Why worker health? Why should I have to deal with one more non-business issue? And what more can be done about health, in any case?

Those are important questions. Managing Health at the Workplace: A Guidebook is designed to give you clear and compelling – and practical – answers. It is based on real experience in factories, on industry research and evidence, and on practical actions that work.

In your factory work you must deal with many concerns. Worker health and safety may not even be the highest priority of the many important things you do.

The Guidebook, in its eight sections, asks you to think differently about worker health:

1. You should view health as a fundamental business issue, not just about compliance. A healthy worker is a more productive, happier worker. This is a fact proven in factories worldwide.

2. You should view your health staff (doctors, nurses, medics) as a strategic resource to be used to promote good health, not just treat injuries. Too many factories waste the talents of their nurses, who can do much more with management support and encouragement.

3. You need to manage your health staff actively if you want to see a return on your investment in health. Most factories let their health staff work without any guidance, goals or performance indicators. This is a waste of your business investment in the health staff.

The goal is to help you achieve important business benefits by improving the health of your women and men workers. These benefits do not appear magically. They occur in workplaces where workers’ general health – in addition to safety – is taken seriously as a leadership interest and management function.

This Guidebook also supports the goals of the Levi Strauss & Co.’s Worker Well-being Initiative, particularly regarding Good Health & Family Wellbeing. And it follows the Worker Well-being approach in which factories take ownership of the change process.

Many factories do not recognize the importance of overall worker health to productivity – and to other business benefits. Many do not understand that the health of...
women workers requires special attention. And many do not realize that they can do a much better job of using the resources they already put into workplace health.

If you need convincing of the business case, Section 1 outlines the direct and indirect benefits of smart investments in worker health.

If you agree with the business case, but you have concerns about whether you really need to do anything more about health in your factory, see Section 3 and Section 4.

Section 3 talks about common concerns and misunderstandings – such as, the mistaken belief that your nurses and doctors know what do already and do not need to be managed. Section 4 explains the special role of your nurses – and how most factories do not take advantage of this role at the workplace.

If you want to do more, but wonder practically what you can do within reasonable costs and limited time and under heavy production pressures, the final four sections have many suggestions.

The simple answer is: “You can do a lot.”

The Guidebook recognizes that every factory is different. Each one will start at a different place depending on its size and resources and the capabilities of its health staff and management. The focus is on continuous improvement, not perfection or a compliance checklist.

Sections 5, 6, and 7 of the Guidebook explains what can or should be done in the three components of a well-managed workplace health function:

• Management systems in health
• Corporate leadership in health
• Health staff, services and activities

Each section provides a set of indicators and practical actions that you can choose to adopt based on your situation. And Section 8 suggests five action steps to help you get started.

You may well decide that the most important area to focus on is improving your health staff and services.

And that is important.

However, experience shows that you also need to address management systems and corporate leadership. You will not make significant improvements to your health services or maintain them if you do not actively manage your health staff. You also need to have the ongoing and public support by the CEO and managing director of the company.

Too that end, the Guidebook is part of a package of tools (described in Section 2) to give you more in-depth guidance and to enable you to take ownership of the factory’s health improvements.

• A Scorecard for self-assessment that provides suggested indicators that can be integrated into your factory’s goals or key performance indicators for health.

• A “How-to” Toolkit with eight modules that tells you how to implement specific improvement activities related to self-assessment and action planning, health staff, clinic services, budgeting and more.

You can access the Scorecard and “How-To” Toolkit online at: http://evidenceproject.popcouncil.org/resource/managing-health-at-the-workplace/

These tools are meant to answer what may be your biggest concern: you are not an expert in health so how can you manage the health staff. You do not need to be a health expert.

You need to have supervisory skills and apply the same business techniques you already use to set health goals and performance indicators, assign responsibility and hold people accountable, and track progress and reward success.

Workplaces with health programs that enjoy strong business benefits have several characteristics. Two key ones are that they “think big, start small, and act fast – one step at a time” and they “set short- and long-term objectives.”

The Guidebook and tools enable you to do both.

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