

OVADIA HEART HEALTH

WHITE PAPER

ADDICTION IN THE WORKPLACE

While companies may not manage personal lifestyle choices, they can foster healthier environments by supporting initiatives such as smoking cessation programs and addressing processed food and sugar addiction.





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Addiction In The Workplace



Introduction

Addiction comes from the Latin word ‘addicere’, which means to be enslaved.[1] There are many forms, from sugar and fast food to cigarettes and vaping, with everything in between, such as texting and gaming. Why should a company or workplace care about addiction? Bottom line.... it could be impacting the productivity, efficiency and even safety of your employees.[2]

While a company is not in the business of managing the individual’s lifestyle choices, it can either be a supportive place for health matters or a major force of negative influence. If we think back to a not so distance past, smoking was allowed in the office, think the ever-popular TV show *Mad Men*. Today, one easily accepts that there are designated places to smoke as well as many settings where it is forbidden or even illegal. And many workplaces will subsidize smoking cessation programs for employees.

As recent public hearings on the negative impact of chronic diseases on both adults and children, such as that led by Senator Ron Johnson, *American Health and Nutrition: A Second Opinion*[3] the role of nutrition as well as pharmaceutical industry impact on our overall health is demonstrated. Additionally, the efforts by Calley Means and Casey Means, MD[4] and others ring the alarm about our ever-growing processed food, toxic ingredients and sugar addiction issues as well as their contribution to poor metabolic health. This highlights the need for company leaders to embrace the situation that addiction is not only about smoking but there might be avenues to encourage better habits in the workplace on all fronts of the addiction spectrum.

Back Story

In 1997, Dr. Alan Leshner, then Director of the US National Institute on Drug Abuse was one of the first to acknowledge, “addiction is a brain disease,” a recurrent illness with relapse characteristics.[5] This was ground-breaking in that it moved the needle away from the primary focus of addiction as a “behavioral issue” into the direction of brain disorder. This was further highlighted by the 2011 definition by the American Society of Addiction Medicine “highlighting a chronic brain disorder not simply a behavioral problem.”[6]

Bitten Jonsson, RN and Addiction Specialist, an expert on food particularly sugar addiction, talks about “your brain being hijacked” and that it is not just a question of willpower.



In her ground-breaking work and programs for SUGAR ®[7] and the Nutrition Network[8] she advocates for developing “brain work arounds.”

Addiction can often be transferable. For example, say one had a smoking problem but managed to quit, they “transfer” the habit on to something else like sugar. Having worked in various “QUIT” programs anecdotal stories from participants will often contain a common story of quitting my sugar habit and took up vaping because I need “to do” something.

How does this relate to the workplace?

A familiar theme among those suffering from addiction is guilt. They struggle with negative talk about themselves, self-sabotage and the lack of ability to quit. This negativity and low self-esteem can spill over into the workplace. Many individuals direct their frustration and disappointment on themselves and potentially other co-workers. The negativity can interfere with their actions and ability to work well in a company team environment.

Supportive measures that allow individuals with addiction struggles to feel they are not alone and or a “bad person” simply because of their current habit can demonstrate a company policy of care and concern for the employee. As human and social beings we thrive on supportive social interactions that inspire confidence and help build self-esteem.

A weak link

A quick walk around most company offices and workplaces one will find bowls of candy, donuts in the breakroom, pizza boxes and a plethora of tempting treats. In the work of Baumeister and Tierney, authors of the book, *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength*[9], they emphasize the concept of “limited willpower.”

Simply said this limited resource can be tasked over and over if for example an individual must walk by the breakroom and or holiday candy bowl multiple times a day. It is a visual and or temptation that keeps inviting them to “have just one piece.” This takes energy, brain power and invades their mental space. Late afternoon the brain is tired of the back and forth, shall I or shall I not and the temptation wins.



If you want people to succeed in their health endeavors, set them up for success. While one might be tempted by the breakroom donuts another might say, well I passed up the donuts yeah for me, I'm going to reward myself with a smoke break or happy hour after work. Thus, creating cycles of unnecessary depletion of daily willpower and a transfer of the habits to another as mentioned above.

Prepare for relapse

The goal of employee wellness programs is to build resiliency and strength in individual health and wellbeing that can carry over into their ability to function well in their jobs and inspire high performance. If employees are your greatest assets helping them navigate when habits take them off the rails can gain even more respect and trust in leadership.

Addiction specialists talk about teaching relapse. Smokers often talk about the various times they have quit. Engaging in mindset strategies that create space for a set-back and how to help get back on track. This is a skill that one can apply well in the workplace. For additional information on mindset see our white paper, Mindset Matters.[10]

Business and careers are often not linear. There are ebbs and flows, up-cycles and down turns. A resilient company learns from the dips, reapplies themselves and moves forward sometimes with renewed strength. This type of strategic thinking can be utilized in peer-to-peer support groups for habit changing efforts.

Using the sports mentality, it is rare that a team wins every single game. There will be losses and how to train for that, mentally and physically is built inherently into the coaching program. It often brings teams closer together and fosters the feeling of "in this together." A mentality that can serve businesses well in a stressful global market.

What can companies do?

- 01 Inquire
- 02 Engage
- 03 Create Space
- 04 Empower



Inquire first, is there employee interest and what specifically is pertinent. Individuals can be shy as well as fearful to share their situation. It must be a non-judgmental atmosphere that allows the employee to feel safe and secure. Keep an open mind that habits can be transferable, and a smoker just might be the best support partner for someone wanting to quit sugar.

Allow them space to interact, share and support each other. For those leading, get out of their way. Create space for them to encourage each other, utilize their personal experience, have trust in being vulnerable and become a group that can navigate the process together.

Help them find their own unique path with the tools to embrace change knowing there will be ups and downs, however, the group is there to support, not judge. Mental Health America offers basic guidelines for peer-to-peer group facilitation that can provide insight on how to structure group support programs.[11] While employee wellness programs are not mental health treatment and or medical advice, the non-judgmental approach to how group programs are structured offers good insight.

Metabolic and mental health

Integrating metabolic health enhancement education and empowerment into employee wellness programs is a vital step forward. The growth of the field of metabolic psychiatry[12] has demonstrated the inherent relevance and cruciality of overall good metabolic health as a powerful positive component of good mental health. For further on that topic look to field leaders, clinical psychiatrists, Dr. Georgia Ede[13] and Dr. Christopher Palmer.[14]

Previously we thought only 12% of US Adults had good metabolic health[15]. Recent work shows that has dropped to 7%[16]. If you want to be ahead of the corporate curve start with metabolic health initiatives. Programs that incorporate group support for not only addiction issues but other health parameters that encourage resilience, build performance enhancing skills and instill overall vibrant metabolic health.



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OUR TEAM



White Paper Written By:

Krisna Hanks

Director of Employee Wellness

Ms. Hanks holds a MS in Kinesiology from Indiana University and an MBA from the University of San Francisco. She is a certified Metabolic Health Practitioner, Nutrition Network Coach Practitioner™ with decades of experience as a worksite wellness consultant and executive coach. Currently Krisna is Director of Employee Wellness and Metabolic Health Coach with Dr. Philip Ovadia and the I Fix Hearts Team. Her background combines years as a professional dancer in Europe and USA, certified worksite wellness advisor, Diabetes Prevention Specialist, Senior Fitness and certified Classical Pilates instructor.



Dr. Philip Ovadia

Board-certified Cardiac Surgeon and founder of Ovadia Heart Health

Our mission is to optimize the public's metabolic health and help people like you stay off my operating table. As a heart surgeon who used to be morbidly obese, I have seen firsthand the failures of mainstream diets and medicine. I realized that what helped me lose over 100 pounds was the same solution that could have prevented thousands of open heart surgeries I've performed – metabolic health. Through Ovadia Heart Health, I teach individuals and organizations my complete metabolic health system to prevent and reverse disease, avoid early death, and live well for life.



Next Steps: Your heart's health is too important to leave in the hands of someone who doesn't fully support your wellness journey.

CONTACT US

📞 ifixhearts.com/talk

✉️ jeremiah@ifixhearts.com

❤️ <https://ifixhearts.com/>

🌐 <https://ovadiahearthealth.com>

