



Well-Being 2021: How to Build a Program for What Comes Next

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Well-Being 2021

The thought of designing a well-being program in 2021 might seem like an impossible task requiring a level of predictability that none of us can count on right now. Many organizations are still managing the effects of 2020's surprises and have yet to begin looking ahead or planning for what's next.

If you're there, you're not alone. But the pandemic and social unrest that upended 2020 planning can inform your actions in 2021. We know now that we can't prepare for what might happen — the biggest shifts are ones we may never see coming. Instead, we have to prepare our organizations, and our people, to adapt to any situation.

In 2021, we're focused on the most important determinant of corporate success: employee well-being. 2020 laid bare the importance of whole-person well-being, and the vital role an employer plays in supporting the well-being of employees. In 2021 and beyond, it's essential for employers to design employee well-being programs that support all aspects of whole-person well-being — physical, emotional, financial and work.

The goal of a well-being program in 2021 isn't preventing bad things from happening. Unfortunately, no one has that power. All we can do is help our employees store well-being resources during the quiet times so they have them to spend when they're needed. To do that, employers must understand what resources employees need, make it seamless for employees to access these resources, build trusting connections and develop a well-being program that's flexible enough to work in any circumstance.

Designing well-being programs for modern employees

Having lived with COVID-19 for over a year, the abnormal can start to feel routine. But as the pandemic continues, the same stressors can manifest in different ways. What people might have been willing to accept as a temporary state of affairs isn't tolerable long-term.

The best well-being programs can serve to shake up this stasis. Giving your people new ideas for how to take care of themselves — even just reminding them that they *should* be taking care of themselves — encourages positivity and empowers action. Sometimes people just need the permission to focus on themselves first.

They're also critical for providing a little structure to days that can start to all feel the same. A relevant well-being activity, a message from a company leader, a chance to communicate with colleagues and countless other moments of care have the power to put people in a slightly different headspace. So many of us are spending every second in survival mode. Taking the time to think about how to thrive through the pandemic may not even come to mind, but it's critical for fighting stress and burnout and staying physically and emotionally healthy.

Traditional wellness failed

It's not easy to ask people to do *anything* else knowing how much they're juggling right now. But asking them to take care of themselves helps them prioritize the thing that falls to the bottom of the list: self-care. Without filling up their own tanks, they have nothing to give either at home or at work.

For these reasons and more, traditional corporate wellness programs have failed. Most traditional wellness programs are aimed exclusively at reducing healthcare costs, so they focus on measurements like biometric values, weight loss and step counts. These programs are punitive, so they feel like something is being done *to* rather than *for* employees. Even the most positive of these programs are often superficial — they don't elevate company culture, inspire commitment or tie to business goals.

Any well-being program that takes a punitive tack will be even less successful this year than

in the past. You can't intimidate or bribe people into losing weight, going to the doctor or making time for self-care to reduce healthcare costs. You have to inspire them. That means you'll need to offer more than the classic cash-off-premiums or gift-card rewards. It's hard enough now to find time for the things we want to do, let alone the things we merely feel like we should.

Further, well-being programs have become an integral part of facilitating an experience that motivates and engages employees. The best way to increase a program's participation and retention is offering a solution that's easy to use and has mass appeal to the everyday user. An integrated mobile platform with personalized care provides an experience that empowers employees to stay connected to what matters most.

What's working against us: The well-being challenges of 2021



Anyone who's lived through 2020 doesn't necessarily need a refresh of how tough things have been. But it's worth remembering that you're not overreacting or exaggerating. Things really are as hard as they seem, and today's employers are facing many challenges, including but not limited to:

A newly remote – and not necessarily grateful – workforce

Considering that work-from-home has historically been a perk, it should be great news that [42%](#) of the U.S. workforce is working remotely full-time in the wake of the pandemic. But while workers may have once longed for more flexibility, few were looking for a full-time position at their kitchen table. Studies touting the productivity benefits of remote work focus on people who work remotely *most* of the time, not *all* the time.

The mandatory nature takes away much of work-from-home's appeal, as does the lack of a clear end-date, and any unintended officemates you may have picked up in the way of family members. Then there's the fact that working from home makes it harder to stop working. [One study](#) found that remote workers experienced increased "work intensification," which means people are essentially working harder to prove they add value from afar. Meanwhile, our own research found that [59% of managers](#) say they're working longer hours since the start of COVID-19. When the workday starts to bleed into the evenings and weekends, and they all take place in the same space, it can become nearly impossible to separate work and life.



Unprecedented levels of burnout

That endless work week leads directly to burnout, something American employees are experiencing at shocking levels. Our report on employee well-being during COVID-19 found that **72%** of employees say they're currently burned out, compared to **42%** from the same study last year.

Burned-out employees don't have anything to give, let alone their best. At this point **38%** of the people Limeade surveyed said struggling with burnout specifically was one of the most stressful aspects of their job in the past several months.

Burned Out

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The risk of losing employees compounds by the fact that they don't believe their employers really care how they're doing. [According to Deloitte data, 70% of professionals think their employers aren't doing enough to prevent or reduce burnout within their organization.](#) With 42% of respondents saying they've quit a job due to burnout —nearly half being millennials — it's not a problem that employers can afford to ignore.

A mental health crisis

All that stress, burnout and isolation compounds. Left unaddressed, it can easily cross the line and become a full-blown mental health issue.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, up to 35% of U.S. employees have reported experiencing symptoms of depression often, [according to research from the Society of Human Resource Management.](#) When you ask strictly about the symptoms of depression, those numbers are even higher: 55% report that they often have little interest or pleasure in doing things since COVID-19 began.

While these numbers have negative implications for productivity, they also go beyond that. Poor mental health will affect physical health as well. Unless employers can afford higher healthcare premiums and lower employee output, they need to proactively offer solutions for mental health.

Total attention saturation

Effectively communicating with employees isn't easy even in the most ideal circumstances, and this difficult task has become exponentially more challenging amid a pandemic. Everyone is facing new demands on their attention, whether it be caretaking, homeschooling, a volatile news cycle or all of the above.

Employers' ability to cut through these many distractions with clear messages that resonate is critical to their success. [Good communication is the best way HR leaders can help remote teams be successful.](#) Without the chance encounters of the office, or the accountability that comes with physical oversight, managers must rely only on their ability to trust and be trusted by their workers.

The components of a well-being program that works for 2021 and beyond

To meaningfully change employee circumstances this year, employers need to address all of these challenges directly by designing a modern employee well-being program that both responds to today's reality and can handle what's next. The old well-being program models won't work — a crowded wellness fair isn't even an option and in-person biometric screenings are much trickier when your employees are scattered for their own safety. Instead of lamenting what's now off limits, consider it an opportunity to use these four principles when planning for employee well-being in 2021.

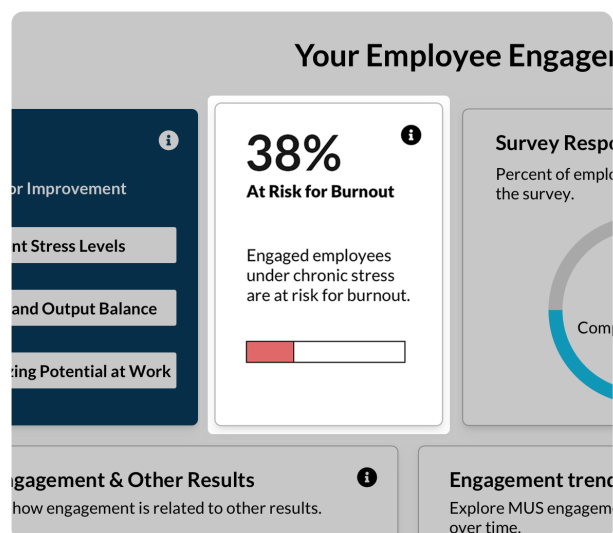
1. Measure what matters: Burnout, stress and the modern well-being metrics

With the pandemic making it increasingly difficult to capture metrics — like biometric screenings — and leaving several dramatically altered — like step counts — it may be time to consider what you're actually measuring. If the goal is reduced healthcare costs, a direct measure of physical change may not even be the best way to get there. And it certainly doesn't account for all the other things that should matter to an organization, like employee engagement, productivity and turnover.

Measures of stress, burnout and engagement can indicate how employees are really doing. In our latest report on employee well-being, we advise managers to look for signs of “silent disengagement.” Metrics like trouble sleeping at night — which Limeade found in 42% of

respondents — or increased alcohol and substance use — which Limeade found in 33% of respondents — can be just as effective as an employee's weight for predicting future problems in the workplace and in your claims costs — not to mention an employee's overall well-being.

Assess Burnout Risk



The Limeade ONE platform measures employees' risk for burnout, alongside standard survey and usage metrics.



2. Keep your efforts nimble

To track these metrics, however, you need to get employees to participate in your well-being program. No one knows where employees will be in 2021 and beyond — remote, in-person, desked, wireless. We just know they'll need be reached.

Whatever shape your well-being program takes in 2021, you have to be willing and able to alter it mid-stream. If employees return to work, you must adapt to that reality. If they stay remote, that too will require new ways of keeping them engaged long-term. The goal isn't to predict what's next, just to know that it'll be different than today. As you plan your well-being program, drop the details and focus on the options.

Any solution you create needs to be available to all employees, wherever they're located around the globe. All tools need to be accessible whether employees are on-network or off, on a work computer or using a personal device and in any language they need.

3. Embrace the whole person, because work-life separation is over

Inherently working from home will blur the lines between work and life, upsetting whatever fragile balance may have been struck. This shift has been accelerated in multiple ways over the past year, however. Social unrest and care of dependents changed employees' perceptions of themselves and their responsibilities — and the expectations they have of employers.

Employers today must appreciate the whole-person needs of their employees — emotional, physical, financial and work — to show they understand what employees are dealing with, they respect it, and they can offer the information and resources employees really need.

4. Create a connection point for all employees

Effective communication drives well-being program awareness and participation. Unfortunately, many well-being programs still depend on unreliable communications channels like posters, brochures, physical mail and email.

No platform is better suited to support your employee engagement and well-being initiatives than mobile. Reach employees where they are, no matter where they're located. You'll have the two-way communication you need to support employee listening, encourage participation and employee connections, and improve corporate reach.



5. Tie it all together with the technology experience they demand

Improving technology is a double-edged sword: It's both easier to deliver a great experience, and more necessary than ever. For employers looking to get employee adoption, well-being programs need a platform that's easy to use and solves real problems. At a minimum, it must:

- Collect benefits and make them easy to navigate
- Integrate with existing tools
- Accommodate new tools to meet employees' changing needs
- Deliver a user experience on par with the big tech brands

If it sounds like a lot, it is. But for employees used to every interaction with employers being a pain — from archaic systems to missing information — a delightful experience is the only way to change their minds. **Once your well-being tools become as seamless a part of their day as checking their bank balance or social media feeds, then you'll have the influence to change behavior for good.**

Focus on what isn't going to change: the need for well-being support

COVID-19 caught us all flat-footed in 2020. Yes, theoretically a pandemic could have been on the radar of the most thorough business continuity team. But in reality, no one was expecting it, and no one was prepared for it when it did hit.

In 2021, we're still navigating this minefield, without any clear idea what "normal" might look like when we do reach it. Instead of getting stuck on the unanswerable question of "what's next?", employee experience teams — whether they be HR, benefits, communications or some mixture of the two — need to think about how to reach people with messages of care and support under any circumstances.

Building a resilient well-being program will give you the tools to reach your people, and your people the tools to build their own resilience and bring the most to work.

We want to transform the way you work. [Click here to learn more about Limeade Well-Being.](#)



Limeade is an employee experience software company that helps build great places to work.

Founded in 2006, Limeade has been a pioneer in the HR technology industry and is consistently recognized for its own award-winning culture. Today, users in approximately 100 countries utilize Limeade solutions.

Limeade helps every employee know their company cares, while delivering people and business results that matter. Limeade partners with its customers to improve the overall employee experience thru improved employee well-being, engagement and sense of inclusion, in addition to reducing the risk of unwanted turnover and burnout.

To learn more, visit www.limeade.com. (ASX listing: LME)



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