

CHANGE **Culture** AND YOU CHANGE **Health**

The **Checklist To Change** Can Help

BY **Ann Bahr** MS



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Checklist to Change Questionnaire

THE FACTS ARE IN—WE ARE A NATION OF SEDENTARY, OVERWEIGHT PEOPLE. When all the data are considered as a whole, the increases in obesity and chronic disease in the U.S. over the past two decades are indisputable and unprecedented. There is also no question that poor health behavior is the primary driver of these problems. So a natural question is, “What is the cause of unhealthy behavior?” It would be unreasonable to assume that there is any one factor or even small set of factors that causes us to have poor behaviors. In fact, some have suggested that the factors behind our poor health behaviors are embedded within the American culture. These factors pervade every aspect of our society from the foods we eat, to the way we shop, to the way we get around, and to the opportunities we have for physical activity. Put simply, our current culture discourages healthy behaviors and encourages unhealthy ones but there are ways to change the culture.

Health promotion professionals cannot ignore the impact that an unhealthy culture has on the health and behaviors of employees. By changing culture, we essentially create a new set of influences that will help our employees adopt and maintain healthy behaviors. When planning effective health promotion strategies that impact culture, it may be hard to figure out where to start. The Checklist to Change can help.

At Wellsteps, we’ve carefully considered strategies to identify and neutralize cultural “problem areas” in your

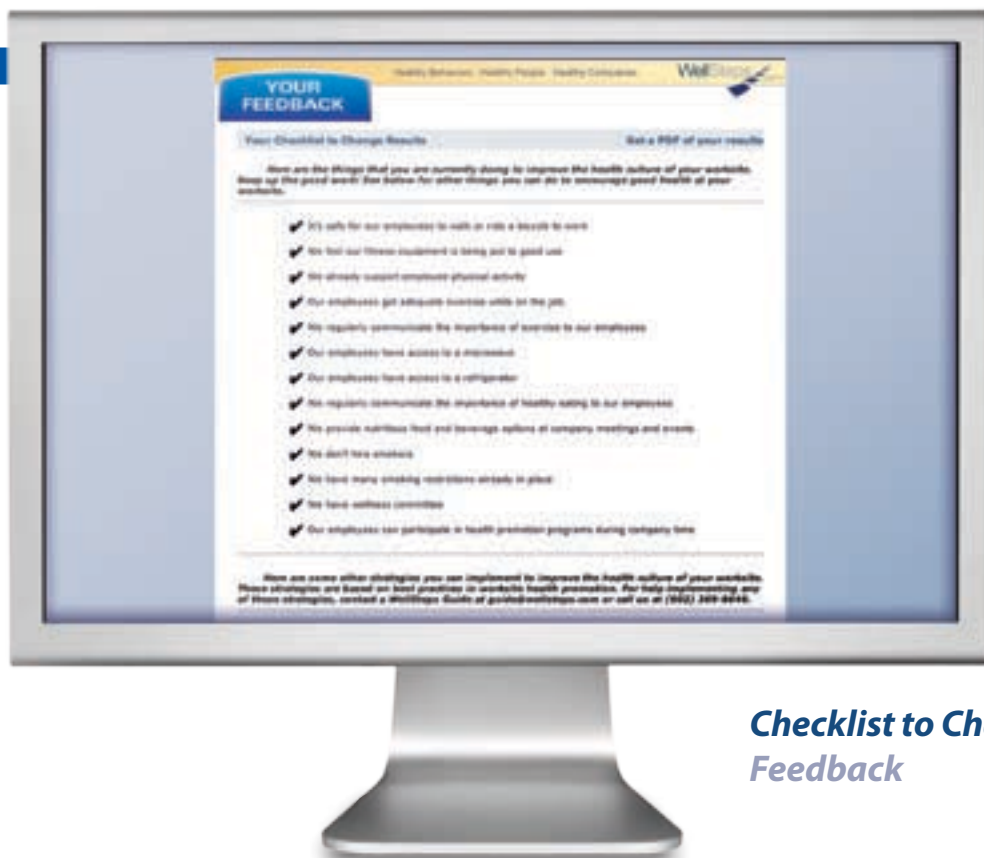
work environment. We have compiled several evidence-based ideas to help you create a healthier workplace. All this information can be accessed using a free WellSteps tool called “The Checklist to Change.”

The questions in the Checklist to Change include things like, “Are there paths or trails near your worksite on which employees could walk during breaks, lunch, or after work? And, “Do you provide nutritious food and beverage options at company meetings and events?” If you can answer 27 simple questions, then you can complete the Checklist to Change. Just answer the questions online at wellsteps.com, click submit, and your customized feedback will appear in your inbox.

When you open the feedback you will see a list of things your company is currently doing right to create a healthy culture. Most companies will have at least a few. Next, you will find strategies that you can implement to improve the health culture of your worksite. All of these strategies are based on the best practices in worksite health promotion.

Now, if you are anything like most people, you’ll see the list of strategies and either blow it off because it is too much work, or try and tackle everything at once. There is a better way. We suggest that once you have read through your feedback, that you download and use the Plan To Change Worksheet (available at wellsteps.com). This worksheet will guide you through seven intuitive steps and help you pick





Checklist to Change Feedback

two or three action items to address each year. It is better to accomplish simple goals than to take on too much and get lost. Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day and a culture of health at your worksite won't be created overnight either.

You might be surprised to find that changing the health environment at your worksite can be quite simple. Several worksites have already used the Checklist to Change and are currently implementing strategies that were suggested in their feedback.

For example, the Health Promotion Team at a Federal Bank in Texas recently completed the Checklist to Change and decided to work on creating a walking path around their building. They utilized Google Earth (www.earth.google.com) to look up their worksite address and then used the plotting tool to mark and measure a walking path around their worksite.

Now their employees can use the trail during breaks, at lunch, and before and after work to add a little more physical activity into their day. Employees now know exactly how far they are going thanks to the new signs posted that mark distances. The employees love the trail and the Health Promotion Team reports that the change really wasn't that difficult to make!

Since the outside trail is completed, the Federal Bank health promotion team has started on its next goal to create an

inside walking track in the basement of the building. This company is well on its way to creating a culture of health at their worksite! There are other examples as well. Although each worksite is unique, they have all found innovative ways to implement strategies and work towards a healthier work environment.

The Checklist to Change can be accessed at wellsteps.com (click on Tools) and is a free service for any company. If you are interested in improving the health culture of your worksite, try the Checklist to Change, then take it a step further and Plan to Change. ★



ABOUT Ann Bahr MS

Ann Bahr is a graduate of Brigham Young University where she received both her bachelor's and master's degrees in Health Promotion. During her time at BYU she formally participated in the research process, investigating the impact of lifestyle on several aspects of health. Her research has been presented at national conferences.

Ann previously worked in the BYU Wellness Program consulting with individuals about diet, exercise, weight loss, and improving health. Ann now serves as the Senior Account Manager for WellSteps. She is passionate about exercise and good nutrition, and immensely enjoys teaching others about the benefits of healthy living.



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