

Why wellness should be everyone's strategy in 2022

By [Sharlene Herandien](#)

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As we head further into 2022, we still live in the reality of a pandemic that not only fundamentally changed us but has also introduced new strategies in the workplace. But even in the context of these challenges, we can still move forward with hope.



Source: Supplied. Sharlene Herandien, training manager at 21st Century.

Our strange new daily reality is now marked by social distancing, vaccinations, and other seemingly over-discussed and over-debated changes. The consistently hot, ongoing debates are clear signs that our reality is anything but straightforward and subject to constant change.

Much debate and discussion has centred around the hybrid working environment. Over the past few years, we have collectively come to the realisation that the hybrid workplace, while still new and sometimes challenging, is beginning to work.

Craig Raath, executive director of 21st Century, a colleague, shared with me: "At the beginning of the pandemic, organisations were largely concerned about how they were going to control employees and manage performance. However, after just a few weeks, leadership in many organisations actually observed that performance had improved. In fact, a great number of people were arguably working too hard. The narrative has changed rather dramatically now because we are two years into this new way of living."

Engagement rather than output is the challenge

"The reality is that while we are winning at creating agile hybrid strategies, we are somehow losing ground in awareness of our wellness. Organisations are struggling with engagement rather than output. Mental-health issues have taken up space in the media and in the boardroom. Athletes have pulled out of international events; celebrities have taken breaks and ordinary people have quit jobs, leadership roles and responsibilities, citing mental-health and wellness issues.

It has become vital to correct this. We need to create a balanced working environment which equally values performance and wellness. At the beginning of a new year, we can start afresh by harnessing our wellness engagement.

I recently interviewed a wellness expert, Andrea Campion from IPM Employee Solutions and asked for her personal input and narrative on wellness, and how organisations can implement and retain strategies, which will work in a hybrid environment. This is what she had to say:



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Adopting the Employee Wellness Programme

"When considering how wellness strategies have changed since the pandemic, what stood out is that companies who have (always) seen the value of 'employee mental health' have been more reliant now on the Employee Wellness Programme (EWP) than pre-pandemic. They have understood that this tool is designed to support the employee and their dependants in the major foundational aspects of their life (emotional, mental, legal, financial and health); all of which now play major roles when working from home in the hybrid environment.

"The employers that have had an EWP in place, have encouraged the usage of such a programme immensely. We found that the employers and managers were more involved and engaged on an emotional level, even just by guiding the staff in the right direction. The idea that 'We are all in this together' has shifted many mindsets around company wellness and exposed the true value of having such a support system in place.

"Collectively, there seems to be a heightened understanding of the importance of company values. While things get shaken up (as they have), we need to consider what type of foundation we have to put in place to best support staff and protect the success of the company's bottom line? Put simply, company health = company wealth."



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Strategies for successful hybrid working environments

Campion elaborated on the strategies that have been introduced since companies have moved to hybrid work environments.

"There are many suggestions around what to implement when considering hybrid models. Some of our clients focus on such factors as:

* Trust and work ethic as teams are formed, which are key in a remote working situation.

* Leadership development and expanded awareness of how to manage a remote team effectively. As leaders are appointed, it's important that they regularly touch base with team members every morning before the day starts, whether it's by means of Zoom or MSTeams, Checking in this way ensures there is 'proof of life', is a gauge to see where staff are emotionally and ensures clients are looked after as per company standards.

* Introducing 'time-out' sessions where staff must get up from their laptops or computers, move and stretch, eat good food, and drink water, all to encourage work-life balance.

"Some employers have introduced software that allows them to see their staff's activity on their laptops to 'keep an eye' on things."

Campion said In some cases, a new structure is needed as roles evolve with company changes.

"Employers and managers should be asking themselves key questions with regard to integrating a holistic view on wellness into their business framework," she said.

"Some of these questions include:

* What type of person do I want to represent my company and look after my clients?

* What is within my budget to attract and retain a person of value according to my company values?

* What support and benefits do I need in place to offer my staff peace-of-mind so that they can put in their best effort as consistently as possible?

* As a collective group, how do I encourage and build up my staff and not allow them to break due to the work-life cycle of stress and pressure?

* What team structure do I need to have in place to ensure my staff and managers are communicating on a manageable platform and reporting in as scheduled?

* How can companies maintain wellness in a hybrid world of work?"



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Communication a priority for healthy team dynamics

Campion said communication and relationships should be key focus-areas going forward.

"Communication strategies should be built on pillars of importance such as employee performance, client satisfaction, employee mental-, emotional- and physical health, and employee- and employer goals, career aspirations and benefits," she said.

"Hybrid structures could work successfully as each company establishes healthy communication and reasonable KPI's as guidelines. Second to this is loyalty, which is also the glue in a successful hybrid model, and this is where employee/employer appreciation comes in. Just as an employer demonstrates commitment and loyalty to an employee in the full EWP offering, the employee loyalty is demonstrated through the engagement."

Wellness as a strategy has become highly important to ensure that our fresh start to the year remains agile, relevant and cohesive to every organisation and employee. The test comes when all the new year's resolutions have worn off and our 'fresh start' no longer feels so fresh. This is where our well-balanced wellness strategy will come in and allow leaders to strengthen their team of winners who could be buckling under the pressures of life and its stress.

We salute the leaders who invest in the wellness of their staff as we all work together in our healthy hybrid work environments!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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