

The WorkBC Employer's Tool Kit:

A Resource for British Columbia Businesses

Healthy Work Environments

A Competitive Advantage in Today's Economy
and Labour Market



How to Create a Healthy Work Environment

Why has the WorkBC Employer's Tool Kit been produced for businesses in British Columbia?

Canada is facing an unprecedented change in workforce demographics as the first wave of baby boomers enter retirement. In fact, for every two baby boomers who retire, there is less than one person to take their place¹. This is a challenge that requires both short and long-term solutions. Both developed and developing countries are experiencing similar demands for skilled labour. With this new global reality, British Columbia is in direct competition with other regions for skilled workers.

This WorkBC Employer's Tool Kit is provided by the British Columbia Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport. It is designed to help businesses in BC develop a range of strategies to address the current and upcoming labour shortages. It provides tools and resources needed to ensure BC businesses enjoy healthy work environments that attract, retain and most importantly, engage their employees.

Despite economic shifts over time, B.C. will continue to face labour shortages. Employers need to recognize, reward and motivate staff especially during a difficult economic environment. Creating a healthy work environment can help you to attract and retain top talent.

Resource Booklets

- Booklet 1:** How to Attract, Retain and Engage Employees
- Booklet 2:** It's About Ability – The Mature Worker
- Booklet 3:** Under the Labour Radar – Aboriginal People, Women, Youth and People with Disabilities
- Booklet 4:** Diversity at Work – Recruiting and Retaining Immigrants
- Booklet 5:** Healthy Work Environments – Competitive Advantage in Today's Economy and Labour Market

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Inside this booklet you will find the following:

- What makes a workplace “healthy”
- The business case for healthy work environments
- Why healthy work environments are fundamental to attracting, retaining and engaging employees
- Why great leadership matters
- Steps for creating healthy work environments
- Options for small businesses

“Workplace wellness is a commitment by an employer to cultivate a work environment that promotes the health and wellness of its employees.”

*Kathy Lilyholm
Manager of Business Development
YWCA's Health & Wellness Centre*

“The coming ‘retirement tsunami’ will affect corporate health and safety culture in unprecedented ways.”

*Conference Board of Canada
Workforce Renewal
Briefing 2008*

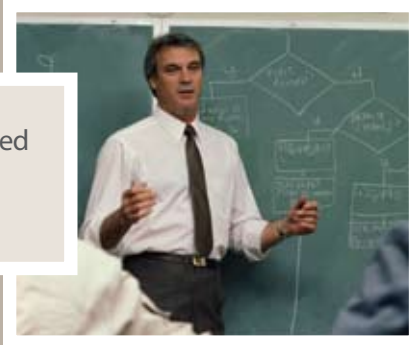




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“To succeed in an increasingly competitive global economy, organizations need to ensure that their workers are performing to the highest standards.”
The Conference Board of Canada, 2000



Supporting Resources: Summary of Available Resource Tool Kits

BOOKLET 1: How to Attract, Retain and Engage Employees

This tool kit provides a general overview of the resources and tools needed to help understand and deal with the current and projected labour shortage. Information on different generations, as well as tools for attracting, retaining and engaging each group is provided.

BOOKLET 2: It's About Ability – The Mature Worker

This tool kit is for employers who are interested in learning more about how to better engage and/or attract older workers. This booklet provides practical tools for planning and implementing strategies to include mature workers in your workforce – including techniques to uncover the potential in mature workers and to ensure they play a key role in strengthening your increasingly multi-generational workplace.

BOOKLET 3: Under the Labour Radar – Aboriginal People, Women, Youth and People with Disabilities

There are several pools of skilled workers in our community which are under-utilized at present, people who have an important role to play in addressing the labour shortage. This toolkit provides information on the unique contributions and motivations of each group, as well as a selection of customized engagement and recruitment tools.

BOOKLET 4: Diversity at Work – Recruiting and Retaining Immigrants

The Immigrant/Skilled Labour resource toolkit is for employers who want to benefit from the advantages of a diversified workforce. By tapping into this rich human resource, you create a competitive and leading edge for your business. This booklet offers resources, tips and ideas on attracting new applicants and creating a work environment that retains new talent.

The New Workforce

British Columbia faces a growing labour shortage. Between 2005 and 2015, 1.1 million jobs will need to be filled in B.C with an estimated shortage of 160,000 workers to fill these jobs.¹

Compounding the challenges of this labour shortage, people in today's workforce are vastly different from previous generations in what they value and expect from a job. To remain competitive, employers need to consider what will attract, retain and engage current and future employees.

The New Workforce: Changing Career Values

Old Values

- job security
- longitudinal career paths
- job/person fit
- organizational loyalty
- career success
- academic degree
- position/title
- full-time employment
- retirement
- single jobs/careers
- change in jobs based on fear
- promotion tenure-based

New Values

- employability security
- alternate career paths
- person/organization fit
- job/task loyalty
- work/family balance
- continuous re-learning
- competencies/development
- contract employment
- career sabbaticals
- multiple jobs/careers
- change in jobs based on growth
- promotion performance-based

Whether you manage a small business or are the CEO of a large corporation, when it comes to productivity and today's competitive market, the issues are the same:

How do you attract and retain the best and brightest talent when the labour market is shrinking?

How do you manage employee absenteeism, which is costly to your business?

How can you increase your profits to succeed in business and compete globally?

A key factor to addressing all these issues is providing a healthy work environment.



What is a Healthy Work Environment?

A healthy work environment is one that will effectively attract, retain and engage employees.

The Canadian Healthy Workplace Council, consisting of leading Canadian organizations and workplace wellness practitioners, promotes a comprehensive and integrated approach to workplace health in order to improve and sustain the health of Canadian organizations, their work environments and their employees.

A workplace can be considered healthy if three key elements are addressed in an integrated manner. These three elements are:

1. Occupational Health and Safety
2. Health Promotion
3. Organizational Health

1. Occupational Health and Safety

A healthy physical environment is one that fosters and supports a safe and healthy workplace with policies, programs and activities such as:

- ensuring worksites are clean and safe
- assessing the potential for bullying and violence in the workplace, with strategies to address such risks
- ensuring that hazard controls are clearly defined, documented, and understood
- providing alternatives for employees who have health-related restrictions
- ensuring accessibility to any protective equipment
- ergonomics (proper equipment design and fit)
- establishing effective health and safety committees



Improving workplace literacy skills is an actionable solution for improving productivity and addressing health and safety concerns.

2. Health Promotion

Organizations that believe in the importance of employee well-being go beyond just providing information on health and wellness. They support skill development and behaviour change to meet employee needs in areas such as:

- nutrition
- physical activity
- tobacco/alcohol/drug use
- mental health

3. Organizational Health

The culture of an organization is created, reinforced, and sustained by the quality of its human relationships and communications and has an important influence on mental and physical health.

Examples of healthy organizational initiatives include:

- a sensible workload and pace
- employee feedback and recognition
- respecting the need for, and supporting employees to balance home and work responsibilities
- providing job training and education opportunities
- communications which enhance a feeling of teamwork and cooperation
- encouraging employee participation in decision-making and overall control of their jobs
- providing opportunities for employee input
- access to support during difficult times
- availability of training in conflict resolution

While generous benefits and perks may attract employees, it is the work environment and workplace culture that keeps them. Top drivers of employee retention and engagement involve:

- exciting work/challenge
- opportunities for career and personal growth
- relationships/working with great people
- supportive management/great boss
- management recognition of work/life balance
- open communication
- satisfying customer needs

Is your work environment safe and healthy? Are there workplace stressors that threaten the mental and physical health of employees such as harassment, bullying, work overload or lack of control over work? Research shows that these factors double or triple the risk of injuries, workplace conflict and violence, back pain and mental illness.



“The bottom line is that when employees are satisfied with their work environment and working conditions, they do their best possible work and provide high-quality service to our customers.”

***Danny Boughton, Owner,
Oxylife Kamloops***



Stress-related absences cost Canadian employers about \$3.5 billion each year.²

The cost of absenteeism attributable to work-life conflict in Canadian businesses is \$5.48 billion per year.³

Workplace Stress

Physical, mental, and emotional stress are being recognized as leading health risks. Some stress is normal – it provides the energy and motivation to meet daily challenges. When these work challenges become too demanding and job satisfaction turns into exhaustion and frustration, they create unhealthy stress.

There are six main risk factors that can lead to employee stress:

1. Job demands/workload
2. Control over workload
3. Support received from management and coworkers
4. Relationships at work
5. Role conflict or ambiguity
6. Change and how it is managed

Employee stress has a significant impact on both individuals and organizations. Regardless of the reasons for it, stress leads to reduced productivity, absenteeism, employee burnout, turnover, and increased medical expenses and insurance costs.

Signs of stress can include the following:

- anxiety
- apathy
- aggression
- irritability
- memory problems
- alcohol or drug problems
- withdrawal
- depression
- physical ailments and illnesses

Strategies to Address Stress

Employers need the skills to identify and manage work-related stressors. They must know how to approach an employee showing signs of stress, listen and offer guidance and options such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP). It is also important for managers to recognize how they themselves may be contributing to employees' stress and how they may need to modify their own behaviour.

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety provides a number of strategies for employers to address stress:

DO

- treat all employees in a fair and respectful manner
- be aware of the signs and symptoms of a person coping with stress
- encourage managers to be understanding and proactive in looking for signs of stress among their staff.
- design jobs to allow for a balanced workload.
- allow employees control over their own tasks whenever possible.
- keep job demands reasonable by providing manageable deadlines, hours of work, and clear duties as well as work that is interesting and varied.
- look for the root cause of workplace stress and address it as quickly as possible.

DO NOT

- tolerate bullying or harassment in any form.
- ignore signs that employees are under pressure or feeling stressed.

Work/Life Balance: How Balanced Is Your Business?

Asking a few simple questions about your workplace provides a good indication of the quality of work/life balance for your employees.

- Do managers receive training about how to support their staff to achieve work/life balance?
- Are your employees familiar with the policies and programs available to help with work/life balance?
- Does your organization provide flexible hours to help employees balance their responsibilities at work and at home?
- Do your managers encourage staff to stay home with sick children or elderly relatives when necessary?
- Does your organization have a method to track employee satisfaction with their work/life balance?

Canadian Mental Health Association

Family-Friendly Workplaces

It is estimated that work/life conflicts cost Canadian organizations roughly \$2.7 billion in lost time due to work absences (this figure does not include indirect costs such as replacement of the employee during the absence, overtime costs or reduced service or productivity).⁴

Employees with access to family-supportive programs and policies are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, be loyal and go the extra mile to help their companies succeed.

Numerous studies reveal there is a cost to business in not responding to employees' needs for reliable and good-quality early childhood programs. Employees are likely to miss work or have difficulty concentrating when worrying about their children.

“Businesses should strive to be family and child-friendly employers; to provide enriched child care that connects to elementary schools where appropriate; to have policies that are sensitive to the involvement of employees in the education of their children; and to be bold and creative regarding the importance of parental leave for new parents.”

Charlie Coffey, Director of the Council for Early Childhood Development

Former Executive Vice-President, Government Affairs and Business Development, RBC



Why Healthy Work Environments Are Good for Business

It is now recognized that the workplace itself has a powerful effect on people's health. Those satisfied with their job are more productive and tend to be healthier. When employees feel the work environment is negative, they feel stressed. This stress has a large impact on employee mental and physical health, and in turn, productivity.

Companies who attract and keep productive workers have leaders who understand the connection between employee satisfaction and employee health and believe that workplace wellness is a business strategy.

A healthy work environment includes management practices that make reasonable demands on an employees' time and energy, involve staff in decision-making, reward good work, communicate openly, and provide support to balance work and home life.

Employers know workers are looking for jobs that pay well, offer good benefits, are interesting, and include excellent health and safety programs. Therefore, in today's competitive hiring market, it has become critical for companies to enhance job satisfaction and ensure that workers enjoy being on the job. Workplace health benefits both employers and employees.

Two-thirds of Canadians over the age of 15 are employed and spend an average of 60 percent of their waking hours at work. Canadian workers spend an average of 10.5 hours each day at work, or commuting to and from work,⁵ making the workplace a critical setting for health promotion.

In 2001, only 29 percent of British Columbians had workplace programs to improve health, physical fitness, or nutrition. Nine out of ten Canadians believe physical activity improves their ability to cope with and reduce stress; improves productivity and recovery from minor illness.⁶

Healthy work environments gain economic advantages through higher employee-retention rates and lower recruitment costs. Since a declining birth rate and aging population are contributing to the tightest labour market in BC in over 50 years, businesses that support healthy lifestyles will attract and retain more employees than businesses that do not.



Management practices that lead to healthy employees also lead to a healthy bottom line.

The case for healthier workplaces is compelling:

- Healthier employees are more motivated, committed, engaged, and satisfied, resulting in higher productivity and lower turnover.
- High job demand coupled with low control contributes to job strain and increased risk of disease. Lack of reward for work effort (e.g. pay, job security, career opportunities, self-esteem and satisfaction) is associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, depression, alcohol dependence and poor self-rated overall health.⁷
- In Canada, absenteeism is on the rise and is estimated to cost \$8.6 billion each year.⁸ In B.C. the actual work time lost in 2005 averaged 8.5 days per year per employee. B.C. health care workers fared the worst, averaging 14.7 days lost per year for each employee.⁹

By supporting employees in reducing personal risk factors such as smoking, weight gain and obesity, physical inactivity and poor nutrition, workplaces will have the greatest impact in improving productivity, and thereby improving their bottom line.¹⁰

Tobacco

Non-smoking employees cost companies \$3,396 less each year than smoking employees.¹¹ For society as a whole, the costs associated with tobacco use in B.C. (in 2002) were \$2.3 billion, including \$605 million in direct health care costs.¹²

Weight Gain and Obesity

The number of people who are overweight is increasing rapidly and obesity-related costs will soon overtake the costs of tobacco-related illness. Obesity can cause personal stress and long-term health problems. Reducing or preventing obesity in the workplace results in better health and well-being, higher productivity and better job performance.





When productivity losses due to obesity (including premature death, absenteeism and disability) were combined, the total cost of obesity to the British Columbia economy (in 2001) was estimated to be between \$730 million and \$830 million a year.¹³

Employers who support their employees in making healthy lifestyle choices to stop smoking, be more active and eat nutritious foods, can significantly impact employee health and their own bottom line. By putting programs that contribute to physical, mental and emotional health in place, employers can benefit through improved productivity and reduced absenteeism.

Multi-component health promotion programs aimed at improving personal health practices of employees have shown a little over 25% reduction in costs associated with sick leave, health plans, workers' compensation and disability.¹⁵ However, these programs are unlikely to have much impact if employees work in a physically unsafe or a toxic psychosocial work environment. The greatest gains are those that occur when health promotion programs are implemented in a workplace that is already an open, trusting and supportive work environment.

Unhealthy, unsafe and stressful workplaces cost employers thousands of dollars each year in workers' compensation, absenteeism, presenteeism, short- and long-term disability, turnover and lost productivity.

Mental Health

The Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health estimates workplace mental disorders result in \$33 billion in lost productivity in Canada per year. This estimate does not include costs related to health care or social service systems, costs transferred from the workplace to these systems or employer costs originating from medical conditions triggered by factors outside the workplace.¹⁴

“My employees are people first. They have different needs and they have a life outside of work. As their boss I have to be flexible and support them and go the extra mile if I am to expect the same thing in return.”

Amy Stiles, Restaurant Owner

Did you know...

Presenteeism is when employees come to work despite illness. This results in reduced productivity as sick workers perform at lower levels, are more prone to mistakes and may transmit contagious diseases to fellow employees.

Solutions for Small Business

Nearly 50% of B.C. workers are employed in small businesses.

Every business can benefit from creating a healthy work environment. Designing and implementing a healthy work environment in a small business can be challenging. Small businesses are distinctly different from larger companies and need to adopt strategies that suit their workplace.

One Size Does Not Fit All!

Small businesses often have less time and financial and human resources at their disposal to implement workplace wellness programs. The cost of ill health and absences can be even greater in a small business where there is no back-up. Small businesses often have an advantage over large companies—a positive workplace culture where people feel appreciated, valued, and trusted. Many employees prefer to work for small business and employees of small companies in Canada report higher levels of engagement than large companies. With a little creativity, small businesses can develop successful, healthy work environments.

10 Ways Small Businesses Can Promote Better Health

1. Let employees know that workplace wellness is a priority. Senior management needs to visibly demonstrate their commitment.
2. Develop policies that support flexible work options and work/life balance (for example, mandatory vacations, flextime, limits to work and e-mail on personal time).
3. Ask employees for input and involve them in finding solutions.
4. Provide an opportunity for health screening.
5. Find opportunities to promote active living, such as stair-climbing or pedometer competitions.
6. Provide kitchen facilities and serve healthy alternatives at company meetings and lunches.
7. Hire an ergonomics specialist to assess workstations for proper design and fit. If the work is physical, ensure workers are taught safe stretching and lifting techniques.
8. Offer wellness incentives as rewards and recognition for a job well done.
9. Become a partner with the community (for example, daycare, gyms, festivals, parks, restaurants).
10. Track progress and assess in order to continually improve.

The Importance of Great Leadership

Leadership is key to both business success and workplace health. Good leaders understand their role in contributing to a healthy, positive and less stressful environment that ultimately enables their employees to work effectively.

Employees with supportive managers or supervisors report less stress and higher productivity than employees with unsupportive managers^{ix}. In other words, *who* employees work for within an organization is often more important than *where* they work.

Recruiters may be able to attract and hire talent, however it is up to leaders at every level within an organization to engage the hearts and minds of employees by fostering a healthier climate.

Questions Every Leader Should Ask

If you are unsure how your leadership may be impacting your work culture, ask yourself:

1. Are my daily interactions and conversations with staff conducted in a respectful and supportive manner?
2. What gets my attention – when employees make mistakes or when they do well?
3. How do I react to critical incidents?
4. How do I communicate? In what manner and with what frequency?
5. What do I reward or punish?
6. Do I create a trusting environment?
7. Do I consider myself a role model for healthy living and work/life balance?



Research shows between 50-70 percent of employees believe leaders are responsible for fostering a healthy workplace.¹⁶

Few companies connect leadership with employee health.

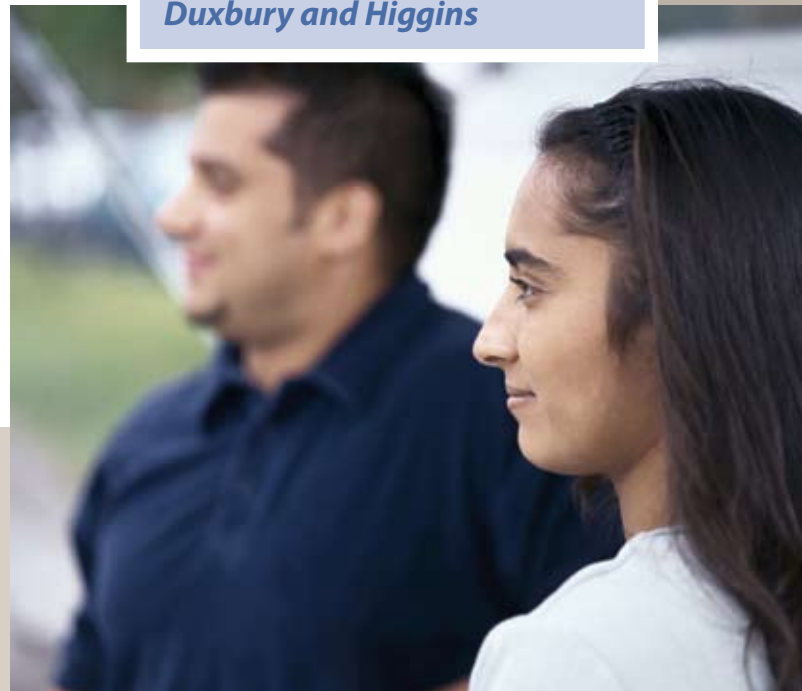
Employers demonstrate that they value their employees through the quality of the work environment they create. While leaders can only do so much to address their employees' health concerns, they can do a great deal to reduce workplace stress.

10 Leadership Strategies to Create a Healthier Workplace:

1. Involve employees in decision-making wherever possible.
2. Encourage workers to voice concerns and suggest solutions, and listen to them.
3. Build workers' trust in the company, and managers' trust of workers.
4. Demonstrate fairness in the application of rules and policies.
5. Improve supervisors' interpersonal communication and "people skills".
6. Train and evaluate supervisors in recognizing and rewarding staff.
7. Implement flexible work options.
8. Support and implement work/life balance and family friendly policies and practices, to enhance engagement (e.g. telecommuting, child care, flex time, wellness/health promotion programs).
9. In consultation with employees, regularly monitor and measure employee stressors and satisfaction.
10. Be a role model for healthy and balanced living.

***"Who you work for
within an organization
has become more
important than where
you work."***

Duxbury and Higgins



Resources

ActNowBC
www.actnowbc.ca

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety
www.ccohs.ca

Canadian Mental Health Association
www.cmha.ca

Health Canada, Healthy Living
www.hc-sc.gc.ca

National Quality Institute
www.nqi.ca

Healthy Workplace Month
www.healthyworkplacemonth.ca

⁶ Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (2001) *Increasing Physical Activity at Work Supporting an active workforce*
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⁸ Canadian Council on Integrated Health Care (2002) *A Discussion Paper on Workplace Health*
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⁹ Provincial Health Services Authority (2006) *Creating Healthy Health Care Workplaces in British Columbia, Evidence for Action*
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www.conferenceboard.ca/documents.asp?rnext=1754

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¹³ Coleman, R. (2001) *The Cost of Obesity in British Columbia*. GPI Atlantic

¹⁴ Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health (2006) *Business and Economic Plan for Mental Health and Productivity — An Agenda for Progress: Reducing the Social and Economic Burden of Mental Disabilities in the Workplace*. Toronto.

¹⁵ Chapman, L. (2003) Meta-evaluation of worksite health promotion economic return studies. *Art of Health Promotion Newsletter* 6(6) 1-10

¹⁶ Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2002). *Primal leadership: Learning to lead with emotional intelligence*.

Resources Specific to Small Business

Health Canada

Small Business Health Model and Guide to Developing and Implementing the Workplace Health System in Small Business.
www.hc-sc.gc.ca

National Quality Institute (NQI)

Healthy Workplace for Small Organizations: 10-Point Criteria and Self-Evaluation Tool
www.nqi.ca

Wellness Council of America (WELCOA)

Wellness for Small Businesses
www.welcoa.org

References

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² Williams, C. and Normand, J. (2003) *Stress at Work* Statistics Canada

³ Duxbury, L & Higgins, C. (2001) *Work-Life Balance in the New Millennium: Where are We? Where Do We Need to go?* Canadian Policy Research Network.

⁴ Charlie Coffey, Director of the Council for Early Childhood Development.

⁵ Canadian Fitness Lifestyle Research Institute *Workplace Health System Series* (1998) No 2
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/occup-travail/juggling_home_work/index_e.html

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Way forward...

Healthy Work Environments – A Competitive Advantage in Today's Labour Market is the fifth booklet in a series of resource tool kits designed for B.C. businesses.

As you develop strategies to address the labour shortage, remember that the new workforce is one that values a healthy workplace. Today's workers are more informed, connected, and demanding than any other. Businesses that commit to employee and organizational health will have the greatest success in attracting, retaining, and engaging employees.



The ActNow BC Healthy Living Pledge and workplace posters are tools you can use to promote workplace health.

Visit www.ActNowBC.ca



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