

Chicago Regional Meeting: Making the Case for the Business Value of Health, Wealth, & Productivity November 11, 2015

As part of our regional program series, IBI and the Midwest Business Group on Health (MBGH) co-hosted a regional event in Chicago in November 2015 that addressed employee health, productivity, absence management and benefits communications. Dr. Thomas Parry, IBI's president, presented information on how to make the business case for the value of health to senior leaders, as well as on existing tools to help measure and boost the impact of employer programs. Jennifer Benz, CEO of Benz Communications, discussed how to use benefits communications to support employee engagement. MBGH convened a panel of employers to discuss their experiences and challenges in employee engagement and workforce productivity. The program ended with an interactive roundtable discussion among all attendees on their own challenges and successes.

Links to Presentations:

[Making the Case for the Business Value of Health, Wealth & Productivity](#)

- Thomas Parry, PhD, President, Integrated Benefits Institute (IBI)

[Essential Role of Benefit Communications in Supporting Employee Engagement](#)

- Jennifer Benz, CEO, Benz Communication

[Webinar Recording](#)

Dr. Thomas Parry addressed four key issues for employers as they make the business case to senior leaders for managing workforce health and productivity:

- Connecting investments in the financial health of a company's workforce with the goals of the business
- Understanding the role of engaging covered populations to impact health and productivity
- How CFOs see health and healthcare
- The tools that exist to help estimate and measure the impact of employer programs

Dr. Parry discussed how to present an argument on the business value of workforce health to the C-Suite by drawing on available resources to better measure and link employee health to business outcomes. By highlighting new employer realities and changes in healthcare in the U.S., Dr. Parry emphasized the importance of a strategic approach to workforce health and "getting inside the head" of senior leaders. The presentation included findings from IBI's upcoming CFO research, as well as conclusions about the move to consumerism in healthcare based on an IBI literature review of 68 peer-reviewed journal articles. Dr. Parry then explained how structuring metrics as hierarchies from dashboard metrics down to contributing and constituent metrics can expand the case for the business value of health and productivity.

Jennifer Benz addressed the importance of supporting employee engagement with comprehensive and concise benefits communications. The presentation outlined three steps to success:



- Get online - make benefits information available on-line and make access easy
- Keep talking - engage with employees and their families year-round
- Work smart - use free/low-cost resources and promote the value of services

Ms. Benz emphasized that a clear, concise communication strategy and focused information on benefits plans can further engagement of a workforce in its health. She shared the findings of the 2014 Benz/National Business Coalition on Health report, *“Inside Benefits Communication”* and emphasized the importance of constant communication and user-friendly design for improving benefits education and use. Ms. Benz discussed how to design a communication strategy emphasizing the importance of a communication timeline so that employees are continually aware of how to access their benefits information. Ms. Benz said that “More than nine in ten companies that communicate year-round met all or most of their goals”. The presentation also outlined how to best choose a communication channel from traditional outlets such as brochures and guides to text messaging. Ms. Benz revealed a concise strategy for using the information companies have available to best engage their workforce.

The third segment of the program featured real-world examples and a discussion of how employers engage high-risk, high-cost employees to enhance workforce productivity. Panelists included:

Moderator: Larry Boress, President & CEO, MBGH

Amy Katzoff, Director of Health and Wellness Benefits, Dover Corporation

Wendy McLaurin, Benefits Manager, City of Gary

Derek Zingg, Director of Global Benefits at Hospira

Jennifer Benz, CEO, Benz Communications

In this panel, participants shared their experiences in managing workforce health and productivity and discussed how to create a culture of health. When considering employee engagement, Jennifer Benz highlighted the importance of creating a user-friendly website that is heavily branded, easy to navigate, and text-light. Ms. Benz stated that “a culture doesn’t begin overnight” and stressed how a user-friendly website also can be used during recruiting to illustrate the connection between a culture of health and employee engagement. By providing clear communication strategies such as using monthly webinars, employees are better informed about the resources available to them.

Other panelists discussed the importance of employee engagement through peer-to-peer interaction. Wendy McLaurin from the City of Gary worked closely with the city’s vendor to better engage employees, emphasizing that nearly 60% of the city’s workforce is engaged in wellness. Amy Katzoff from the Dover Corporation discussed using wellness champions at each site to build employee engagement and to improve utilization. With employee testimonials and shared success stories following the first year, the Dover Corporation built a foundation for a culture of health and garnered senior management support. All panelists agreed on the importance of peer influence.

Panelist Derek Zingg of Hospira emphasized the importance of prevention as a significant investment in the health of the workforce. He also stressed the importance of employees communicating with their physicians, particularly around billing of care. Each panelist emphasized the importance of executive support, clear communication, and a strong culture of health.

Following the two presentations and panel discussion, attendees conversed in small groups and shared their insights on the following questions:

- What does a successfully engaged workforce look like in your organization?
- When making the business case for the value of health to senior leadership, what are they most interested in and does this align with your objectives?
- What are the biggest barriers you are still unable to overcome?

Representatives from each group shared their key findings. When discussing what a successfully engaged workforce looked like, Bart Karlson from ConAgra Foods shared his group's insights on how important it is to create a culture of resiliency among the employees. Carolyn Bilson from Habits at Work explained the importance of "walking the talk" by "practicing healthy habits in an excitable and repeatable way" to foster a successful, engaged workforce. Audience members suggested that employee investment and participation be included in the strategy, and that management support and structure, and empowerment within the organization also be considered.

The discussion on making the business case for the value of health focused on how to better understand the key business metrics for which senior leaders are held accountable using the IBI case study on MGM Mirage as an example. Audience members also discussed how they have engaged senior management on this issue, citing the importance of promoting the financial perspective when discussing wellness issues with the C-suite. The importance of using available metrics -- particularly metrics on absence and on health-related performance -- was underscored. Lizzie Nolan from Helix stated how giving operational feedback within an organization's current program is vital to making the business case to senior management.

The group also discussed other challenges such as staffing barriers, finding common ground in different environments (such as a unionized workforce), positioning for different audiences, and employee accountability for taking care of their own health.