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| **5 Productivity Gains to be Mined from Focusing on Wellness**  Consider this recent study by Australian healthcare insurer Medibank: it revealed that on average 6.5 working days of productivity are lost every year per employee as a result of people coming to work and not performing to their usual level of productivity: a syndrome known as ‘presenteeism’.    Then add that as recently as 2009/10 the total cost of presenteeism to the Australian economy was estimated to be AUS$34.1 billion (NZ$36.5bn), nearly four times the cost of absenteeism.  Now contemplate that the same ratio can easily be applied to New Zealand.  Let us explain how a focus on wellness will not only improve health but engagement - and thus overall happiness and productivity - of our working population.  **Stella Green** of Be Confident Change Consulting says that the phrase ‘Health is Wealth’ is true:  “Growing evidence suggests that the health of a company’s employees and the long-term health of the bottom line are aligned, and if we treat them as separate we pay the price.  “For companies the cost is in diminished productivity and loss of talent. For individuals the cost is health and happiness. The reverse is also true; what’s good for the individual is good for business.”  **So, what specific gains can be made through focusing on wellness?**  **1. Attract better employees**  To be on the top of your game you need to be happy and healthy, both physically and psychologically, and talented people who can pick and choose don't want or need to work for companies that don't support this approach.  **2. Then hang on to your talent**  Green says a sustainable wellness programme is critical to gaining and retaining talent in today’s market. She quotes a study by the National Business Group on Health that showed that organisations with effective wellness programmes report significantly lower voluntary attrition than those whose programmes have low effectiveness (9% vs. 15%).  “At the Biltmore tourism enterprise, the rate was 9% in 2009, down from 19% in 2005, thanks in part to a wellness programme. Vicki Banks, Biltmore’s director of benefits and compensation, said: “Employees who participate in our wellness programs do not leave”.  **3. Fresher, rested employees ready to perform**  Quoting an Australian study of 224 employees that found an absenteeism level of 26.6% for those reporting high stress levels compared to 14.7% in the low stress group, Green says that more than 30% of people in the US and UK don’t get enough sleep – a critical aspect to wellness.  This is echoed by **Professor Grant Schofield** of the Human Potential Centre, AUT Millennium: “Wellness means more outputs for less work, a better night’s sleep making you sharper earlier and giving you more sustained energy throughout the day.”  **4. Save considerable cost, generate great ROI**  A Harvard Business Review article showed in 2010 that strategically designed investment in employees’ social, mental, and physical health pays off.  In the article, Johnson and Johnson leaders estimated that wellness programmes cumulatively saved the company $250 million on health care costs between 2002 to 2008, and that the return was $2.71 for every dollar spent.  **5. Improve collaboration - and the bottom line**  Says Green: “Safeway supermarket chain found that 70% of their $1 billion health bill was driven by people’s behaviours. A company-wide wellness programme saw both the employees and the company’s bottom line become healthier.  “When people understand what makes them thrive, they become highly effective collaborators and inspire those around them to lift their game. When people find what energises them - the right work style, the right mindset and have the right fuel on board - they are unstoppable.” |