

# A Glimpse into a Wellbeing Journey

By Tony Morgado and Virginia Vega, Genentech



For how many decades have we heard in business that we need to do more with less? As Dr. David Posen points out in his book, *Is Work Killing You?*, following many years of right-sizing and efficiency efforts, businesses can create a paradoxical situation that feels like an organization can do “everything with nothing” (p. 60). Though an extreme analogy, how much does this doing more with less mindset in all aspects of our lives add to the ever increasing sense of feeling overwhelmed? The underlying philosophy behind our wellbeing journey was to recognize that people do not have a separate work life and non-work life. People have a whole life and demands in all components need to be considered as part of developing one’s wellbeing.

With such a large portion of people’s lives spent at work, employees are looking for employers to aid in the process of supporting their overall wellbeing. In late 2011, Genentech’s Career and Learning team began analyzing the need for providing learning solutions to help employees develop personal coping skills to deal with a changing workplace landscape and to help employees manage the demands of a new global work environment. This was the beginning of our wellbeing journey. We launched a cross-functional, cross-site team to develop an approach for implementing our “Wellbeing @ Work” initiative. Though the title of the initiative appears to imply a sole focus of wellbeing in the workplace, the goal was to develop resources and tools that could be accessed by employees to support their overall life harmony. The guiding principle for the project was to focus on being able to provide wellbeing resources and tools to as many employees as possible in a simple and accessible way. In essence, the objective was to provide tools for employees to take charge of their own wellbeing. The project was designed to build the organizational momentum for a focus on wellbeing, starting with a grassroots effort targeted toward employees seeking to improve their overall wellbeing.

Why pursue wellbeing? Dr. David Posen (2013) posits that it is “short sighted and frankly foolish... to take competent, conscientious, committed and caring employees and push them past their tipping point” (p. 45). From a humanistic perspective, if employees are your most important asset, and you care about their health, happiness, engagement and productivity, you should care about their overall wellbeing. In addition, there are tangible business benefits to be derived from a culture that has thriving wellbeing. People that enjoy what they do each day are more productive and can better handle

longer work hours with lower frequency of burnout (Rath & Harter, 2010). Further, Wright, Copranzano and Bonett (2007) report that employees who exhibit positive psychological wellbeing think outside the box, are more proactive, and are better prepared to deal with workplace ambiguity. In another study, Wright and Bonett (2007) found “turnover intent tends to be high for those employees exhibiting low psychological wellbeing, irrespective of their level of job satisfaction” (p. 152).

So what is wellbeing? The foundation of our initiative was based on research from the book *Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements*, by Tom Rath and Jim Harter. This multidimensional view of wellbeing identified one’s state of wellbeing as the result of a combination of five interdependent essential elements: career, community, financial, social, and physical wellbeing. Rath and Harter’s (2010) five elements model is both intuitive and easy to understand:

- Career wellbeing – Do you find purpose in what you do each day? Are you able to use your strengths?
- Social wellbeing – Do you have supportive relationships at work, home, and in your community?
- Financial wellbeing – Are you managing your finances effectively, taking care of today’s needs and planning for the future?
- Community wellbeing – Are you engaged in the area where you live?
- Physical wellbeing – Do you have good health and the energy to get things?

The language of “wellbeing” was preferred to “wellness” as the later often strongly implies only physical health. Wellbeing encompasses all of the elements of an individual’s life experience and includes the physical wellbeing element. This holistic view of wellbeing also recognizes the impact of the work setting, using one’s strengths, deriving meaning/purpose from daily activities, and manager/employee relationships as critical to enhancing wellbeing. There is also a connection between personal and work opportunities

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## About the Authors



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to enhance one's wellbeing; for example, social and community wellbeing can be achieved in harmony with activities at work as opposed to exclusively reserved in one's private life.

The "five element" model aligned with the information gathered during the needs analysis as the career and learning team was identifying new resources to support the employee's desire to be better prepared to handle organizational change. The analysis process led to a series of resources being rolled out to help employees focus on and develop their wellbeing. These include:

- *Wellbeing @ Work Tool Kit* – A website with resources and tools, including a wellbeing assessment. In addition to a broad array of resources, there is a social community where employees can share ideas and experiences with developing their overall wellbeing.
- *A Better Way of Working* is a course offered in collaboration with The Energy Project. The Energy Project offers a scientifically grounded curriculum that energizes people and transforms companies by helping them to more skillfully manage energy rather than time. When we have more energy available to us – more capacity – we can get more done, in less time, at a higher level of quality, in a more sustainable way.
- *Resilience: Finding Your Inner Strength* – Developed to allow participants to learn practical coping strategies to manage challenging situations to develop a healthy stress cycle where one manages periods of stress with periods of rest and recovery.
- *More Time for You*® – A course offered in collaboration with Linkage, Inc. based on the work of Rosemary Tator and Alesia Latson provides time management practices to better handle the volume of email, workflow, and job responsibilities from a holistic view of work/life harmony.

Our initial efforts focused on developing coping skills for employees. However, focusing on just the individual is not enough. We recognize that the employee exists within a system, and attempting to only provide the employee with coping skills without changing the system will be a partial solution. Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter (2001) indicate that developing coping skills for individuals is a partial solution; leadership behaviors and organizational policies need to be changed in order to support an overall strategy of wellbeing.

In order to address the need to support leaders interested in changing the environmental conditions impacting employee wellbeing, a group learning/change process was designed called *The Wellbeing Journey*. The process involves assessing the current state of wellbeing through interviews

with the leadership team, and collecting wellbeing assessment data from all employees on the team. This analysis becomes the basis of the action research/learning model on which *The Wellbeing Journey* is founded. During the experience, the team is introduced to the five-element wellbeing model, they create their team definitions of each element that fits within their team context and, through joint analysis, identify areas of focus to enhance their wellbeing. These areas of focus are the key to action planning where the team decides on courses of action to change the environment to support wellbeing. Examples of simple win-oriented actions include: the leader no longer routinely sending weekend emails, having walking one-on-one meetings, including healthy foods at meetings, implementing flexible work arrangements, and connecting the team to the local community through volunteer activities. Participants engage in meaningful dialogue, build relationships, and have a team wellbeing strategy as a result of the experience. These intact team sessions inevitably end with the creation of a wellbeing team of champions to keep the momentum going. For example, one team that focused on wellbeing between 2013 and 2014 experienced a 30 percent improvement in their employee opinion survey scores related to balance between work and personal commitments.

The implementation of the wellbeing initiative was designed as a grassroots movement. Our common mantra was *build it and they will come*. And, so they did. In the past 36 months, 20 percent of the workforce has participated in a wellbeing learning solution. Similarly, some 3,500 users have accessed the resources on the *Wellbeing @ Work Tool Kit*. In the last few years, we have seen the concept of wellbeing go from "what is that?" to entire business units designing off-site meetings around the five elements of wellbeing, to teams developing wellbeing challenges to a grassroots sponsorship of campus wide mindfulness meditation sessions. During our journey, wellbeing has grown from being an interesting concept to becoming embedded into the organization's lexicon and recognition that improved employee wellbeing is good for the individual, the organization, and ultimately improves our ability to develop innovative therapies for patients with unmet medical needs. And, yes, our wellbeing journey continues!

