

# A New Way to Wellness: *Maybe it isn't a business strategy after all?*

- What are the 4 key challenges we face
- 4 mega trends of opportunity you can't miss
- 9 ways to identify the coming health renaissance
- 6+ questions to help think creatively about the future

The certification of wellness coaches has become a new business model onto itself these last few years. Thousands of trained, certified, and enthusiastic professionals are coming into the workplace wellness space. We're encouraged by their curiosity, new ideas, enthusiasm, and entrepreneurial spirit. Many wellness coaches now work for big employers. But we're hearing that many of them are beginning to start their own small businesses. They're entrepreneurial oriented, social media savvy, smart, and energetic.

This influx of new people into wellness is refreshing. The wellness community needs new ideas and perspectives. It's time for a shakeup and disruption. Wellness entrepreneurs — powered by new technologies and market demands — can take wellness to a new level, and establish a sustainable and significant industry. The opportunities have never been greater.

Workplace wellness pioneers have accomplished much during the last three decades. Return on investment (ROI) and health outcomes data, where comprehensive wellness programs exist, have been exceptional. It doesn't take much participation to get there. One analysis showed that a comprehensive wellness program could break even by shifting just 1 percent of employees from high risk to low risk<sup>1</sup>. Just imagine if you could shift an entire population. Evidence-based practices give us guidance based upon sound experience. The science, if not the art, of wellness has been broadly applied in practice.

However, some legacy issues are surfacing that require new thinking about how to offer wellness services.

## *The 4 key challenges exerting pressure on existing workplace wellness practices are:*

- 1. Incentive oriented:** Low engagement in wellness programs is avoided, at least in the short term, by the use of financial incentives. One study of 36 employers found that without an incentive, less than 20 percent of employees completed Health Risk Appraisals (HRAs)<sup>2</sup>. Sadly, it remains to be seen if financial incentives can result in sustainable behavior change. The incentives themselves often represent the largest part of wellness budgets. The same study referenced above showed that cash incentives between \$200 and \$600 were optimal. What's more, the incentives are attracting proposed Federal regulations because they tie clinical and other health information into eligibility for premium discounts for the group health insurance plan.
- 2. More privacy regulation:** The screening and disease management disciplines incorporated into wellness programs have resulted in workplace wellness participants coming under the Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act (GINA), the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). The end users of workplace wellness services are increasingly being perceived as "patients" with all the associated protections. For instance, if a premium discount or other incentive is provided for completing an HRA, a company may violate Title 1 of GINA if the HRA includes family medical history questions<sup>3</sup>.
- 3. Commoditization:** Wellness program providers use similar standards and procedures that depend upon HRAs. The HRA data then triggers interventions based upon individual and group risk profiles. The result is the wellness community moves in a procedural lock step, thus limiting creativity and innovation on the front line. As a result, wellness has become somewhat of a commodity. And some say, "a little stodgy." You could look at almost any wellness company Website, and replace just the name of the business with a competing organization and none would be the wiser.
- 4. Perception of failure:** We must forgive people who do not believe wellness works. The U.S. population has become increasingly unhealthy during the birth and evolution of the workplace wellness movement. The obesity issue has given us all a daily, visual reminder that we're not yet impacting population health. In fact, not one single state achieved the Healthy People 2010 objectives for keeping obesity to 15 percent of their total populations. Even more discouraging is that nine states had an obesity rate of 30 percent or higher in 2009. In comparison, no state had an obesity rate of 30 percent in 2000, and only three states were at the 30-percent mark in 2007<sup>4</sup>. What's more, the percentage of Americans who adhere to all four of the most basic lifestyle prescriptions for good health — not smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, eating enough fruits and vegetables, and getting physical activity — is a dismal 3 percent<sup>5</sup>. It's easy to confuse population health issues with workplace wellness effectiveness. But ultimately we have to find ways to improve the health of the whole population.

## *These 4 Mega Trends will present opportunities to help wellness entrepreneurs overcome current road blocks to success:*

**1. Mass acceptance of social media:** According to Hope Health's Managing Editor, Jen Cronin, "Social media will soon be offering us many different ways to connect with people in local communities. People will be able to find walking partners, someone to share care giving help with, and local events to stay healthy and socially engaged." Linking up locally is a natural progression as people look to their social networking friends for support and companionship. A Pew Internet and American Life Project report recently found that "Facebook users have more close relationships and receive more support than others. They're also more likely to revive dormant relationships and use social networking to keep up with close social ties."<sup>6</sup>

We believe social media will successfully tap into local communities in new and creative ways, focusing on this friendship support aspect. One successful example is [www.momslikeme.com](http://www.momslikeme.com) — a place where local moms connect and share experiences about being a mom and a woman. There are discussion groups, event listings, and classifieds. Currently there are more than 90 communities across the countries with "moms like me" sites. We believe similar health-focused, local social media will help people in a community find others of similar health interest to partner with and meet in person.

**2. Intense interest in the environment:** Being aware of our natural environment and the earth's ecological balance will make people want to reconnect with nature. There is a greater desire to be tied into outdoor activities. This increased interest is evident by attendance in the National Park System. In 2010, there were more than 281 million park visits. The number was forecasted to increase by almost 5 million in 2011 and by roughly another 3 million in 2012<sup>7</sup>. People want to get outside and get active.

**3. Renewed focus on education:** Improving the intellectual and physical development of our children will be a top priority in many households and communities — through grassroots efforts and national initiatives. Organizations such as the PTA are focused on legislation to bring greater family involvement in education — a key to student success. And, local schools and communities are coming together around physical development. One example is *The Hope Heart Institute's Kids Take Heart* — a health and fitness curriculum targeting anatomy, fitness, nutrition, stress, and goal-setting. It was developed as a tool to equip children in third, fourth, and fifth grades to make lifestyle choices that promote fitness, health and wellness and lessen the likelihood of chronic disease. Since it began, *Kids Take Heart* has reached more than 18,000 students. These intellectual and physical focuses will become more and more important if our nation is to compete in the global economy.

**4. Demographics:** The baby boomers will be looking for new experiences and causes. They'll be checking off their life's to-do list, and looking for fun and interesting ways to stay mobile and independent. In an AARP survey of Americans approaching 65, during the next five years:<sup>8</sup>

- a. 84 percent plan to take better care of their physical health
- b. 74 percent plan to make more time to do the things they have always wanted to do
- c. 61 percent plan to travel more
- d. 54 percent plan to volunteer more
- e. 44 percent plan to take classes or learn something new.

As these numbers illustrated, aging does not equal decreased activity.

# *A renaissance is coming in health education and wellness*

Workplace wellness started as a fitness movement 30 years ago (Association for Fitness in Business). But empty workplace fitness centers and low numbers of employees exercising indicated a need to become more comprehensive in approach. By the mid 1990s, HRAs started becoming the foundation of workplace wellness programs. And because comprehensive wellness programs claimed to be able to reduce health care costs, tremendous pressure remains to make sure that is actually happening.

It feels like the wellness profession is where the medical profession was in the 19th century before it was aware germs existed. It's like we're learning but still missing something important that will soon be obvious.

## *A renaissance in wellness is coming — here's what it may look like*

- ***Wellness as a definition will probably change or go away.*** Wellness currently is about primary prevention (lifestyles), secondary prevention (screenings, immunizations, check-ups, etc.), and disease management (drug compliance, interventions, rehabilitation, etc.). We'll raise the bar and talk much more about living to our full potential. The screening and disease management services will fall under a treatment-oriented category.
- ***Wellness is a holistic, natural, and spiritual way to exist.*** In some significant ways we'll return to the natural environment and reconnect. Wellness now is far too much about the manipulation of data and people. Wellness must be about the celebration of life, the joy of being here, and a journey of accomplishment and discovery.
- ***We'll move up stream and make sure our children learn the joy of movement,*** the wonder of nature, and the fulfillment of artistic expression. And we'll begin to stress the importance of mathematics, engineering, and the sciences as part of a holistic, intellectual, experience we want for our kids. Saving sea turtles, for example, fires up the child's imagination in all these wonderful disciplines.
- ***"Intuitive eating"*** provides some insight in how we may use our own biological cues to live better. This concept involves self-monitoring for fullness, texture, and taste. We'll see this same self-monitoring and mindfulness approach evolve in movement and other life skills.
- ***Knowledge will proliferate horizontally in a community.*** Hospitals, businesses, and organizations will interconnect via events, venues, and locations not confined to the silo experience of a building. Businesses will integrate wellness programming with other resources in the broader community.

- ***Geographic distances will become less of a barrier.*** Our interest in intellectual and spiritual growth will include the world in its pursuit. And ways of living will be shared and modified more than ever before. We won't think of the term "diversity," it will just be a fact of life.
- ***These changes will exhibit themselves in more people walking and hiking.*** More events will be educational and involve movement and physical contact with one another. There will be more positive oriented "flash events" and get-togethers. Technology will start to go under the hood, and we'll enjoy technological benefits without as much obsession. We'll use technologies to enhance the human experience in ways we simply can't imagine.
- ***The business models of those offering life skill improvements will be more community based,*** unabashedly more capitalistic, and highly personalized to each individual. Products and services will emphasize simplicity, less-is-more, ease-of-use, portability, easy maintenance, and affordability. Creativity and new ideas will flourish. Apple's iPhone, iPad, and other amazing new products and services are a glimpse of what is coming.
- ***Living healthfully will not be considered the type of thing that requires discipline*** or hard work. It will be easy, natural, and enjoyable. Health professionals will talk more about very small steps people can take. Recommendations and guidelines for life improvements will be sustainable and highly relevant.

## 6+ questions for wellness entrepreneurs

1. Is there a way to decouple some wellness programming from HRAs and data mining, but still get high participation? Can we develop programs that are so attractive people want to join in without needing to be financially incented?
2. Should you be targeting a new client and making money in a different way? For example, is there a way to use advertising or couponing revenue to fund wellness programs? Can you approach workplaces from outside their walls and draw employees to you? Are you a consultant, event planner, coach, public speaker, communicator, or a social media facilitator? What roles can you play for which you can charge a fee for? Or can you take a fair percentage of a new revenue source you help create?
3. Could local merchants put on programs in the community endorsed and financially supported by workplaces? Are micro-events, flash-fit events, and quick get-togethers possibilities to add an element of surprise and spontaneity?
4. Can you make your communication more interesting, relevant, and promising? Can we focus on the benefits of having more energy, sleeping better, feeling stronger, looking great, thinking faster, and moving with ease? People are not too inspired by their cholesterol and blood pressure values. Can we move testimonials to the home page, and the supporting data to a link?

5. Are there ways to share community resources so small businesses can participate? Can you aggregate the organizations in your community and then offer a central program? Can you use experts in different disciplines such as financial literacy to generate interest? Money and health are connected in many fundamental ways.

6. Can you tie together different populations and create educational events? Older people and younger people, or employee volunteers and school programs?

Be open to even subtle new things people are doing to connect with one another in an effort to improve health. We don't have the step-by-step guide yet for implementing a new way to wellness. But it's clear that as a wellness community we're at a crossroads, and about to move to a new stage.

Maybe "wellness as a business strategy," the name of a popular group on LinkedIn®, is the correct way to think about all this. But maybe not. Maybe wellness isn't a business strategy after all. Maybe it's something more fundamentally important to who we are and the way we live.

Let's focus on primary prevention (lifestyles). Let's come up with new, community-based models, and improve the health of entire cities and counties instead of just lone businesses. Then we can make an impact on population health. Let's make the places where we live vibrant and engaging. Let's uncover the gems in our own backyard and start telling those inspirational stories. Don't wait for permission. Don't wait for some expert to tell you what or how to go about building your wellness business. Trust your instincts and dive in with your ideas and concepts. The next advancements in wellness are going to come from unexpected places. It's your turn to lead.

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## About Hope Health

Hope Health is an experienced, multi-media, content provider offering new perspectives in wellness and benefit communications to workplaces and community organizations. For more information about our wellness communication solutions, go to ***HopeHealth.com***.