



The Case for Workplace Massage

Organizations are facing a tough challenge attracting and retaining the best employees. The leading edge of the baby-boomers is now entering their retirement years and this demographic shift has signaled a contraction in the labour market – the magnitude of which has never been experienced. The demand for skilled employees is heating up rapidly and competition for this finite group is expected to be fierce for the next 5, 10, 20 years.

There are two main challenges facing organizations:

- 1) Attracting the best talent.
- 2) Keeping current staff happy, healthy and productive.

Attracting the Best Talent:

To be an “employer of choice” financial compensation and group benefits must be competitive. The third component – and one that can crystallize the decision to join one company over another is the “quality of the work environment”. This is where “workplace wellness” comes in. The ability to provide prospective employees with workplace wellness options that will help them function more effectively sends a very strong message that the employer cares about the physical, mental and emotional welfare of its employees.

Lawrence B. Costello, Senior Vice-President, Human Resources, Trane USA:

“Our values drive us to create an environment for our employees that is safe, healthy and secure. Not only is it the right thing to do for our employees; it’s the smart thing to do for our businesses. When employees see the investment the company makes in their work environment, it reinforces their commitment back to the organization, enhances productivity and distinguishes Trane as an employer of choice in the battle for human capital”.

Keeping Current Staff Healthy, Happy and Productive:

It is widely accepted that the cost of employee turnover is substantial. In a study performed by the B.C. Human Resources Association, it was determined that the cost to replace and train a new line employee is half of a year's salary and the cost to replace and train a managerial employee is one and a half times a year's salary. This doesn't take into account the overflow effect that occurs when others are expected to take up the workload from the person who's vacated their position.

The bottom line is that it makes financial sense to keep employees engaged, happy and feeling well-supported in their efforts.

Stress and Health Challenges in the Workplace:

Many organizations have a diverse workforce of younger and older workers. Each age group has its own unique challenges. Older workers are more likely to develop chronic health conditions that can lead to an increase in sick days and short-term disability. Younger workers may have work/life challenges that lead to **presenteeism*** issues. A common theme that runs through many organizations is work-related stress and tension.

***Presenteeism** is the measurement of productivity of an employee when they are in the workplace. The employee may be present in the workplace but their productivity is low due to mental health issues, pain, disability, improper ergonomics or improper job match.

Whether originating in the home or at work, poorly-managed stress can have a profound effect in the workplace:

- Stress-related absenteeism (colds, flu)
- Short-term disability
- Presenteeism
- Employee turnover
- Office morale

For many years, employee sick days was used as a key measure of employee productivity. While still a factor, it has become clear that a more accurate measure of employee productivity is the level of employee presenteeism. It has been determined that costs related to presenteeism are "seven times" greater than the cost of employee sick days. These are employees who are showing up for work, but due to a variety of factors (majority stress-related) their productivity is diminished.

There are a number of reasons why employees come to work even though their productivity may not be high:

- Deadlines to meet
- Don't want work to pile up
- Don't want colleagues to be overloaded with work
- Think missing work would be frowned upon
- Can't afford to do without the income

To be an “employer of choice” an organization must clearly communicate to prospective and current employees that it cares about creating a work environment that will support the employee at many levels. Given the speed of technological advances and the ability to accomplish more in less time, there is an inherent risk that employees will become emotionally and psychologically disconnected from the process. Add in higher expectations for performance and shorter timelines and there is a good chance that work-related stress and tension will accelerate and lead to other chronic issues.

Providing employees access to workplace services that will help them cope more effectively with their work-related stress and tension will go a long way to pre-empting the cascade effect that leads to sick days, short-term disability claims, presenteeism issues and employee turnover. It will also reinforce the values message that the organization is looking after its employees.

The Solution: Workplace Massage.

As employees begin having workplace massage on a regular basis, they will begin to experience lasting physiological changes and a substantial reduction in the stress and tension patterns they have likely had for many years. The benefits of ongoing workplace massage are cumulative and the process will result in the employees becoming more “stress hardy”. Their ability to handle work-related stress will increase and they will experience a boost to their immune system. Employees will be healthier, more focused and overall office morale will improve.

One of the greatest benefits of workplace massage is that it introduces an appropriate, caring element into the workplace. Unlike other activities that require the individual make a physical effort – workplace massage is about attending to the employee. All they have to do is sit in a very comfortable, supporting massage chair – and for 15 minutes the practitioner will provide a revitalizing massage. In many “high-tech” environments the type of work or physical layout of the office creates a feeling of isolation for the employee. The workplace massage program re-connects employees and they have a positive sense of being part of something that supports them in their work efforts. They experience immediate benefits while they are at work; and they also carry these benefits home with them. Those who are feeling acute stress from immediate work challenges will have a chance to step back and clear their heads and then re-focus their efforts.

From a practical perspective, the big advantage of workplace massage is that it is brought into the workplace and employees aren't required to leave the office for extended periods. No capital investment is required to prepare the office for the service. All that is required is a space of 5' x 5' for each chair massage practitioner. The short sessions also fit well into employee lunch and coffee breaks.

The portable nature of workplace massage makes it the easiest wellness service to introduce into an organization. In our experience with many government and corporate organizations, the workplace massage program forms the "core" of their overall workplace wellness strategy. After the program has been in place for a number of months, the employees can be surveyed to determine other complimentary services that can be introduced in stages. Over time, the ability to create a basket of workplace services that meet the diverse needs of the employees becomes a distinguishing feature of companies that have truly earned the reputation as an "employer of choice".

Workplace massage involves certified practitioners bringing their portable massage chairs into the workplace. The employee remains fully clothed and no oils or lotions are used. The 15 minute massage is performed through the clothes and focuses on the low, mid, upper back, shoulders, neck, arms and hands. This particular form of massage is designed to be both relaxing and invigorating. The person having the massage will feel immediate tension relief and revitalized.

For further information on creating a workplace massage program for your organization, contact **Healing Hands Chair Massage** at **(250) 383-4300** or **1-800-792-0452**.