

A WELCOA | Expert Interview



Dee Edington, PhD

Director, Health Management Research
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PART 1:
**Culture
Counts**

Culture Counts...

A New Approach To Changing Unhealthy Behavior

Dr. Dee Edington, Director of the University of Michigan's Health Research Center is one of the foremost researchers and advocates for managing and improving the health and well-being of the U.S. workforce. His research has spanned more than three decades and his scholarly publications, in large part, have helped to shape the way that we think about managing employee health today.

In this interview led by WELCOA President Dr. David Hunnicutt, Dr. Edington sheds important insights on the current status of employee health management. But even more importantly, he sets forth a bold vision for what needs to be done if we are to keep our employees healthy and well in these remarkably challenging times.



Q Dr. Hunnicutt: If you could give one piece of advice to business and health leaders with respect to managing the health of their populations, what would it be?

A Dr. Edington: This is going to sound strange coming from me, but THE most important piece of advice I would give business and health leaders is to, first and foremost, carefully craft a corporate vision for health and well-being and to articulate it throughout the organization. I say this because I have come to learn over the years that it is the leader's vision that sets the stage for change. Without a clear vision, change simply will not take place.

Q Hunnicutt: I wouldn't have guessed, being a prominent health researcher, that developing an organizational vision would be the one piece of advice you'd give to health and business leaders.

A Edington: Like I said, I have learned over the last several years, that if we are going to have a meaningful impact in employee health management, we've got to start by changing the culture of the organization—and that process begins with the CEO setting forth his or her vision for employee health and well-being.

I hate to admit it, but I think we really made a major mistake in our field when we jumped straight into

behavior change. I guess hindsight really is 20/20. The fact of the matter is you just can't change behavior unless you change the culture first.

Q Hunnicutt: So it's the culture that provides the fertile soil for the change process to occur?

A Edington: Absolutely right. That's why I tell business and health leaders every chance I get, you can't grow healthy people if you don't take time to till the soil. Your national office is in Nebraska and I'll bet you know full well that you can't grow healthy corn if you don't till the soil.

It's the same thing with behavior change—the key is to create a supportive culture that's conducive to long-term change and then—and only then—is it appropriate to address the behavioral aspect.

Q Hunnicutt: And the beginning of culture change begins with the CEO's vision?

A Edington: Exactly. Now if I could give a second piece of advice, I'd also let every business and health leader know that once the vision has been established, you've got to begin aligning your company's strategic priorities with that vision. Employee health management has to become part and parcel of the way the company does business.

“If people don't pay attention to establishing a supportive company culture, we are setting our employees up for failure.”



Q Hunnicutt: Dee, it sounds like you've had an important epiphany of sorts. And this is really what you'd tell the world if you had only one message that you could deliver?

A Edington: It is. I believe in my heart—and I think the research supports this conclusion—a supportive culture is the most important element that supports individual behavior change. If people don't pay attention to establishing a supportive company culture, we are setting our employees up for failure.

Q Hunnicutt: Do you think maybe we've done our employees a bit of disservice by addressing the behavioral aspect first?

A Edington: There's no question about that. I mean, we had to start somewhere. But I think by pushing behavior change without having a supportive culture in place, we've pointed a lot of people down the road that ultimately leads to failure—and we've all got to admit that a lot of people have failed in their attempts to lead healthier lives.

We've got to change that—and it's something I am very passionate about. I mean just look at something as simple as corporate walking programs. We tell people to walk 10,000 steps everyday if they want to protect their health status—but we have them in environments for 8 to 10 hours everyday where walking isn't embraced by the company's culture. As a result, the vast majority of employees—about 75% in fact—fail in their quest to get their steps in.

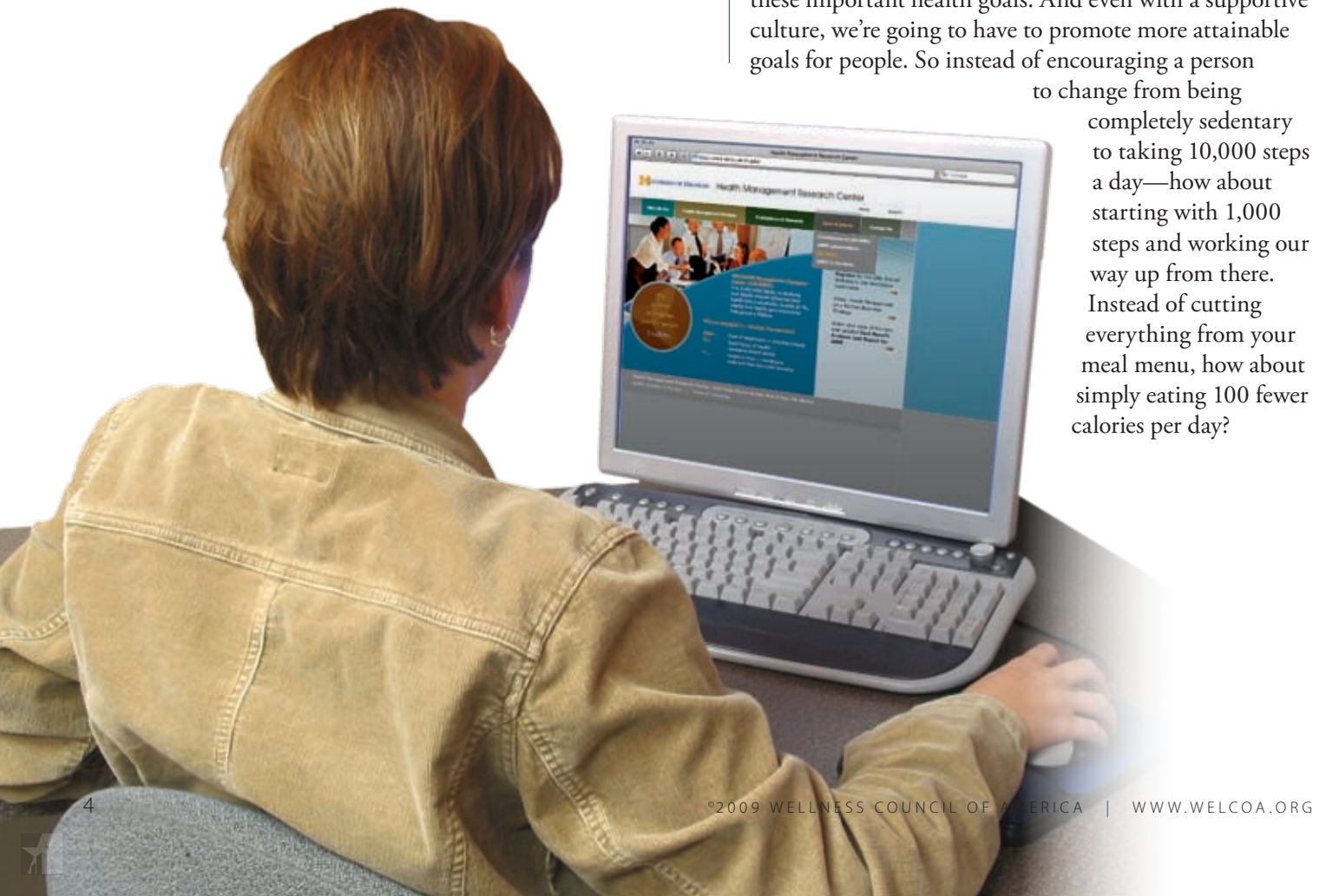
So by promoting behavior change without cultivating the culture, most employees will fail miserably.

It's true with exercise, and it's certainly true with maintaining a BMI under 25. When you look closely, failure is the result for most behavior change initiatives—unless the company consciously creates a culture that's supportive to human health and well-being.

Q Hunnicutt: So really what you're saying here is a supportive culture will allow more people to succeed and, in a sense, success breeds more success?

A Edington: There's simply no question about it. We've got to get people to experience success in some of these important health goals. And even with a supportive culture, we're going to have to promote more attainable goals for people. So instead of encouraging a person

to change from being completely sedentary to taking 10,000 steps a day—how about starting with 1,000 steps and working our way up from there. Instead of cutting everything from your meal menu, how about simply eating 100 fewer calories per day?



Q Hunnicutt: In your estimation, do you think most corporate leaders understand the importance of a creating a supportive, health promoting environment?

A Edington: Not really, but I think they are following our lead. Again, I think one of the major problems we've got to deal with pretty quickly is that we've created a lot of losers in our companies by not advocating for more supportive environments.

“...by promoting behavior change without cultivating the culture, most employees will fail miserably.”

Because we say that employees should be walking 10,000 steps; maintaining a BMI of 25; and controlling their blood pressures; there's three behavioral initiatives right there and virtually everyone is going to fail because the bar is simply too high right now.

Many, many companies have significant portions of their populations that are failing when it comes to health. That's problematic, because people get demoralized and discouraged and pretty soon they start believing that they can't manage their health status.

Just as an important aside, two of the best workplace culture experts in the business are Judd Allen and Tom Golaszewski. If people want to learn more, they'd be wise to get in touch with them. Their research and work in culture and behavior change is very compelling.



ABOUT **Dee W. Edington** PhD

D.W. Edington, Director of the University of Michigan Health Management Research Center, is also a Professor in the School of Kinesiology at the University of Michigan and a research scientist in the School of Public Health. Trained in mathematics, kinesiology and biochemistry, Dr. Edington received his B.S. and Ph.D. degrees from Michigan State University and completed his M.S. at Florida State University. He taught at the University of Massachusetts before coming to Michigan in 1976. Dr. Edington is the author or co-author of over 500 articles, presentations, and several books, including *Biology of Physical Activity*, *Biological Awareness*, *Frontiers of Exercise Biology*, *The One Minute Manager Gets Fit* and the 2nd edition, *The One Minute Manager Balances Work and Life*. Dr. Edington's teaching and research focus on the relationship between healthy lifestyles, vitality and quality of life, as they benefit both individuals and organizations. He is specifically interested in how individual health promotion, worksite wellness activities and programs within organizations impact health care cost containment, productivity and human resource development. In essence, the HMRC studies the precursors to disease and vitality. Dr. Edington enjoys the constantly emerging challenges at the HMRC. He describes the Center as dynamic, innovative and a world-class leader in driving towards information-driven decision making in the evolving new health care environment.

About University of Michigan's Health Research Center

UM-Health Management Research Center (UM-HMRC) is a world-wide leader in studying how health choices influence total health and productivity, quality of life, vitality and health care economics throughout a lifetime.

Be sure to visit their website: www.hmrc.umich.edu



Dr. Dee Edington Speaks Out...

▶ On Corporate Vision

"...THE most important piece of advice I would give business and health leaders is to, first and foremost, carefully craft a corporate vision for health and well-being and to articulate it throughout the organization."

▶ On Creating Supportive Cultures

"...if we are going to have a meaningful impact in employee health management, we've got to start by changing the culture of the organization—and that process begins with the CEO setting forth his or her vision for employee health and well-being."

▶ On Behavior Change

"...I think we really made a major mistake in our field when we jumped straight into behavior change...The fact of the matter is you can't change behavior unless you change the culture first."

▶ On Aligning Health Strategic Priorities

"...if I could give a second piece of advice, I'd also let every business and health leader know that once the vision has been established, you've got to begin aligning your company's strategic priorities with that vision. Employee health management has to become part and parcel of the way the company does business."

▶ On Avoiding Failure

"...I think by pushing behavior change without having a supportive culture in place, we've pointed a lot of people down the road that ultimately leads to failure—and we've all got to admit that a lot of people have failed in their attempts to lead healthier lives. We've got to change that—and it's something I am very passionate about."

▶ On Small Steps

"...even with a supportive culture, we're going to have to promote more attainable goals for people. So instead of encouraging a person to change from being completely sedentary to taking 10,000 steps a day—how about starting with 1,000 steps and working our way up from there."

University of Michigan's Health Conference

UM-Health Management Research Center's (UM-HMRC) 28th Annual Wellness in the Workplace Conference will be held on March 18, 2009 at the Four Points by Sheraton in Ann Arbor, MI. The conference theme is: Zero Trends. Conference participants will be challenged to think outside of the box and consider new ways of approaching health management. Topics include:

- ▶ *Senior Leadership Drives the Vision*
- ▶ *Operations Leadership Creates the Culture*
- ▶ *Self-Leadership Creates the Winners*
- ▶ *Quality Assurance: Outcomes Drive Success*

All registrants will receive the premier release of the exciting new book by Dee Edington, "Zero Trends: A Culture of Health!"



Q Hunnicutt: I agree with you—it’s definitely concerning. Are you optimistic about the future?

A Edington: I am. Despite the shortcomings I’ve mentioned earlier, there’s no question that we’ve learned a lot about managing the health of populations over the last 30 years. There’s a growing body of research demonstrating that health can be managed and a return-on-investment can be generated. That’s really good news.

But now the challenge is to take what we have learned and begin implementing on a broad scale—and that’s where it’s going to take some effort and energy. It’s the next real push.

Bottom line; good things are going to happen if we can concentrate our energies on doing the right things—I really believe that. I am excited for what lies ahead and my passion for what we’re doing in health management is still burning. ★

Are You A WELCOA Member?

WELCOA is the largest workplace wellness organization in the U.S. With over 3,000 corporate members, WELCOA members receive valuable publications, training, and resources to help them build and sustain results-oriented wellness programs.

Learn more about the benefits of WELCOA membership by visiting welcoa.org/store/sidenav/joinwelcoa.html.



What’s Ahead In Part 2 of David Hunnicutt’s Interview with Dee Edington?

Dr. Edington sheds important light on the health management process and sets forth some bold new metrics corporate leaders.

You don’t want to miss part 2 of this interview—it may be the most important thing you’ll read all year.



ABOUT WELCOA

Based in Omaha, NE, the Wellness Council of America (WELCOA) was founded in 1987 as a national non-profit membership organization dedicated to promoting healthier life styles for all Americans, especially through health promotion initiatives at the worksite.

Working Well—Specifically, WELCOA focuses on building Well Workplaces—organizations that are dedicated to the health of their employees. The Well Workplace process provides business leaders and members with a structure or blue print to help their organizations build results-oriented wellness programs. Ultimately these programs help employees make better lifestyle choices, and positively impact the organization’s bottom line. To date, over 700 companies have received the prestigious Well Workplace award.

Leading-Edge Wellness Information—In addition to helping organizations build structurally sound wellness programs, WELCOA serves as a national clearinghouse and information center on worksite wellness. WELCOA responds to thousands of requests for information and materials by publishing a number of source books, a monthly health and wellness newsletter, an extensive line of brochures, as well as conducting numerous training seminars.

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ABOUT David Hunnicutt PhD

Dr. David Hunnicutt is the President of the Wellness Council of America. As a leader in the field of health promotion, his vision has led to the creation of numerous publications designed to link health promotion objectives to business outcomes.



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