



Engaging Employees In Workplace Health: Borislow Insurance

Jennifer Borislow founded Borislow Insurance (BI) in 1982 with the vision of creating a community of health and well-being for her clients. She and BI co-owner Mark Gaunya also understand that employees' health and well-being are critical to how they work with clients. They recognize the key to BI's success is its talented workforce, so when it comes to employee well-being, Borislow often says, "We walk the talk."

BI employees pilot test and provide feedback to refine all of the wellness initiatives in which they participate. This approach keeps employees motivated, improves morale, and creates a culture of health in the company. The company then rolls out the refined wellness offerings to its clients. The co-owners' creativity allows them to focus on keeping employees engaged while meeting business needs. BI's success in engaging its employees in health promotion and wellness is evident through the numerous awards and recognition the company has received.

Establishing Workplace Wellness At BI

Borislow and Gaunya experienced the challenges of maintaining a healthy routine for themselves and their families while juggling the demands of building the business, and frequent travel. They wanted to ease that burden for employees, and make health and wellness a priority for their organization. In 2010, they invested in a workplace health program and provided a work environment that encouraged employees to be healthy. They first hired a full-time Wellness Nurse to review company health data and start wellness activities such as a walking program. In 2015, they hired a full-time Wellbeing Director to develop strategies for engaging employees and creating a culture of health.

BI's owners thought that a comprehensive wellness strategy—not just a program—would be key to attracting and retaining talented, healthy staff. While the Director of Health & Wellbeing developed the overall wellness strategy, BI hired full-time Health & Wellbeing Consultants Sally Soliman and Brittany Larrabee in 2014 and 2017 to launch wellness activities. In addition to the wellness staff, most BI employees have helped plan activities or volunteer on committees, such as the Wellness Team and the Engagement Multiplier Survey Team.

Borislow INSURANCE

Borislow Insurance: At A Glance

Locations: Methuen, MA

Size: Approximately 53 employees

Industry: Employee benefits

North American Industry
Classification System (NAICS) Sector:
Finance and Insurance

Program Overview

The company's wellness program, called BI Health & Wellbeing, provides a variety of offerings to employees to keep their interest. The approach includes five elements of wellness—physical, financial, workplace, community, and mind/spirit—to help employees be more productive, increase employee morale, and attract and retain talent.



The BI Health & Wellbeing program uses a cyclical process. First, it identifies staff needs through surveys and focus groups. Based on the results, the program pilots new activities aligned with the five wellness elements. Then BI redesigns offerings based on employee engagement results and feedback.

Highlights of the award-winning BI well-being program include:

- A substantial company budget of \$1,132 per employee a year for wellness activities and infrastructure.
- Activities such as fruit and vegetable delivery, monthly on-site massages, cooking demonstrations, and manicures/pedicures.

- Infrastructure such as standing desks, walking trails, a garden, and a stress-free/nursing room.
- On-site gym with personal trainer.
- Compensation for time to use fitness facilities and an on-site nutrition coach.
- Chronic disease management programs and coaching.
- Health Savings Accounts, with company-supported incentives for completing healthy activities.
- Healthy Living Reward, a \$100 reimbursement for healthy living products or services.
- Access to financial, will, and estate planners.



Director of Health & Wellbeing, Travis Horne, in BI's on-site fitness facility.

Employee Testimonial: Participating In Well-Being Offerings

Shaina, an Executive Assistant, appreciates how BI's well-being activities promote a healthy lifestyle and help her achieve better work/life balance. Shaina has two children and works full time, so finding time for herself can be a challenge. She takes advantage of BI's remote work options and flexible work arrangements, as well as wellness events such as healthy potluck meals and cooking demonstrations. Shaina said the on-site gym and access to a fitness trainer during work hours had the biggest effect on her well-being. "I don't think I would have been able to bounce back after both of my pregnancies if it weren't for the wellness program!"

are made in glass jars and sold on-site, with proceeds going to various charities. The salad jar idea was created by an employee and fully supported by BI leadership, who understood the importance of using employees' suggestions. BI also promotes engagement through frequent communication to staff. The company newsletter includes written messages, video updates, and health messages from Borislow and Gaunya. They chose the interactive format after employees said they wanted to receive information outside of in-person meetings.

Engaging Employees In Wellness Through Leadership Support And Environmental Changes

BI encourages employee engagement by reducing barriers to participate in the BI Health & Wellbeing program. BI owners allow employees to exercise at work and during work hours at the on-site fitness center with the on-site trainer.

Leaders also encourage employee engagement through one of BI's regular offerings, the salad jar program. Salads

Using Data To Assess Employee Engagement

BI uses data at the employee and organization level to evaluate employee engagement and create wellness programs and products. The Engagement Multiplier is a survey to assess company morale and efficiency and to increase employee retention. The survey measures employee engagement in the workplace and allows BI

Workplace Health Awards

- Well Workplace Small Business Award, 2009 (sponsored by the Wellness Council of America)
- Best Places to Work, 2011 (sponsored by the Boston Business Journal)
- WorkWell Award, 2015–2016 (sponsored by the Worksite Wellness Council of Massachusetts)
- Healthiest Employer Award in the State of Massachusetts, 2012–2017 (sponsored by the Boston Business Journal)
- Fit-Friendly Worksite Award, 2012–2017 (Platinum Level) (sponsored by the American Heart Association)
- Nation's Best and Brightest in Wellness Award, 2017 (sponsored by the Best and Brightest)

to regularly check the pulse of staff. To protect employee privacy, encourage honest responses, and avoid any conflict of interest, BI works with a vendor to give the survey and analyze the results. The vendor gives BI leaders a report. The internal Engagement Multiplier Survey Team, with staff across various departments and levels, reviews the results to make decisions about the program.

The BI executive team also uses data from the Health & Wellbeing Culture Assessment, which measures the level of business commitment to building a sustainable culture of health and well-being for employees. The assessment includes data from BI and its clients to examine the wellness benefits offered. BI uses the results to benchmark wellness programs yearly. BI leaders review findings from the Engagement Multiplier and culture assessment to decide what programs to offer. For example, the 2015–2016 culture assessment highlighted a gap in BI’s offerings related to financial well-being. In response, BI contracted with a financial planner to conduct regular on-site meetings during work hours for employees to discuss their wills, estates, or other financial and legal planning matters. After demonstrated success internally, BI added these services to its wellness benefits for clients.



BI employees before participating in a road race.

Designing And Tailoring Programs To Sustain Employee Engagement

BI places data and employee feedback at the center of decisions about programming. Borislow said, “How do you change the conversation? You change the conversation by looking at the data.” The wellness team works with leadership to prioritize new wellness activities. Leaders realize they cannot address all needs, so they focus on two or three issues and activities at a time.

The leadership’s ability to review data, identify gaps, and apply solutions helps employees feel more comfortable giving opinions. The opportunity to be heard and to see programs that reflect their interests or needs motivates them to continue to participate in the Engagement Multiplier surveys and become involved in well-being activities. For example, employee feedback and data showed that employees needed help managing stress. To address this need, the company offers free chair massages to all employees.

Challenges

One of BI’s challenges related to its online health portal, which the company had worked with a vendor to design. After some time, the team noted that employees were not using the portal and that the reporting features were difficult to use. As a result, BI no longer uses an online portal and redirected those financial resources to its in-house wellness programs and activities.

Another challenge has been that the same people were always showing up to the events. To encourage participation by a broader spectrum of employees, BI decided to offer a greater variety of activities. Small activities, such as a coffee tasting that the team is planning, are designed to draw employees out of their seats to engage with one another and have fun.

Advice For Other Employers

BI has created an award winning wellness culture. It attributes its success to asking for and addressing employee feedback, reflecting on the Engagement Multiplier survey and culture assessment results, and consulting with the wellness team. These three practices help BI maintain employee engagement in the program around the five elements.

For other companies seeking to do the same, BI recommended the following:

- Get senior-level support for the program first.
- Secure a budget to support wellness.
- Evaluate what works and engage employees to provide solutions.

Lastly, Sally, a wellness committee member, added that, “Developing a wellness committee or having focus groups is really beneficial to hear what the employees themselves are looking for.”

Recommendations For Action

- Learn about [leadership commitment and support](#) and how it plays a vital role in communicating the purpose and carrying out workplace health programs.
- Expand the program beyond physical health to focus on the overall well-being of employees. Consider ways to include elements like financial or mind/spirit well-being to engage employees.
- Assess your organizational culture and employee engagement regularly through anonymous surveys.
 - [CDC's National Healthy Worksite Program \(NHWP\) Employee Health Assessment \(CAPTURE\) survey](#) measures current health status, health behaviors, readiness to change health behaviors, needs, and interests related to worksite health and safety.
 - [CDC's NHWP Health and Safety Climate Survey \(INPUTS\)](#) provides an overall assessment of workforce attitudes about the physical and psychosocial work environment, including factors that support or detract from a healthy worksite culture.

The [CDC Workplace Health Resource Center \(WHRC\)](#) is a one-stop shop for organizations to find credible tools, guides, case studies, and other resources to design, develop, implement, evaluate, and sustain workplace health promotion programs. Visit <https://www.cdc.gov/WHRC> to find more case studies of workplace health programs in the field.



BI staff clean a local kids' summer camp before it opens for the season. Team activities included painting buildings, picking up brush, and raking the grounds.