

# COUNTDOWN TO WELLNESS

five things YOU can do to implement a wellness centered veterinary workplace



## COUNTDOWN TO WELLNESS

Take	<b>FIVE</b>	Minutes to Watch this Quick Start Video: Share the Urgency & Answer the Why!
Model	<b>FOUR</b>	Healthy Behaviors: Quick and Easy Ways to Start Creating a Healthier Workplace
Overcome	<b>THREE</b>	Obstacles: Ideas for Removing Barriers and Shaping a Culture of Wellness
Facilitate	<b>TWO</b>	Wellness Check-ins a Month: How to Communicate the Change
Designate	<b>ONE</b>	Wellness Champion: Building Your Guiding Team

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## TAKE FIVE MINUTES TO WATCH THIS QUICK START VIDEO: SHARE THE URGENCY & ANSWER THE WHY!



Many veterinarians and veterinary teams, when hearing the term “wellness,” may first think about the wellness of their patients. Many do not think about their own wellness – physical, mental, and/or spiritual health within the context of the veterinary workplace.

For decades now, studies have detailed that veterinarians and their teams are “at risk” for burnout, depression, psychological distress, substance abuse, and suicide ideation. Many veterinarians and team members show a progression from idealistic enthusiasm to a gradual loss of energy and commitment. Fatigue, frustration, and mental anguish may lead to incompetence, helplessness, and hopelessness. This could lead to a toxic team environment and may shorten a career.

This video highlights some of what we know statistically about the mental health of our profession. You, your associate, your colleagues, your veterinary team, are at risk.

Positive emotions, responsive communication, and general “wellness” will reduce the risk. You can implement positive change within the veterinary workplace for the team’s well-being.

What is “at risk” is precious to many. This is a call to action. Five minutes will begin your countdown to wellness. Take the first step and **WATCH THIS VIDEO** with your team TODAY.

### TEAM WELLNESS: VALUE ON INVESTMENT (VOI)

Raising awareness is the first step towards building a culture of wellness among your team. As with any business investment, integrating wellness activities into the workplace will require a commitment of time, money and/or resources. A small investment can have great returns when you consider the return on value. A commitment to team wellness will have a positive impact on your organization and the bottom line.

#### Team Impact

- Improved employee morale
- Improved employee loyalty
- Reduction in organizational conflict

#### Customer Impact

- Improved client experience
- Higher customer satisfaction

#### Business Impact

- Increased productivity
- Lower employee turnover
- Decreased paid and unpaid sick days
- Fewer work-related accidents
- Improved day-to-day operations

# MODEL FOUR HEALTHY BEHAVIORS: QUICK AND EASY WAYS TO START CREATING A HEALTHIER WORKPLACE

## SHAPE THE CULTURE

Shaping the culture in your workplace should be both an individual and a management level effort. When you model a healthy behavior, you set a good example for your colleagues. When the entire office, team, and/or management models healthy behavior, a culture of wellness is supported and can continue to grow in the workplace. Listed below are easy and relatively inexpensive ideas to start your wellness journey. Ease into the process: pick a category, try one suggestion and build from there. You may even be inspired to create your own wellness traditions in the workplace. To help you get started, check out the Countdown to Wellness: By the Month Planning Calendar on page 13.

### NUTRITION

- Provide healthy snacks
- Hold a healthy potluck
- Share healthy recipes; consider creating an office “healthy recipes” cookbook

### MINDFULNESS

- Expressions of Gratitude: Choosing to express gratitude is the antidote to negative emotions. We invite you to find three or more words of gratitude for each day in your life; these can be based on your work life, home life, or both.
- Meditation: Check out Headspace to start your practice TODAY. <http://www.headspace.com/>
- Do something for others. Participate in a food or clothing drive or partner with a local church or civic organization and find ways to help those in need. Not only will this provide a tangible benefit to the recipient, it will develop comradery and teamwork within the workplace walls.

### PHYSICAL FITNESS

- Schedule a walking meeting
- Perform stretching exercises at your desk
- Expand your network to local associations- get to know your colleagues in the area
- Participate in local events as a team; group support works!

- The wellness champion can work with other team members to gather and post information about local clubs and opportunities
- Encourage people to find an activity they enjoy

### REJUVENATION

- Box breathing, or 4 square breathing, is a 4 cycle, 4 second per phase breathing routine. <http://boxbreathing.org/>
- Schedule recess time. Go DIGITAL FREE during recess.
- Create a “work-free zone”. Have a space at work where there is “no shop talk”. This could be as simple as transforming an empty office space or even a corner of a little-used room.
- Create an inspirational message board. This could be virtual or “analog” and should be open for all to participate in. <http://www.brainyquote.com/> has a multitude of suggestions.

### PRODUCTIVITY

- Post accomplishments on a board; state your goals and support one another
- Encourage creativity with collaboration spaces

### CHALLENGES & CONTESTS

- Fitness challenge. Can each member of the team walk, bike, or run 1 mile/day?
- Sleep challenge. Can each member of the team achieve 7 hours of sleep/day?
- Have team challenges such as trying to eat 5 fruits and vegetables a day, go 30 days without eating sugar, or a month of making vegan or vegetarian dishes

### COOL PERKS & JUST FOR FUN

- Have a themed clothing day – be CREATIVE. How about “pink sock” day or “funny-hat” day?
- Celebrate an obscure food. Look around on the web – there are tons to celebrate, like popcorn day or gyro day.
- Think of creative perks to give to staff. Schedule a babysitter or pet sitter, arrange for a cleaning service or send dinner to their home so they can enjoy some down time.

# OVERCOME THREE OBSTACLES: IDEAS FOR REMOVING BARRIERS AND SHAPING A CULTURE OF WELLNESS

## PREPARE FOR OBSTACLES

Change is hard. Preparing for obstacles ahead of time can make them easier to face.

Present these scenarios to your team, answer discussion questions together, and review recommendations for action.

### SCENARIO 1: LACK OF PARTICIPATION – OBSTACLES OR ATTITUDES

You've created a great wellness program and most of those around you seem to find it fun, inexpensive, and easy. As you might expect, however, there are some who don't participate and even disparage some of your efforts. After all your hard work you wonder if you have done something wrong.

#### Questions for Team Discussion:

##### Lack of Participation – Obstacles or Attitudes

- Why might team members not participate in or dislike wellness programs?
- Who on the team or how many people need to buy-in for a wellness program to be successful?

#### Recommendations for Action

- Believe that not everyone on the team has to participate for success. However, there are key individuals (especially in leadership) or a critical number of individuals who need to buy-in for the program to thrive.
- Recognize there are legal and ethical limitations to requiring team members to join in. You must accept it if a team member does not want to participate in wellness activities, if declining does not interfere with job performance. Additionally, forced participation is demoralizing and could counteract the benefits of the wellness program.
- Revisit how your team is communicating a sense of urgency about wellness and your vision of wellness for the organization.
- Keep it fun and flexible. Great wellness programs are self-sustaining because participating is easy and feels good. Not every wellness idea will work for every team. Try something new if your current plan does not pan out.

- Ask the team if they feel comfortable sharing their obstacle to participation and provide assistance generating potential solutions.

- Lack of motivation
- Interpersonal conflict
- Time availability/scheduling
- Family obligations
- Financial limitations

### SCENARIO 2: WHO HAS THE TIME?

Your team comes back from a conference excited about implementing a wellness program. Unfortunately, you don't have the time right now to discuss making any changes and there is absolutely no room in the budget for new programs. Unfortunately, with busy lives and lean wallets, no one seems to have money to offer or time to volunteer to start the program.

#### Questions for Team Discussion

- Have your team brainstorm for 5 minutes to generate as many ideas as possible with no restrictions for improving the wellness culture with very little time or money.
- Where might your type of business find other sources of funding for wellness activities?

#### Recommendation for Action

- Implement Easy, Cheap Ideas
  - Trapped Time – People who tested this program found that some small physical activities were easiest to do when they were stuck in one place for a period of time whether it was sitting on hold or in the bathroom. These may be the perfect place to post fliers for simple stretches. These are moments when we often look to add something to fill the time.
  - Team Track Current Activities – Some beta sites started tracking their small wellness goals as a team in a mini competition. By sharing how many glasses of water they

were drinking per day they made something cheap and not very time consuming a team activity instead of an individual one and generated positive peer pressure.

- Walk it Off – Many of our testing teams found a way to walk. From walking meetings to a daily turn around the business with whoever was free at a set time, they felt this was fun and a great way to get to know one each other better.
- Build a guiding coalition. No matter the type of veterinary organization in our test sites, the number of resources dedicated to the wellness program depended on the buy-in of leadership and the interest of the team. Identify the people in the business who are most essential to getting the resources you need and help them understand the importance of implementing wellness. This may take time.
- Explore outside financial resources such as wellness grants or sponsored training sessions.
- Don't get overwhelmed. Even organizations that start small with a single wellness initiative are heading in the right direction. Even a single person setting a good example for the rest of the team makes a difference.

### SCENARIO 3: NOT ENOUGH?

It has been three months since you started what seems to be a successful wellness program. A handful of teammates go for a short walk around lunchtime every day, there's a chart comparing team member's daily water intake, and the bulletin board is peppered with "daily gratitude" post-its. However last night was the third night this week most of the team had to work late with last minute emergencies. This morning, a group is venting their frustrations and questions whether the organization's commitment to wellness is legitimate since employees continue to have to stay late with little notice. You're worried that the organization financially must take on this additional work.

#### Questions for Team Discussion

- Where might business objectives and wellness objectives conflict? Where might they work together?
- Team members may have different ideas of what wellness means to them. What are your team's highest wellness priorities?

- How will your team know you have "enough" wellness in your organization?
- Implementing a true wellness culture might require investment that pays off in the long term but requires sacrifices in the short term. List some examples where making a long-term investment has paid off for your organization despite short-term expense.

#### Recommendations for Action

- Set clear, reasonable team expectations. Some desired wellness changes may not be possible for the organization. Match job descriptions and work schedules to typical work requirements including when additional hours or tasks may be required, under what circumstances, and who makes the ultimate decision.
- Plan ahead. Careful examination of common business patterns and creative problem solving may help prevent unexpected wellness challenges. Empower the whole team to contribute by actively asking for ideas and suggestions.
- Test alternatives. Instead of assuming the status quo is better, test alternative strategies that improve team wellness. When making a new change rather than turning back at the first sign of trouble, set objectives and red flag boundaries that signal a problem. For example, revisit a new policy if two competitors begin to offer longer hours, or if expenses rise by x%.

### SCENARIO 4: TEAM MEMBER IN CRISIS

A usually strong team member has recently started calling in sick frequently and their behavior at work has become erratic. They have even been belligerent to some fellow employees and you had to write them up and give them a written warning. This team member just approached you today and let you know that they have just been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.

#### Questions for Team Discussion

- How might you help maintain a healthy work environment for your whole team, including this team member?
- Have you or do you know someone who has experienced mental illness? If so, what are some things you wish people understood about mental illness?
- How would you feel if this person had recently been diagnosed with a brain tumor as opposed to a mental illness?

## Recommendations for Action

- Know your mental health crisis resources.
- Before finding yourself in a situation like this, consider team education about mental health to address misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding these issues.
- Know your legal or ethical limitations in these situations and consult professionals when needed. It is not appropriate to ask employees to share a mental health diagnosis or to treat employees differently on the basis of that diagnosis.
- Understand disability law, how it applies to physical and mental illness, and how to fairly treat any employees who appropriately request and require accommodations to perform their job duties.
- Establish boundaries within job descriptions for the team as to what behaviors are or not acceptable and apply those standards consistently for all team members.

## SCENARIO 5: SOLO PRACTITIONER – ENTREPRENEURS

You know you need more wellness and balance in your life, perhaps more than many of your colleagues, because you are running a business by yourself. Especially with the financial and time pressures of practice and a personal life, you know you need to find a way to adapt wellness concepts to your particular business.

### Questions for Consideration

- Who specifically in your life makes it easier or harder to live out wellness behaviors? Who do you consider part of your support network and can help you discuss your boundaries and values?
- What about working for yourself makes it harder or easier to implement wellness programs?

### Recommendations for Action

- Building a Wellness Team
  - You are not alone. Reach out to others who can support you including veterinary school classmates, colleagues in your field, family and friends, mental health professionals, career coaches, and even yoga instructors.

It is hard to expect any one person to support us all the time, so cultivate multiple sounding boards for diverse perspectives.

- An accountability partner can ask you about your progress and hold you to your wellness goals.
- Consider creating a support group of professionals (veterinarians, in your field or out, or other professionals) to raise the questions above that others might discuss with their organizations.
- Setting Boundaries
  - Set down, preferably in writing, your personal boundaries based on your values and goals.
  - Have a Plan B. If you are worried that trying a new wellness technique or setting a new boundary will not be good for your organization, set a red flag boundary so that you only turn back if you have objective evidence that things are not going well. For instance, state that you will reconsider the change if you lose two well-established clients or if revenues fall by x% compared to the previous year. Not meeting your goals may be less scary if you know what to do if things do not go as planned.
- Plan for Growth and Learning
  - Set yourself up for small wins. Set SMART goals for wellness, goals that allow you to track your progress. For now, keep goals small so that you can be successful and start gaining momentum. SMART goals are:
    - » Specific
    - » Measurable
    - » Achievable
    - » Realistic
    - » Time-bound
  - Take a growth mindset. If we do not achieve a specific goal, we can still learn something from the process of trying to achieve that goal. What worked and what did not allows us to understand ourselves better. Even if we do not achieve a goal, there is success to be found in learning from the experience.

# FACILITATE TWO WELLNESS CHECK-INS A MONTH: HOW TO COMMUNICATE THE CHANGE

## THE WHY AND HOW OF WELLNESS CHECK-INS

A Wellness Check-in is a brief, engaging, and interactive team “huddle” which will enable you to communicate and prioritize wellness in your work space.

### Why dedicate the time?

Wellness check-ins center around the need for the entire work team to be appreciated, valued, and heard. These check-ins are intended to focus on the mental and physical well-being of the entire team providing a venue to share, listen, and support each other.

### How to Communicate

Communication is key to imparting a wellness culture in your practice. Successful communication is frequent, varied in content, tailored to your audience, and consists of two-way conversations. Regularly scheduled wellness check-ins demonstrate that you value the team members’ wellbeing and are committed to a forum for healthy communication. Setting predetermined dates and times for regular check-ins will increase adoption. Check-ins should last no longer than 20 minutes and be as frequent as twice a month. Setting agreed upon ground rules will help facilitate productive check-ins. Be creative! Aim for more dialogue in the conversation and less of a one-way speech. Make it an organic fit. Keep in mind the diversity, personalities, and strengths of your team.

Questions to stimulate dialogue about WELLNESS within your veterinary workplace:

- What do you think of when you think of stress?
- What causes the most stress at work? At home?
- What can we control? What can we not control?
- What helps you cope with stress?
- What went well at work in the last two weeks? What didn't go well?
- How can we set each other up for success?
- What can we do as a team to support each other?
- How do you contribute to a positive and productive workplace?
- Who on your team adds value to your work life? How do they add value?
- When did you have the most fun at work during the past six months? How can we make sure we have more of these moments?
- When do you feel your job is making a difference?

# DESIGNATE ONE WELLNESS CHAMPION: BUILDING YOUR GUIDING TEAM

## IDENTIFY A WELLNESS CHAMPION

A Wellness Champion serves as an ambassador and a resource to support a culture of wellness within a clinic or organization. As your team starts their journey towards building a Wellness Focused Clinic, the Wellness Champion will play a vital role in your program's success.

### Key Attributes of Successful Wellness Champions

#### Social Skills

- Desire to help others
- Respected within the workplace

#### Capacity

- Able and willing to dedicate the time
- Energetic

#### Health

- Personal commitment to working toward the goal of a healthy lifestyle.
- Current personal health status is not important

### Wellness Champion's Roles and Responsibilities

Work towards building a culture of wellness among your team

Lead by example through practicing healthy behaviors

Communicate wellness initiatives through:

- Word of mouth
- Information displays (posters, flyers, etc.)
- Staff meetings and trainings
- Emails
- Identify and share success stories

Serve as a trusted source for collecting feedback from wellness participants

Assist in program improvement and development

Support the clinic wellness program's goals and objectives

Maintain communication with management about feedback and monitored metrics

### Management's Responsibilities

Demonstrate commitment (i.e. Wellness Pledge)

Define your expectations to include time commitment

Provide support and resources

Recognize the contributions of the Wellness Champion

Recognize the actions of the Team

### Resources

<https://www.avma.org/ProfessionalDevelopment/Personal/PeerAndWellness/Pages/default.aspx>

# WELLNESS CHAMPION: PLANNING DOCUMENT

Why I believe wellness is important for our team:

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How I will communicate the "Why" to the team:

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I expect to spend a maximum of \_\_\_\_\_ hours per week working on wellness related activities for our team.

Three wellness behaviors I want to show by example over the next \_\_\_\_\_ month(s):

1.

2.

3.

The top 3 team wellness initiatives to focus on in the next \_\_\_\_\_ month(s) are:

1.

2.

3.

I will communicate these initiatives to our team using the below methods:

1.

2.

3.

I plan on collecting feedback from our team to gauge success (effectiveness) of our wellness program by:

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When I experience challenges in my role as Wellness Champion these are the individuals and resources I can turn to for help and support: (Challenges may relate to conflicting hospital policies, management decisions, or individual team member reluctance)

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**TO BE COMPLETED WITH MANAGEMENT/LEADERSHIP:**

The Wellness Champion role is a \_\_\_\_\_ month term position with the option to volunteer again.

The Wellness Program Sponsor is \_\_\_\_\_

This person should have decision making authority and the ability to influence the work team (i.e. Owner, Manager)

The Wellness Program will have access to discretionary funds: Yes or No

Budgeted amount: \_\_\_\_\_ (Not Applicable)

Fund manager: \_\_\_\_\_ (Not Applicable)

For additional resources visit the AVMA Wellness and Personal Assistance website at  
<https://www.avma.org/ProfessionalDevelopment/Personal/PeerAndWellness/Pages/default.aspx>

# WELLNESS PLEDGE

## **We recognize...**

The veterinary profession is a healing profession committed to the health and wellbeing of animals, humans and the environment. As a caring profession our members often are outwardly focused; as a result, we recognize that it is important to purposefully foster a professional culture that supports individual and workplace wellness. We recognize that maintaining individual and team wellness is essential for optimum performance.

## **We are committed to...**

- Supporting personal and professional wellness, to promote productive and fulfilling veterinary work environments.
- Aligning business practices with the goals and objectives of our wellness culture.
- Sharing organizational successes and best practices as it relates to implementing wellness programs within our profession.

# COUNTDOWN



# TO WELLNESS

[avma.org/WorkplaceWellness](http://avma.org/WorkplaceWellness)

<b>MONTH 1</b> Express your gratitude. Aim to write down one thing you are grateful for each day.	<b>MONTH 2</b> Introduce box breathing and practice during your wellness check-ins. <a href="http://boxbreathing.org/">http://boxbreathing.org/</a>	<b>MONTH 3</b> Create an inspiration board. Check out this link for ideas. <a href="http://www.brainyquote.com/">http://www.brainyquote.com/</a>
<b>MONTH 4</b> Host a team healthy food potluck or BBQ.	<b>MONTH 5</b> Hydration challenge! Can your team meet their water intake goals? Post results in a visible place.	<b>MONTH 6</b> Celebrate an obscure holiday this month, such as “National Bobblehead Day” or “National Argyle Sock Day”
<b>MONTH 7</b> Take a walk! Try to turn scheduled meetings into “walking” meetings.	<b>MONTH 8</b> Establish a work free zone in the lunch or break room. No talking about work allowed!	<b>MONTH 9</b> Form a salad club. Take turns having team members make salads for a group lunch.
<b>MONTH 10</b> Introduce Headspace or another mindfulness app to your team and practice during wellness check-ins. Check out <a href="http://www.headspace.com">www.headspace.com</a>	<b>MONTH 11</b> Hold a fitness challenge. Can the team achieve a walking, running or other fitness goals? Post in a visible place.	<b>MONTH 12</b> Give back to the community this month by organizing a food drive or collecting clothes for donation.