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# Achieving Wellness Goals Podcast Transcript

*Crystal Brandow:* Thank you for joining us for today's podcast, hosted by Policy Research Associates. This is Crystal Brandow, and I am here with Ryan Picarella, the President of The Wellness Council of America, or WELCOA. Today we're going to be talking about achieving wellness goals, and I'm very excited to dive into this topic with Ryan.

*Crystal Brandow:* This is the fourth part of a four-part series with WELCOA, The Wellness Council of America. WELCOA is a national organization, a membership organization, doing work all around the country on workplace wellness. So, we're delighted to have Ryan here to share his expertise with us. He's been in the health and wellness industry himself for over a decade, and he's been sharing some wonderful information with us throughout this podcast series. So, if you haven't listened to one through three, please feel free to check them out. We're going to dive into the fourth and final podcast with WELCOA and talk about achieving wellness goals. So, before we get started, Ryan, thanks so much for being here with us again.

**Ryan Picarella:** Thanks, Crystal. It's great to be here.

*Crystal Brandow:* So, when we talk about achieving wellness goals, a great place to start would be explaining what wellness is. So, from your perspective, can you share with the audience, what is wellness?

**Ryan Picarella:** Yeah, I love that question. It's actually a very personal question, and so it's one of those things you could ask 100 people what wellness means to them, and you'll probably get 100 different definitions. But for the purposes of me describing it today, what we wanted to do at WELCOA was to come up with a definition that we thought both related to the human experience and something that the workplace, every organization has control of, that they could help improve wellness or take it away in some cases.

**Ryan Picarella:** So what we did is we spent a couple of years working with top experts, and researchers, and clinicians, and behavior experts to say, "Okay, from WELCOA's perspective, what is wellness, and how can an organization look at it in a big, full-human way?" In our field and in the wellness world, I think for too long, we looked at wellness as so much in the physical domain that we really didn't look at wellness outside of that, that we looked at wellness as an overweight issue, as a cholesterol issue, as a blood pressure issue, a diabetes issue, and all of these are in the confines of a medical model.

**Ryan Picarella:** We wanted to really branch out from that because I think that all of those things are symptomatic of a much bigger thing. So, we looked at wellness and we defined it by seven distinct criteria, and that's health, meaning, safety, connection, achievement,

growth, and resiliency. Again, all of these things, and this is in the context of the workplace. I'll briefly go over what each of those are and we can go on to the next question, but health is the traditional sense that, are we physically healthy? Do we have the energy to get up? Are we eating the right foods? Are we moving around enough? All of these things are important to living an overall healthy life.

**Ryan Picarella:** You know, meaning. Meaning and purpose in work, that all of us want to show up and feel like we are leveraging our gifts, our talents, that what we're doing is contributing to something more important. As you and I have talked about before Crystal, that this is really being driven hard by millennials in the workplace, wanting to feel like that their work has a sense of meaning and that they have a sense of purpose in the work that they do is so important.

**Ryan Picarella:** Safety. Do you show up and feel free of harm or danger, and that you're in a safe working environment and condition? Again, this is a very basic, at the foundational of the pyramid again, but incredibly important to make sure that people do feel safe every day from injury or from emotional ... it could be emotional harm as well. Connection. I've said this a couple times, that one of the most important things that organizations can do, and that we as humans really need in our lives, is a sense of human connection. So how can organizations facilitate more connection in the workplace.

**Ryan Picarella:** Achievement. Do I feel like I have growth opportunities? Am I going to move up? Do I see a clear line of sight between what I'm doing now and where I want to be, down the road in my career? Do I feel like my company supports me in achieving both my personal and professional goals, and potentially wellness goals as part of that? Growth is very much related to that, as well, that we all have this need, in our jobs and in our lives, to continue to move ahead, to set goals, and to feel like we have opportunities to move forward. Then resiliency, we talked a lot about that, but do we have the capacity, do we have the tools, and do we have the foundation to really be resilient?

**Ryan Picarella:** So those are the seven things, and for anybody that wants more of that, these are all free resources that we have, but that's really the foundation of how we look at wellness at WELCOA and help organizations understand how they can take each one of those seven and build those into their strategies to help their employees be well.

*Crystal Bradow:* Thank you so much for that. At Policy Research Associates, we very much use the eight dimensions of wellness, which were developed by Dr. Peggy Swarbrick, who's at Collaborative Support Programs of New Jersey. I'll just list the eight quickly without diving into what they are, but they're emotional, social, occupational, physical, intellectual, spiritual, environmental, and financial. So, these are the eight dimensions of wellness that a lot of our work revolves around. We have different fact sheets on them, tips for providers to help work with individuals with mental health conditions, or anyone for that matter, work on any of these areas of wellness.

*Crystal Bradow:* So, I love the seven domains that you just discussed because they can definitely be mapped to these different dimensions of wellness, looking at resiliency in all these areas, safety in all these areas, achievement in all these areas. So, I think that's a wonderful framework that you all decided to go with, and distribute materials about, and

have available to people, because it's a wonderful lens to look at wellness through. Thank you so much for sharing that.

**Ryan Picarella:** Yeah. Like you said, I think there's certainly a lot of overlap, which is a good thing, between the eight that you described and ours as well, so that's spot on.

*Crystal Brandow:* So now that we have some framework for understanding what wellness is, can you share how many employees around the country are actively trying to achieve some sort of wellness goal? Is there a way of knowing this? Are you familiar with that?

**Ryan Picarella:** Yeah, so it's an interesting question. I would say pretty much every single employee is trying to achieve some sort of wellness goal. So what's interesting is that, in the field of wellness, we kind of got stuck into this extrinsic reward model, that we felt like we needed to pay people a sum of money to achieve a wellness goal that, a lot of times, organizations set for them. So, if you had a BMI over 25, that we're going to pay you to a lower that BMI and get it within whatever the organization feels like is the right amount.

**Ryan Picarella:** So, what's interesting is that most people, and we've surveyed thousands of people over the years, are trying to achieve a wellness goal, and everybody's is different. It could be, I'm trying to walk a 5k. I'm trying to get out of financial debt. I'm trying to really get into a job that connects with my sense of meaning and purpose. So we're talking about things that people want to do, but when you ask them, "How many of you have been successful in achieving your wellness goal?" it's interesting that most people say that they have not been successful. That by and large, people really aren't, for a host of reasons.

**Ryan Picarella:** So, what's interesting is that people do want to wake up and feel good every day, right? I mean, we want to wake up and have energy. We want to wake up and, whether we have children, or we have pets, or whatever we want to do, or we have a hobby that we enjoy doing, riding bikes, or gardening, or anything, that these are all wellness things, and that we do want to wake up and feel the best that we can every single day.

**Ryan Picarella:** So, I'm not sure at what point, why we thought we needed to pay people large sums of money to be well. So that's just, that's absolutely wrong. So I think what organizations need to understand is that people do want to be well, and that the goal for all of this is to move away from extrinsic rewards and to really tapping into people's intrinsic desires to be well, and not just that, but to be their version of well, to achieve the goals that they have for themselves, and everybody's is different. Again, wellness is a very deeply personal thing, and so allowing people to self-select into those things that really matches with their life, and their dreams, and their desires, and then achieve some success through that.

**Ryan Picarella:** For the academics that are listening to this, there's a great theory that you'll see woven into a lot of our work at WELCOA, it's called self-determination theory. It really is about human behavior and motivation. What is it that can increase motivation for certain activities? Part of what we're seeing is there's this thing called self-justification effect, that if you otherwise incent people for something that is naturally intrinsic to them,

that over time, that intrinsic desire goes down because they would have done it naturally. So, it makes perfect sense.

**Ryan Picarella:** So what I encourage organizations to do is to begin to understand what are the things, what are people's individual goals, not set goals for them, and then begin to create the conditions for them to achieve those on their own, autonomously.

*Crystal Brandow:* That's great. Thank you so much. So, I want to get into what organizations do to help their employees achieve their wellness goals. But before talking about other organizations, I wonder, Ryan, if you can talk a little bit about what WELCOA offers to employees and what WELCOA does to help those that work with you achieve their wellness goals.

**Ryan Picarella:** Yeah, that's a great question. Like we did this before, I'll answer again from a small business perspective, what we do, and then I think we can talk more if you'd like about what I see in larger organizations that have access to more resources. So, a couple of things, and I think for us, I think the most important in a small business is flexibility. So, flexibility, and that can meet a bunch of things. So, if you need flexibility with childcare, things like that, and having alternative work schedules, we certainly do that.

**Ryan Picarella:** We have some of our employees that, we've got one employee that works in Hawaii, for example. So, I think that we are really flexible. There's obviously, we are a business and we are an 8:00 to 5:00 business, and so it works better with some jobs than others, but I think if, you know, understanding what an employee's needs are, then we can help schedule around those things.

**Ryan Picarella:** So, if you have a particular yoga, or spin, or other type of class that you like to go to during the day, allowing our employees to do that. We have an on-site fitness center here, so it makes it easy for them to do that. But I think flexibility and scheduling to allow people to make the time to do those things is particularly important.

**Ryan Picarella:** I mean, I think, as an organization, going back to the seven criteria that I mentioned, I think we focus on all of those. So, from a health perspective, we offer great benefits to our employees. I think that that's incredibly important, making sure everybody has access to care, the coverage that they need, it's affordable for everybody, and that we don't have levers to make them pay more for certain things, that it is something that they can have access to if they need to go to the doctor. We have some on-site screenings that we'll offer here, but that's really important for that access to care piece.

**Ryan Picarella:** Meaning. For us, I think it's pretty simple, because we, being The Wellness Council of America, being a 501(c)(3), I think we all have a deep meaning and sense of purpose in our work, because I think that organizations are the key to turning around the healthcare problem that we have in this country. So, we all work tirelessly, but it's great work because I think that it's, we're doing our part to help make the world a better place. So, we share stories and testimonials, and if someone gets a kudos, it's a team kudo. So, we really bring that meaning to the forefront. Every Friday we have weekly highlights, and so if it's an email, or a card, or a letter, a personal thing, we share that with the team so that we can celebrate that meaning and purpose with everybody.

**Ryan Picarella:** The safety piece. I think that, again, we work in an office environment, and we even do some trainings around safety. But if it's little stuff, like we live in Omaha and I know you're in New York, and so if it's a really snowy day, don't risk coming to the office. Bring your computer, let's figure out ways to work collaboratively, and have teams, and figure out what are the right policies to support people, to make sure that they're safe, both free of harm, and that they're not putting themselves at risk unnecessarily.

**Ryan Picarella:** Connection. This is important for us. Again, on Fridays, after our highlights, we have a happy hour every Friday that we'll share stories, personally, we do fun games, icebreakers. Again, the idea is that we are always finding ways to connect with each other, and to continue to grow and develop our team internally.

**Ryan Picarella:** Achievement. Every year, what do you want? What do you want to grow into? That could be, "Look, I want to be a developer and right now I'm this," and so finding ways, educational opportunities to either learn a new trade, learn a new skill, but to constantly feel like people are getting that part of their job fed. Again, whether that contributes to their current job or maybe something that they want to develop in the future, is that, having those conversations and knowing what their goals are. Do you want to be a leader in the company, and if you do, let's talk about what that looks like and the path forward with that.

**Ryan Picarella:** Then resiliency. I think this goes back a little bit to having that flexibility. We've brought chair massages in here. We teach resiliency and stress management. So, we will go over this with our teams, as well, so building that capacity into what we do is inherent. I mean, we are a wellness company, and so part of what we want to do is eat our own cooking and walk the talk if you will. So, all of these things, we make a concerted effort to do at the organization.

**Ryan Picarella:** Then basic stuff, like we have filtered water. We have all standing workstations. We have a standing boardroom station. We encourage walking meetings. I mean, all of these things are things that you mentioned that you all do, which is fantastic to hear, but we incorporate, because the idea here is that it's not a thing anymore when it's what you are. When it's who you are, and what you do, and it's part of your culture, it's just, it's kind of inherent in the DNA, and that's really what my goal is for WELCOA and what I encourage other organizations to really take advantage of, as well.

*Crystal Brandow:* I love that comment about it being inherent in the DNA. That's something that we talk about a lot in our mentally healthy workplace work, that it's not necessarily a matter of implementing a program or a practice, but it is the thing. It is what you do. It is part of the culture, the operation, how the organization functions.

*Crystal Brandow:* Again, in our first podcast we talked about different things organizations can do to try to fill that gap in terms of the social determinants of health, and we talked about small organizations and large organizations. I think that's really important, just as a reminder, that small organizations can do this. So, PRA is a small business, and some of the things that you mentioned, we also have here.

*Crystal Brandow:* We have professional development opportunities so that if someone does want to excel in a certain area of their work, they can get paid to go to conferences,

and have that trip paid for and registration paid for, to go dive in, and learn, and network, and be with other people with similar interests, to help enhance their expertise, to help explore different areas, and to help show up at work with that additional knowledge and additional support.

*Crystal Brandow:* So I won't list all of the different things that we do here at PRA, but it's just wonderful to hear what small organizations, small businesses, can do to help support wellness for their employees, that you don't have to be a large organization with a massive budget to be able to accomplish these things.

**Ryan Picarella:** Yeah, no, you're exactly right. That's one of the things that I think is so important, that wellness, actually, it doesn't have to be expensive. I would say some of the best, quote, unquote, "wellness programs", we don't really like to use the word program, I've seen, didn't offer any incentives at all, and didn't have to have on-site fitness facilities, any of that, that it doesn't cost anything to genuinely care in an authentic way for your employees. It just doesn't, it's free.

**Ryan Picarella:** So, there's a lot that that can be done without feeling like...and actually, in some cases I've seen organizations that may offer too much. They have a crazy point structure, and they have a lot of incentives, and there's a lot of hoops that you have to jump through, and it's confusing. In some cases, it actually creates more stress for people because they don't know exactly what's expected of them. There might be trust issues with data issues and things like that.

**Ryan Picarella:** So, it absolutely does not have to cost anything at all. So, I think that that's a really important point for people to bring home, regardless of what size company you work for.

*Crystal Brandow:* Yeah, and to that point of things not having to cost anything, going back to one of the first items that you discussed, the flexibility, that's such a huge piece and costs absolutely nothing to an organization to provide that. So we have flex scheduling here at PRA, and people use it to take care of whatever they need to take care of, whether that is going to that yoga class or spinning class, like you mentioned, or a doctor's appointment, or just wrapping up the day and coming in fresh the next day, and moving those hours to the next day, so that they can just get home or wherever they need to be.

*Crystal Brandow:* So that flexibility, again, costs nothing and helps to instill a sense that the organization cares about you and understands, like we've talked about in previous podcasts, that you bring your whole self to work. Sometimes that whole self wants a longer lunch period or whatever that is, and then being able to flex that time, and still get the work done, and shift things around to accommodate personal schedules. So, you started with that, and I think that's a great piece to emphasize because it costs nothing and it means so much to employees.

**Ryan Picarella:** Yeah, absolutely, and I think the last thing I'd say is, I've heard and seen a CEO, a CEO that I admire, say, "Lead loudly." That it's important for all the leaders, and everybody out there that people are looking at as a role model, that, do that. If you've got a kid's recital that you want to go to, don't sneak out the back door. That make it known,

that make it be okay for people to acknowledge those important things in their life and to do that.

**Ryan Picarella:** So I encourage everybody, and again, this is not about titles or expanding controls, it's lead loudly, and I think that that's really an important point, that we can all play a role in doing that so people feel comfortable and safe when it's time for them to take advantage of the same thing.

*Crystal Brandow:* That's great. Thank you so much. So, before we wrap up this topic, you mentioned some of the different pieces of the WELCOA culture that support employee wellness. Is there anything else that you'd want to add about what organizations can do to help their employees achieve their wellness goals and have better success with that?

**Ryan Picarella:** No. I mean, I think that, the advice that I give a lot of organizations is you've got to ask first. That seems really obvious, Crystal, but I tell you, so many of them, they don't, or that you might have a corporate office or a head office that assumes they know what everybody else wants. You might have different remote locations. You know what, surveys are great, but sometimes just sitting around a table and finding ways to really collect that feedback, and to see what people want, can be a really powerful exercise.

**Ryan Picarella:** The only caveat to that, I would say, is be prepared to act, that just simply asking people and never taking action isn't a good thing at all but being ready to start doing something about it. But there's been so many times when I've gone in on a consulting project with organizations, and you get out there, and then you take the feedback back to the management, and they just can't believe what they've heard. It's not that they're just telling me something they wouldn't share with them.

**Ryan Picarella:** So, I think just figuring out what employees need and beginning to create a plan to address that. I don't think that there's any obligation, and it certainly doesn't have to be expensive, knowing that everybody can't afford standing desks, or can't afford some of these things, and that's fine. The most important thing that I'll end on is finding ways to create caring cultures and caring environments, because the impact that that will have on employees' lives, and ultimately the organization's success, is really astounding.

*Crystal Brandow:* Excellent. Thank you so much for adding that, and I think that's a wonderful closing point for today's conversation. Again, thank you to everyone who's listening to this, as well. We hope you're getting some useful information from this conversation with Ryan, and again, WELCOA is a resource to access various tools and products to support mental health in the workplace, and to support workplace wellness. Their website will be in the description of this podcast.

*Crystal Brandow:* Policy Research Associates also has a number of resources that can help spark conversation, help move things along, and help create some ideas regarding some of the things that we've been talking about. So, again, this is the final podcast in this four-part series that we have done with Ryan Picarella, the President of The Wellness Council of America. We're so grateful for your time and for the conversations that we've had and thank you so much for working with.

**Ryan Picarella:** Yeah. Thanks, Crystal. I really appreciate being here.