

# The 5 Pillars of Employee Behavior Change

How to Build a  
Culture of Well-being  
at Your Company

# Table of Contents

- 3. Introduction
- 5. **PILLAR #1**  
Focus on motivation
- 9. **PILLAR #2**  
Let employees choose a well-being program specific to their needs
- 11. **PILLAR #3**  
Help employees focus on developing one healthy habit at a time
- 14. **PILLAR #4**  
Make the approach person-centered rather than clinical or medical
- 16. **PILLAR #5**  
Create an environment where employees can make healthy decisions
- 19. Conclusion

# Introduction

Today more than ever, employers are focused on how to improve the employee experience and fundamentally, the well-being of their workforce. Organizations are quickly realizing that the always-on mentality, stress, organizational design and other factors of modern work are significantly impacting their employees' ability to be productive, successful and happy at work.

While traditional drivers for improvement of employee well-being have often been rooted in healthcare cost reduction, 53% of companies today would more broadly like to create a culture that promotes health and wellness, according to the [Society for Human Resource Management \(SHRM\) 2017 Employee Benefits Report](#), rather than simply reduce the cost of healthcare.

Building a culture of well-being is no small feat, and having a long-term impact on employees' health and well-being at home and work is an even bigger challenge. HR and Benefits Leaders have tried everything from flu shots, onsite massages and employee assistance programs to farmers' markets to improve the lifestyle and health of employees, but while these efforts do have

an impact, it's often not the long-term behavior changes these leaders were aiming for.

**Building a culture of well-being is no small feat, and having a long-term impact on employees' health and well-being at home and work is an even bigger challenge.**

Instead, companies see employee interest peak for a time, maybe make a shift towards improvement, but ultimately, employees fall back into their old routines and the stress, unhealthy eating habits, or lack of motivation mount again leaving employees—and their companies—back at square one.

**So what is the secret to employee behavior change?** How can organizations move past the quick fix, short-term solutions and really build a foundation of well-being that improves company performance in the short- and long-term? By empowering employees to make the small improvements over time that lead to long-term benefits for the employee and company.

In this white paper, we'll explore the 5 pillars of employee behavior change that will help you build a culture of well-being at your company.



## PILLAR #1

# Focus on motivation.

Rewards and Incentives are a great way to inspire employees. However, they work best when combined with personalized, authentic, intrinsically focused programs to create lasting behavior change. Offering rewards in exchange for employees exhibiting certain behaviors is a pretty common feature of employee well-being platforms, e.g. giving a gift card to any employee who participates in a biometric screening. These tactics can be a great way to inspire employees to take part in healthy behaviors like walking, running or drinking water instead of soda, and they can of course improve the employee experience and bring employees together.

They won't, however, help you support long-term behavior change or build a sustained culture of well-being. That may sound counterintuitive, so let's explore this.

The first thing to consider is that social challenges



### DID YOU KNOW?

According to the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of motivation there are 6 distinct types of motivation; *Intrinsic regulation* has the highest likelihood for sustained long-term behavior change.



PILLAR 1



PILLAR 2



PILLAR 3



PILLAR 4



PILLAR 5

and competitions are rooted in extrinsic types of motivation, rather than personal or intrinsic types of motivation. The Self-Determination Theory of motivation or SDT, is the single most researched and cited model for motivation in the social sciences and public health, and it breaks down motivation into six distinct types and shows how each relates to the likelihood of sustained behavior change. See chart below.



PILLAR 1



PILLAR 2



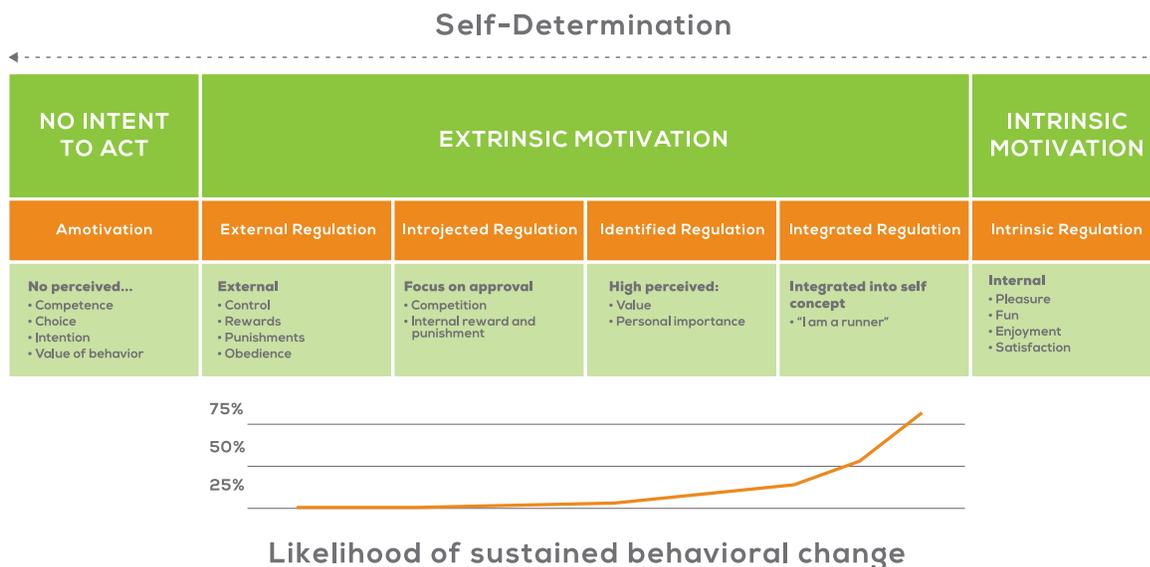
PILLAR 3



PILLAR 4



PILLAR 5



**TERMINOLOGY**

*Introjected regulation is the act of doing something for the purpose of obtaining an external reward or outcome and is considered extrinsic motivation.*

As you can see, competitions fall within the third type of motivation, “introjected regulation,” which means that employees are basically doing the behavior only because of a social goal—to beat other people, or simply for the

approval of being part of the group.

The problem with this type of motivation isn't its ability to be a hook to get employees involved in a well-being behavior—it does—it's that it doesn't naturally lead to the more effective 4th, 5th and 6th types of motivation which are more personal and lasting. On the right side of the spectrum, employees care about the changed behavior themselves because they associate it with their identity and it becomes an intrinsic motivator, which means they do it because it feels good to do it, not because someone is giving them something for doing it.

Ultimately, when a person starts walking 10,000 steps or eating healthy to lose weight as part of a very public challenge or competition and they notice they aren't part of the top 10% or 20%, they often end up judging themselves for not being "as good as" others in the program or they try to "game the system," completely forgetting the original goal of improving health. So, either they "fail" or don't join the program to begin with. Where does that leave you? Your healthiest or most social 5% to 10% of employees stick with the program, while the rest drop out or never join.

Second, even for those that stick with the challenge or competition for the entire time, research shows that the likelihood employees will stay with those behaviors that were part of the program after it's over is quite low for one simple but powerful reason – the challenge or competition was an artificially created



PILLAR 1



PILLAR 2



PILLAR 3



PILLAR 4



PILLAR 5

reality—and it, too, is over. Most employees go back to their default setting, because the program was never about weaving a new behavior into their lives for years to come—it was about who could play the game the best, or win. Once the challenge ends, so does the motivation for doing that behavior.

**Most employees go back to their default setting, because the program was never about weaving a new behavior into their personal lives.**

The best thing you can do is to develop personalized, authentic, intrinsically focused programs that support employees in **building healthy habits that will stick with them for life**. Give employees the tools and room to change their behavior for reasons they choose. The ideal program is one where an employee chooses a single habit to focus on and they are diligently working toward fitting it into their complex lives. We will discuss this more below.



#### PRO TIP

Help employees tap into their own intrinsic motivations for engaging in healthy behaviors rather than relying primarily on the carrot or stick approach.



PILLAR 1



PILLAR 2



PILLAR 3



PILLAR 4



PILLAR 5



## PILLAR #2

# Let employees choose a well-being program specific to their needs.

Traditional wellness programs tend to be paternalistic—they tell employees exactly which habits they need to focus on, like quitting smoking or changing their diet in a specific way. Or worse—they only target a so-called “high-risk” portion of the population. This approach is flawed in two ways: first, it alienates employees who aren’t motivated by the particular focus of the program,

and second, it risks making the employees who are included feel guilty and ashamed. Guilt and shame are simply not factors that help people make lasting behavior changes.



### TERMINOLOGY

A *paternalistic* approach to healthcare occurs when a physician (or in this case, an employer) makes decisions based on what they discern to be in the patient’s best interests, even for those patients who could make the decisions for themselves.



PILLAR 1



PILLAR 2



PILLAR 3



PILLAR 4



PILLAR 5



#### DID YOU KNOW?

Frequent choice over the long term is associated with greater cognitive flexibility, positive mental health, better adjustment, enhanced creativity and improved long-term learning.



#### PRO TIP

Well-being programs that exclude certain employees can fall short in two ways: they alienate those who aren't included and make those who *are* included feel guilty and ashamed. Build programs that invite everyone to participate in their own way.

Luckily, there is an approach that works. [Research](#) shows that letting your employees choose how they will tackle their health and well-being goals—and how they'd like to be acknowledged—is key.

When you allow employees to choose the main components of their well-being program—the habit they'd like to improve, the frequency at which they do it, the coach they work with—you facilitate the shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. This will increase the chances of helping them design something that works well within their own complex lives and make it more likely to achieve lasting behavior change.



PILLAR 1



PILLAR 2



PILLAR 3



PILLAR 4



PILLAR 5



## PILLAR #3

# Help employees focus on developing one healthy habit at a time.

When we think of “habits” we often think of the bad things we do that we wish we didn’t: biting our nails, smoking or watching too much TV. We don’t consider the most basic, automatic things we do every day that are good for us: brushing our teeth, spending time with our kids or pets, and the morning routines we’ve

optimized that let us make it to work on time. But one thing we do know are that habits are hard to form—and break. Social scientists now know that it can take between 66 and 88 days to form



### DID YOU KNOW?

It can take between 66 and 88 days to make a behavior change stick. Even the smallest change can take about 10 weeks to become a new habit.



PILLAR 1



PILLAR 2



PILLAR 3



PILLAR 4



PILLAR 5



## TERMINOLOGY

*Automaticity* is the ability to do things without occupying the mind with the low-level details required, allowing it to become an automatic response pattern or habit. It is usually the result of learning, repetition and practice.

a new healthy habit—or for a new behavior to become automatic. It takes nearly 10 weeks of repetitive, reliable action for a new behavior to stick.

Below is just one study, of many participants, showing that to reach “automaticity” takes anywhere between

66 days and 88 days. The first study, just for eating a piece of fruit with lunch, took 66 days to become automatic. For 15 minutes of exercise before dinner, it took 70 to 80 days and for doing 50 sit-ups after morning coffee, it took 88 days!



PILLAR 1



PILLAR 2



PILLAR 3

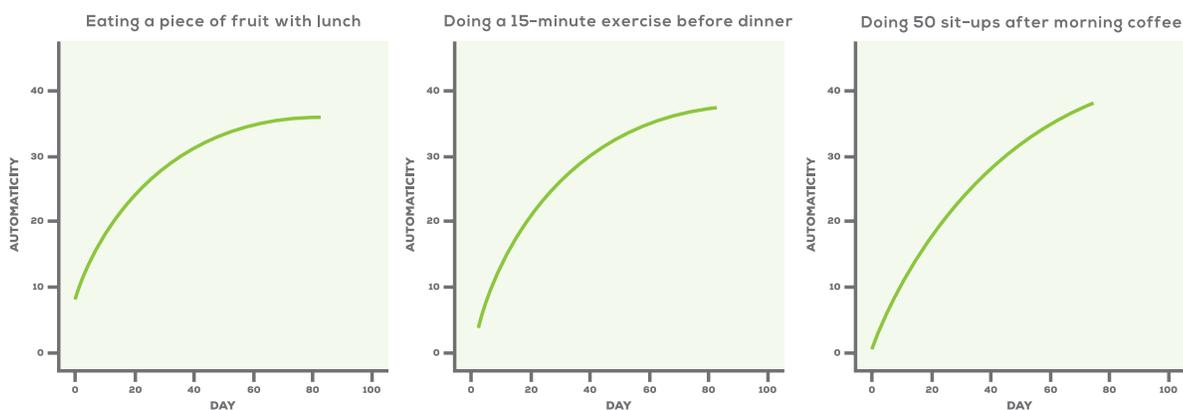


PILLAR 4



PILLAR 5

### Habit Formation in the Real World



Source: Lally, Phillipa, et al. "How are habits formed: Modelling habit formation in the real world." *European journal of social psychology* 40.6 (2010): 998-1009.



#### PRO TIP

Offer employee well-being programs that enable employees to focus on just one habit change at a time.

It's understandable that employee well-being programs are based on short-term activities around covering a spectrum of big themes like healthy eating or exercise—that's human nature. When we set a goal for ourselves to lose weight or to feel better, we want and usually try to do it all at once—eat better, exercise, drink more water, etc. Unfortunately, we all know this doesn't work.

If the end goal of your employee well-being strategy is long-term behavior change, keep in mind how long your programs need to be and the level of effort and dedication required on the employee's part to create a new healthy habit, while oftentimes also breaking a negative habit.

The good news is that research on hyper-focused habit change is extremely positive. If you can help employees dive deep on one change for at least 10 weeks, the likelihood of that habit becoming a permanent behavior is extremely high.



PILLAR 1



PILLAR 2



PILLAR 3



PILLAR 4



PILLAR 5



## PILLAR #4

# Make the approach person-centered rather than clinical or medical.

Person-Centered Therapy (PCT) is an approach to physical and mental health which aims at tackling the discordance people face between their goals and their reality. Because forming new habits is much more complex than most people realize, there's

often a disconnect between someone's desire to change their behavior and what they're actually able to accomplish.

In contrast to the Cognitive Behavioral



### DID YOU KNOW?

When individuals feel like someone else (e.g. their coach) understands their experience and has even undergone similar challenges, this type of shared experience can be a powerful motivator.



PILLAR 1



PILLAR 2



PILLAR 3



PILLAR 4



PILLAR 5



## TERMINOLOGY

*Person-Centered Therapy* was developed by the psychologist Carl Rogers. This approach focuses on encouraging empathy for the coach and empowerment for the individual.

Therapy (CBT) model of psychotherapy, in which people's unconscious desires or false perspectives are revealed and adjusted, the PCT approach accepts and validates the subjective experience of each individual. Put another way, CBT is about course correction, while PCT is about accepting a person where they are and supporting them in whatever change *they* want to focus on.

A [study](#) published in the [Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine](#) found that providing personalized health coaching boosted long-term program engagement and outcomes.



## PRO TIP

Boost your employees' chances of long-term success by providing personalized health coaching.



PILLAR 1



PILLAR 2



PILLAR 3



PILLAR 4



PILLAR 5



## PILLAR #5

# Create an environment where employees can make healthy decisions.

Even if you don't realize it, your workspace has an impact on how your employees behave and feel. Everything from desk setup and office layout to food placement and breakout spaces can influence the working environment and your employees' well-being.



### DID YOU KNOW?

According to the 2016 Everyday Health Inc./Global Wellness Institute Workplace Wellness Study, the top three workplace well-being detractors are the lack of: break time, fresh air and privacy.

Are you promoting movement and collaboration with standing desks and breakout areas? Do you provide a kitchen or common area where employees can gather



PILLAR 1



PILLAR 2



PILLAR 3



PILLAR 4



PILLAR 5

and eat together? Are you encouraging breaks for activity and rest with games and quiet areas?

A well-designed environment can impact people's habits and make them more (or less likely) to behave in certain ways. You can automate good decisions, facilitate flow and remove negative influences with simple changes such as using smaller plates to encourage portion control or storing unhealthy food out of sight. In [Inspirus' summary of Sodexo's 2017 Global Workplace Trends Report](#), one of this year's 10 workplace trends is all about redefining the workplace experience. The report lists a number of factors that impact workplace experiences – including the environment and physical space in which employees work. The summary states that “keeping employees happy, healthy and productive requires that companies consider numerous factors about where they work — the built environment, technology and virtual work considerations, amenities and how people experience their surroundings. However, it's not just about physical space; it's also about software, communications, workflow, organizational structure, rewards, learning and development, performance management — in short, any of a number of tools and resources to enable employees to get through their workday.”



PILLAR 1



PILLAR 2



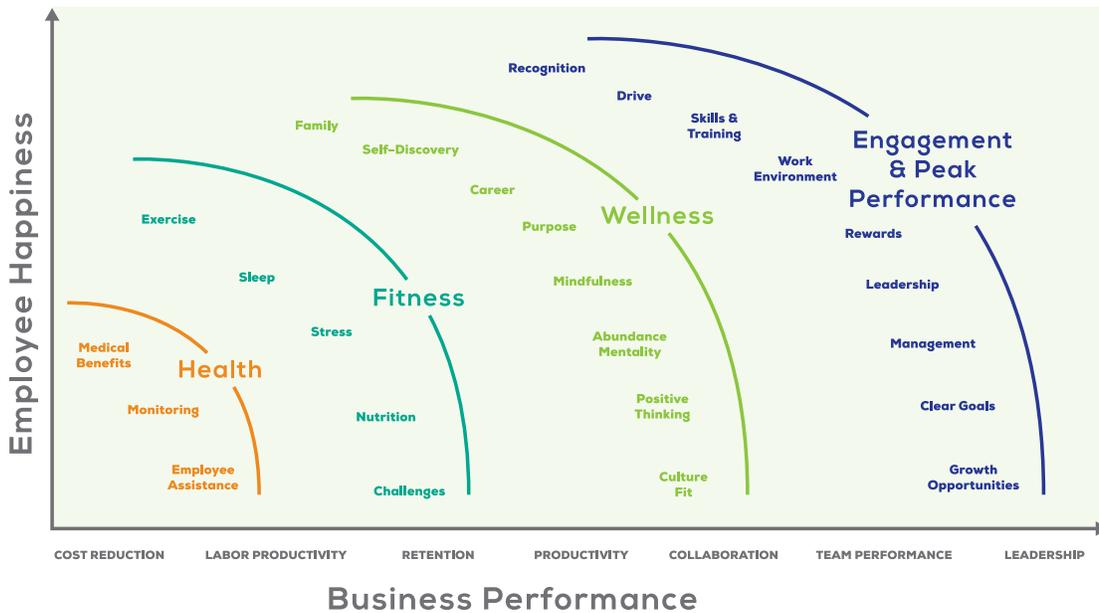
PILLAR 3



PILLAR 4



PILLAR 5



PILLAR 1



PILLAR 2



PILLAR 3



PILLAR 4



PILLAR 5

The environmental aspect of employee well-being can be quite broad; it's generally a matter of employee health overall. Are employees focused and energetic? Do their managers help them flourish in their role? Are they resilient? Can they manage stress effectively? Do they have the skills, support, setup, coaching and training to do their jobs well?

According to Josh Bersin, the focus of HR in 2017 and beyond is to move HR from the "personnel department" to a new role as the "consultants in human performance." HR and Benefits have a big opportunity to impact business and the bottom line by designing programs that make "work-life better" — making business performance stronger than ever.

# Conclusion

Behavior change is challenging both on an individual and organizational level. But if you want to show your employees that you genuinely care about them and to reap the valuable benefits as an employer of doing so, the key is to help them make lasting lifestyle changes.

---

## ABOUT INSPIRUS

---

FIND US HERE:  
[www.inspirus.com](http://www.inspirus.com)  
[LinkedIn](#)  
[Twitter](#)  
[Facebook](#)

Using the five pillars we've outlined here will help you shift your focus from solely on near-sighted healthcare cost reduction to a far-reaching and more inclusive culture of well-being. This empowers your employees to be healthier in the long run—and it will also help you create a more sustainable and profitable business.

*All 2017 client testimonials and results courtesy of LifeDojo. Inspirus Well-being is supported by LifeDojo's technology and methodology.*

# About Inspirus

Inspirus believes employees make up the foundation of culture, which is shaped and evolved through everyday experiences that are essential to the development of strong, high-performing organizations. We seek to influence the employee experience through our six Quality of Life dimensions: recognition, health and well-being, personal growth, physical environment, social interaction, and ease and efficiency.

Only Inspirus combines an integrated rewards engine, learning courses, communication tools and analytics into a single platform spanning recognition, well-being, safety, milestone awards and community involvement. Through Sodexo's broader mission of improving the Quality of Life of all we serve, Inspirus aims to bring joy to work, one experience at a time.

Visit [inspirus.com](https://inspirus.com) for more information.