launch anniversary, an incentive campaign allowed employees using the flex fund to enter a prize draw where they could win an additional contribution towards their Isa.

“That went down really well and raised the flex fund usage from 80% to 90%,” says Fairweather.

Around 10% of eligible employees have signed up for the workplace Isa so far. “Compared against the other benefits, that puts it in the top three, after holiday buys and pension top-up, and it continues to grow in popularity,” Fairweather concludes.

Industry insight
supplied by

Mental health

Employers can play a key role in reducing work-related stress



Shaun Subel | director, corporate wellness strategy
Vitality

Work-related stress, and indeed mental health in general, is increasingly becoming a key concern for employers. It is an issue which affects all organisations, regardless of size or sector, and can become particularly acute in the early months, as new targets arise and the year stretches ahead.

This has been highlighted by *Britain's healthiest workplace*, one of the UK's largest workplace health and wellbeing studies, released by Vitality in September 2017, which surveyed over 160 employers, and 32,000 employees. More than half of those surveyed reported at least one work-related stress issue, with around a quarter reporting two or more, making it one of the most prevalent health issues facing the UK workforce.

As well as its negative impact on the individuals affected, stress is also an issue which has significant ramifications for an organisation's productivity; Vitality's research suggests that employees who feel stressed due to being subject to unrealistic demands are, ironically, losing the equivalent of more than six days of productive time per year in ill-health related absence and under-performance while at work.

DIFFERENT DRIVERS

Stress is a highly challenging issue for employers to tackle. The drivers vary and encompass a broad range of dimensions, such as having

unrealistic demands and pressures, not being consulted about workplace change, having a lack of control over tasks, and experiencing strained relationships with colleagues.

While the specific stress factors are difficult to predict from one staff member to another, some general patterns are evident. Higher paid employees, for example, report less stress than lower paid employees across all measures, with the exception of demand and pressures on their time. Less senior employees, meanwhile, tend to cite factors such as a lack of role clarity, lack of consultation about change, and a lack of control over their tasks.

This suggests that a vicious cycle may exist whereby time-poor leaders' responsibilities and demands limit their ability to effectively manage the employees under them, with negative knock-on impacts on team engagement, relationships and productivity.

These insights speak to the fact that a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to work in managing employees' mental health.

COMBATTING STIGMA

While progress has been made in breaking down the stigma around mental health and wellbeing, attitudes remain complex.

Many employees are reluctant to talk about these issues, particularly in the workplace. When asked as part of Britain's healthiest

workplace who they would discuss a mental health issue with, the most popular option within the workplace was a line manager, with 36% indicating this as a preference.

Even this, however, was significantly lower than the proportion who would choose to speak to family members (65%), a GP (62%) or friends (55%), with other workplace support structures such as colleagues, an onsite counsellor or an employee assistance programme (EAP) being much less popular overall.

Taken together, this paints a concerning picture. Even though the work environment may be an underlying cause of mental wellbeing issues such as stress, many employees remain keen to keep these hidden from their employer.

AN INDIVIDUAL APPROACH

Perceptions and actions differ markedly by income level and seniority; for example, higher paid employees are far less likely to discuss their mental health issues with their line manager or their colleagues, but are more likely to use an intervention such as an EAP. This indicates that perhaps they value the confidentiality of these channels, while less senior employees are more likely to feel comfortable speaking openly.

Perhaps the most important insight for employers when it comes to the management of work-related stress is that there is no single solution. No employee, or indeed organisation, is the same. Therefore, responses need to be tailored to the specific risks and needs of a workforce.

Employers seeking to mitigate the effects of stress in the workplace should look to the role of the line manager as a first-line intervention. Effective training in recognising and dealing with mental health issues, and indeed the assignment of increased importance to their role as a manager, is an effective place to start. [eb](#)



Beating the blues

Supporting employees with their mental wellbeing in January



Jessica Bird | deputy editor
Employee Benefits

Whether due to cold weather, lack of natural light or the end of the festive season, January is a peak time for poor mental wellbeing, resulting in the third Monday of the month typically being dubbed 'Blue Monday'.

Poor psychological wellbeing might manifest in many ways, such as low motivation, a dip in performance, the use of coping mechanisms such as smoking and drinking, irritability or absenteeism.

So how can employers combat negative influences, and use the start of a new year as a time for positivity and resilience?

KEY FACTORS

Christine Husbands, managing director of RedArc, confirms that January is a particularly problematic time, with the healthcare provider typically observing a 30% increase in mental health referrals during this month.

Stuart Kerr, technical director at games-room specialist Liberty Games, agrees that the Christmas period can cause lasting problems into the new year: "Christmas takes a lot of energy, therefore [employees] end up feeling exhausted in January, which leads to a low mood, increased stress levels and blood pressure."

OPEN COMMUNICATION

In January, signposting to services such as employee assistance programmes (EAPs) is essential.

However, these benefits are not the first port of call, according to Mark Pinches, head of coaching at Westfield Health: "The key thing really is to open up those communication channels. We know that a lot of mental health issues would be minimised if we open up communication channels and reduce the stigma."

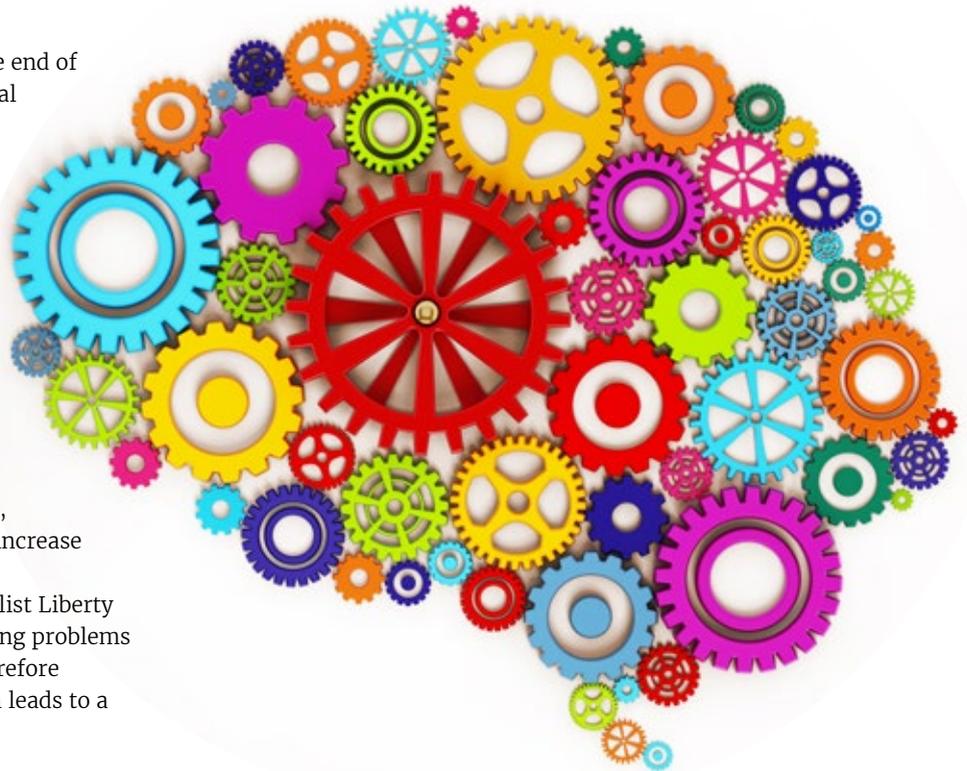
Communication is particularly important when flexible working comes into play, says Husbands: "[Employees] can sometimes withdraw and become really isolated. It's about making sure that [managers] keep in touch with them and are still interacting.

"[In general,] it's very important for employers and line managers to know their employees and to recognise if they're not behaving in their usual way, and to be equipped to have the conversation."



NEED TO KNOW

- January can be problematic when it comes to mental wellbeing, but it can also be a positive time to introduce new initiatives.
- Open communication around mental health, in addition to signposting towards official services and benefits, can create a positive culture.
- Employers can use mindfulness, yoga, breakout spaces and other workplace initiatives to combat some of the physical influences on mental health.



POSTIVE DRIVERS

January can be a good time to create a wellbeing strategy, harnessing the ethos of improvement and fresh starts.

"[The start of the year is] very positive in terms of motivation, so [if an organisation wants] to kick start something, as far as a wellbeing initiative to promote a better environment around mental health, the new year is a good time to do that," says Pinches.

Nevertheless, it is important to understand what a specific workforce will respond positively to, rather than blindly employing punchy slogans, says Husbands.

"Individuals who are feeling quite low to start with might find that more difficult," she explains. "[Others being] all full of excitement can be off-putting when you're feeling quite low."

COMBAT THE INFLUENCES

The harsh reality of UK office lighting, published by Staples in December 2018, revealed that 33% of 7,000 survey respondents find their office to be demotivating, while 40% specifically stated that the lighting in their workspace is uncomfortable.

In the earlier, colder months of the year, employees are also less likely to be active, adding to the health and psychological impacts of the sedentary lifestyle inherent in many office-based jobs.

“It’s important people get enough fresh air and sunlight, so [organisations should] encourage employees to get outside at least once during their working day,” says Kerr.

Mental and physical health can also be promoted in the workplace via yoga, exercise classes, and mindfulness sessions.

“Mindfulness, and sessions locally in the workplace, give [employees] an opportunity to recharge the battery,” explains Pinches. “It’s very energy sapping to be focused on a screen all day sitting down.”

The structure of the workspace itself can also be an important element of ensuring mental wellbeing, says Kerr: “Breakout areas, such as games-rooms, allow employees time to take a break or simply move around and work actively which is proven to stimulate the brain.”

RESILIENCE OVER REACTION

In order combat the seasonal influences and stresses placed on mental wellbeing, employers should promote resilience among staff. This might take the form of workshops and mindfulness sessions, or providing resilience toolkits and resources for employees to access in their own time.

Pinches concludes: “Resilience comes physically and mentally. If employees are over-worked or stressed and are physically quite strong and have the energy to deal with it, they probably have a chance of dealing with it much more effectively.” **eb**



Case study | Direct Line

Embedding mental health first aid to ensure employees are supported in 2019

Insurer Direct Line has 17 offices and 20 accident repair centres in the UK, housing 10,300 employees overall. To support all of these staff members in the difficult early months of 2019, the organisation has worked to embed communication and support around mental health into its culture.

Richard Stanbury, head of employee relations and senior business partner at Direct Line, says: “I would expect the challenges within the organisation to be similar to those facing the UK population. As people come out of the Christmas and New Year period, for example, there’ll be financial concerns. Relationship issues can be quite a major factor in the Christmas break. This time of year also accentuates issues that were already in place.”

In March 2018, more than 1,100 managers underwent mental health awareness training, and in May through July, Direct Line introduced a mental health first aid network. The organisation now has more than 130 mental health first aiders, with at least one on each floor of every building.

“We’ve gone down the track of trying to take a similar approach to mental health first aid as we do for physical first aid,” says Stanbury.

The organisation conducts quarterly calls among its trained first aiders, to share key learnings and challenges. In addition, it held a mental health first aid conference in October 2018, which included external speakers and workshops.



“This was an opportunity for learning, a bit of a thank you for volunteering, and also to make sure that the impetus behind having these first aiders was kept alive,” Stanbury explains. “There’s an enormous level of competence [among] the mental health first aiders. The opportunity to learn from others is really appreciated.”

Direct Line now has an enhanced culture of communication and support around mental wellbeing with which to advance into 2019, fitting with its organisational aim to encourage employees to bring their whole selves to work.

Fairness and transparency

How can organisations promote employee motivation?



Dr Shainaz Firfiray | associate professor
Warwick Business School, University of Warwick

Motivating employees is a topic of critical importance to organisations; a motivated workforce is more productive compared to a disengaged group of employees. Meanwhile, a lack of motivation can negatively impact competitiveness, because disengaged employees can transmit sceptical attitudes across an organisation.

There are a few measures organisations can take to promote higher levels of employee motivation.

Firstly, individuals have an innate desire for fairness. Employees compare their inputs, or effort on the job, and outputs, such as pay and rewards, with those of others in the workplace. When there is a perceived imbalance between the efforts and rewards received compared to other colleagues, this will create psychological tension, and will reduce motivation.

The transparency of procedures used to determine rewards, namely the courtesy shown during interactions with employees as well as the willingness to share informational resources, also has a significant impact on perceptions of fairness.

Fairness is a significant contributor to employee motivation because it can reduce fears of exploitation, increase psychological safety and build a sense of self-worth among employees.

Visionary leadership is also important. Providing shared organisational goals can enable leaders to re-frame obstacles and threats as challenges and opportunities. This allows employees to transcend the limitations of the situations they face at work.

This approach can encourage employees to be open to new experiences and to perceive work as exciting. It can help employees expand their understanding of their work environment and foster stronger attachment to the organisation's strategic goals, and thus induce higher levels of motivation.

Lastly, employers should consider opportunities for advancement. Most individuals have an achievement orientation, or a desire to accomplish something challenging. To this end, many employees aspire to occupy positions of higher social power and influence.

Programmes through which employees may develop their skills and prepare to take on greater responsibilities are a sound investment that can not only boost productivity, but also make employees feel that their skills and contributions are valued and hence keep them engaged.

Grooming employees for higher positions is also a very cost-effective means of preparing an organisation for the future, as it can reduce the costs associated with recruiting and training new employees who are unfamiliar with the employer's culture and values. 



Engagement and motivation

Maintaining productivity and happiness in the first quarter



Nick Martindale |
freelance journalist

It is no surprise that, after the excesses of Christmas, employees may return to work in January demotivated, and perhaps determined to look for fresh challenges, even if these lead them away from their current employer.

So, how can organisations keep staff motivated and engaged, reducing turnover and ensuring that employees enter the year on a positive footing?

EASE EMPLOYEES IN

Christine Naschberger, associate professor in management at Audencia Business School, states that it is vital to ease employees back into work: “If [employers] put teams under pressure when they return to work, [they] risk losing the benefits of the holidays in just a few days.”

To ensure that staff do not feel they have been launched straight into an unforgiving period of hard work, organisations might consider holding a new year’s celebration, a welcome breakfast, or various other activities to start the year on the right foot.

John Attridge, founder and chief executive officer of BBX UK, agrees: “Organising something that people can look forward to is a great way to keep staff engaged and enthusiastic for the year ahead. This will also enhance team morale and colleague relationships, which in turn will encourage them to remain in the business.”

SUPPORT HEALTHY GOALS

It is important to be in tune with employees’ personal goals. Given the cultural context of festive indulgence and fresh starts in the new year many will be looking to adopt a healthier lifestyle.

This is something employers can help with as part of a wider effort to make staff feel valued at work, in addition to the benefits that health and wellbeing can bring to motivation and productivity.

Donna Griffiths, director of HR and employee wellbeing at Westfield Health, says: “In the short-term, introducing exciting new lunchtime activities or training groups, such as exercise sessions or healthy eating seminars, will be something staff can look forward to, and will also provide a refreshing change to the usual daily routine.”

In the long run, employers need to create a healthy organisational culture, ensuring employees take full lunch hours, and incentivising them to engage in wellbeing-related activities.



NEED TO KNOW

- Following the festive break, employees can return to work demotivated, and determined to look for new challenges elsewhere.
- Easing staff in with a welcome event will give them something to look forward to and decrease the difficulty of returning to work in January.
- Supporting employees who are trying to look after their health and wellbeing in the new year can ensure they feel valued and motivated.
- Using the start of the year to recognise past achievements, while simultaneously building strategy for the months ahead, will ensure employee buy-in.



COMMUNICATE EXPECTATIONS

Effective communication is essential if employers are to understand their workforce's needs for the year ahead and keep them motivated.

Deborah Exell, global head of human capital and business transformation at Getronics, explains: "Get to know what [motivation] means to them personally. Everyone is different and it's not all about the next step up the career ladder; it can equally be voluntary giving, getting involved in [the organisation's] cultural initiatives, or changing to flexible working hours."

RECOGNITION IS VITAL

The early months are a good time to reflect on the year just gone, highlighting employees' achievements, says Dawn Smedley, culture and engagement strategist at O.C. Tanner Europe.

"[Organisations should] get employees thinking about the unique difference they have made, share their stories and get people excited about the year ahead," she says. "[They could] produce an infographic highlighting moments that stand out, [and] share this with the executive team so that they, too, are reminded what great people they have."

This should either be accompanied or followed by laying out plans for 2019; this way, employees are more likely to feel motivated, capable and committed, rather than overwhelmed by expectations for the year ahead.

"January is an excellent time to keep staff informed of any targets and goals they will be expected to achieve, as well as highlight any [organisational] landmarks, events or significant changes that could impact them," says Jo Sellick, managing director of Sellick Partnership. "By setting out significant milestones, staff will have the opportunity to get excited about the year ahead or flag any potential areas for concern before they escalate."

This is also a good time to remind line managers of the need to show appreciation for the work employees do, and to ensure they remember to do so over the coming year, says Kathryn Kendall, chief people officer at Benefex.

"The effort of remembering to say 'thank you' is minimal," she explains. "The impact, on the other hand, can be transformational. In the space of two syllables, an employee might have gone from feeling that no one notices the efforts that they're making, to feeling on top of the world." ⁶³



Case study | X4 Group

Using seasonal holiday incentives to motivate and engage employees

Recruitment organisation X4 Group combats the potentially negative impact of the initial months by giving its 125 UK-based sales employees the exciting prospect of a holiday to work toward.

In a scheme originally launched in January 2012, X4 Group funds three holidays over the course of the year: a 'high rollers' trip to Las Vegas, typically in September, a summer holiday, which in July 2018 comprised a stay in Ibiza, and a ski trip held in March.

If their targets are met, approximately 20 staff members are chosen to take part in the three-night skiing vacation to either Austria or France. This is completely paid for by the business, covering costs such as accommodation and flights.

Danielle Church, senior marketing executive at X4 Group, says: "With the 'new year, new me' fresh start, this is where people really evaluate what they're doing in their career, so this is about how we want to engage people."

Sales employees are chosen based on their billing and number of completed deals, as well as their overall attitude and client and candidate recommendations. Some are also awarded a ticket based on personal achievements, such as motivating colleagues, taking advantage of training opportunities or learning from past mistakes.



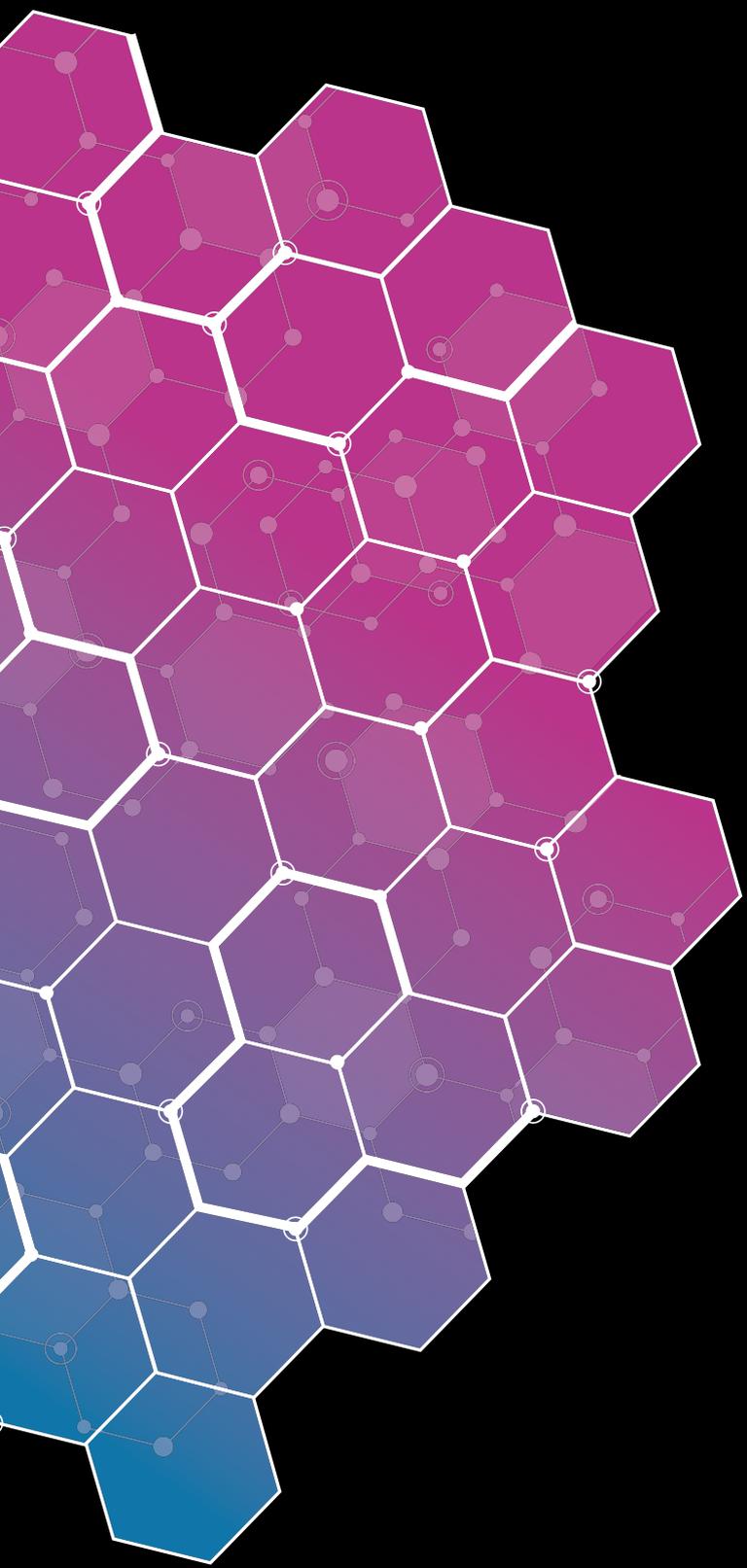
This information is collected between October and January. Typically, eight permanent employees and six contract workers are selected for the trip, as well as a few directors.

X4 Group's motivation and engagement strategy also includes monthly employer-paid lunch clubs at desirable London restaurants.

The organisation is also planning a 'Battle of the Brands' quiz night on 31 January 2019, complete

with employer-supplied food and drink. The business consists of four distinct brands, which will compete against each other. Church states this event is to ensure employees have something fun to look forward to in the new year.

Church concludes: "We've got an excellent team and we want to make sure they're engaged, feel that they're invested in the [organisation], and are going to stay with us in January."



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