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An entirely different disease management

At \$174 billion in 2011, the cost of diabetes is worth talking about. Just mention the word “diabetes” and health insurers, human resource staffers, and wellness advocates immediately respond “disease management”. Having troops of nurses on the phone with patients is one way to manage diabetes cost.

There is another way: applaud employees’ good work.

No kidding.

Studies have shown that employees who feel that their effort at work is not recognized or rewarded are more likely to have poor control of their Type 2 diabetes. People with Type 1 diabetes also fare worse, when their work environment does not esteem them. Improving a person’s diabetes control – that is, bringing their glucose numbers to a healthy range – can save a lot of money. Per patient savings can be more than \$1,000 per year.

Granted, traditional disease management may accomplish that savings goal. Recognizing employees does more than affect employees’ diabetes. Esteemed employees have less heart disease, less depression, and less stress. Improving these leads to more savings: A depressed employee costs 53 percent more in medical costs than a happy employee.

By making subtle changes to the workplace, employers can have boost employees’ health and reduce health costs. To assess how your workplace’s reward culture, think about how employees would answer questions like these:

- *Do you consider your job very important?*
- *Do your colleagues consider your job very important?*
- *How satisfied are you with your work prospects?*

Companies can esteem employees with simple things -- mentioning a customer compliment or congratulating a new recruit on how quickly he is learning the ropes. Recognition need not be expensive or complex. But it does need to be part of the company’s values.

Employees' health is profoundly affected by subtle things in the workplace. Health doesn't just happen after work and on weekends. It happens and is shaped by the one place where employees spend the greatest share of their waking hours: at work.

In 2012, resolve to appreciate more about the people around you, whether they are employees or family members. You will make a bigger difference than you realize with your gratitude.

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