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# Well-being in the workplace

Presented by Hugh Robertson, TUC

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# The TUC Great Jobs Agenda

Giving every worker the opportunity to progress



# What is well-being?

- **OED** – The state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy.
- The Government now measure it – “The aim is to provide a fuller picture of how society is doing by supplementing existing economic, social and environmental measures.”
- ...and the NHS website lets you measure your own.
- The same as wellness and “absence of physical and mental illness.

But most of all it is a marketing tool

Here are a few of my favourites



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# TWININGS

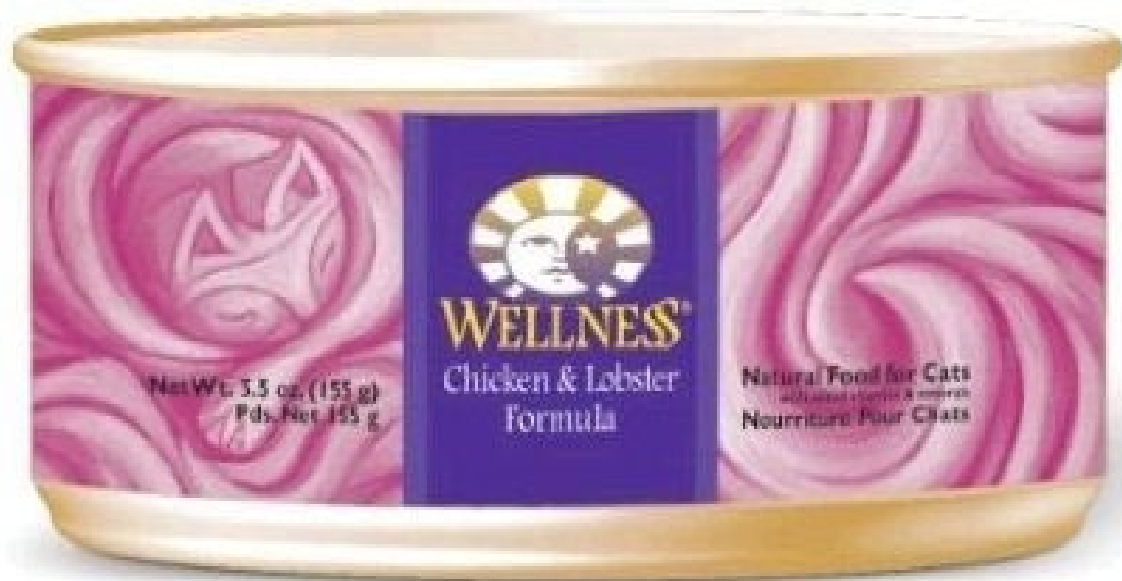
WELL BEING  
TEA GIFT BAGS

SPECIAL  
OFFERS



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# Well-being in the workplace

- In US, companies spend \$6 billion a year on wellness/well-being programmes.
- Well-being is growing in popularity in UK, sometimes general programmes round health checks, smoking and exercise but often related to stress “management”.
- Is this a good or a bad trend?



## Why is Well-being being introduced?

Main reason is because of stress.  
Responsible for over a third of all work-related sickness absence and effects over half a million workers.

# Stress

- One of the biggest causes of work-related sickness absence
- Closely linked to MSDs
- Clear evidence of how it can be reduced – HSE Stress Management Standards
- Their use has fallen in last five years.
- Been replaced with other initiatives
  - Awareness-training
  - Coping strategies (CBT, mindfulness etc.)
  - Resilience training
  - Even on-site massage, reflexology etc.
- All concentrating on the worker – not the workplace
- No evidence that they can reduce **development** of stress-related illness
- All easier for the employer than prevention

# Using the workplace to promote good health

- Best way of improving well-being in the workplace is by changing how work is organised.
- Government and employers put emphasise on individuals. They say workers should change their lifestyle by exercising more or eating better.
- How likely is this when a worker is juggling long hours domestic responsibilities and no access to decent food?

# Employers well-being initiatives

We should not always be negative about it these. They have a place and can be useful.

Workplace is responsible for a lot of ill-health

- Workers like well-being initiatives!
- Not a solution but unions should be involved, but without illusions.
- Must be seen as an add-on – not an alternative to prevention.
- Can even be a recruitment tool.

***But never forget that if the workplace is making people ill, the best solution is to change the workplace.***

# What do they entail?

- ✓ Exercise classes at lunchtime
- ✓ Access to a gym
- ✓ Cycling
- ✓ Sponsorship of sports and social activities
- ✓ Provision of showers
- ✓ Healthy eating
- ✓ Smoking cessation programmes
- ✓ Employee Assistance Programmes

# There are downsides

- Often makes workers feel uncomfortable around issues over weight etc. or are pressurised.
- Sports and social events are often male-orientated or around alcohol.
- Can be a cost to the worker (gym deals, tax etc.)
- More likely to be targeted at middle or higher grade workers.
- Where is the evidence? - Must be monitoring and evaluation.



# Union involvement

- Employers use “well-being” as a way of cutting out unions.
  - Well-being ambassadors
  - Well-being committees
- Can cut across union role.
- Unions can run their own well-being campaigns but should ensure that they are linking them with prevention and also recruitment.

# TUC well-being guide

*"Work and Well-being"*

Available on the TUC website





## Conclusions

For unions our priority is prevention of illness, respect at work, security and decent pay.

These are what will lead to “well-being” -- Not on-site massage.

But unions do have a role in supporting workers collectively improve their health, and if that means supporting employers initiatives, and they make a difference – we should.



The logo consists of the letters 'TUC' in a bold, sans-serif font. Each letter is rendered with a 3D effect, appearing to be made of a translucent material with a white-to-purple gradient. The letters are slightly offset from each other, creating a sense of depth and movement.

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