

# Ten Ways To Build A Healthy Organization



by Sara S. Grigsby

## **A Healthy Systems How-To Guide**

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# Ten Ways to Build a Healthy Organization

By Sara Grigsby and Laura Michelle

The potential for health and vitality, in individuals and organizations, is always present, waiting to be unleashed. “Unhealthy workplaces” with out-of-balance cultures are, in fact, full of creative potential. To remove the blocks to vitality, and re-focus the flow of creativity released in the process, start with a clear understanding of what you and your organization are aiming for --- health.

Health means wholeness. It is recognized as integration, flow, focus, and clarity. We know that in organizations, as in ourselves, health is more than the absence of an obvious problem or disease. Health is that invisible quality or radiance, in and around us, expressed as vitality, presence and peace.

For individual health, we need flow in our circulation, freedom in our respiration and a strong energetic pulse. We seek an integration of body, mind and spirit. We want our focus to be productive, purposeful and clear. In our workplace, we need flow in our processes and information exchange; integration expressed through connections, productive relationships and coordination of our efforts; clarity in seeking our vision; focus in the desired direction. Health facilitates effective communication, supports conscious change, fosters a match between the organization and its workforce, and supports efficient and effective work efforts.

Here are ten important ways to build integration, flow, focus and clarity into your organization -- ways that can profoundly impact the health of your workplace and its employees. Share these Ten Ways with other members of your organization. Begin with the NEXT STEPS. As you create these new pathways for health in your organization, you will discover the potential you unleash.

## 1. Create a Healthy Vision

If you want a healthy organization, ultimately you need to hold your own unique vision of it. To start, you may need to benchmark what health looks like in other organizations. Discussions about who you are and what health may look like at your company will clarify how best to express your organizational life force.

We've gotten you started. Now provide some opportunities for everyone to get on board with a common understanding and some shared language to support your vision.

### NEXT STEPS:

- Define Health as it relates to your company and create and maintain a glossary of relevant terms. Ask for interested volunteers. Represent the system (stakeholders) in the discussion.
- Create a vision map.
- Provide formal and informal venues for on-going reflection.

## 2. Make Wellness a Competitive Strategy

Get wellness out of the back room. Identify wellness as an agent of corporate capacity. When defining company values, don't be shy! Include wellness. As you plan, overlay your wellness strategy across your goals, objectives and resource allocations. Implement tangible wellness initiatives and align them with other corporate targets. Assess and adjust, but don't take a short-term perspective -- stick with this strategy for longer-term payoff.

## NEXT STEPS:

- Conduct a broad-scope wellness assessment to identify wellness issues, areas of improvement and to create a portrait of the “health” of your company.
- Use the results in your strategic planning.

## 3. Clarify Your Company’s Key Processes

Your key or core processes represent the primary paths of vitality in the workplace. Identify and then create a flow chart of your key processes. Remove bottlenecks. Re-design them for flexibility, flow and integration with the broader organization. Create links to all stakeholders of the process. Involve stakeholders and share the results -- so connections are made, relationships are strengthened, and responsibilities shared. Your effort will dismantle the compartmentalization of work that results a “that’s not my job” mentality.

## NEXT STEPS:

- For each key process, gather a group of stakeholders. Evaluate the processes. Is it working? What are the goals of this process?
- Have the same group redesign the process to meet organizational as well as process goals.

## 4. Design a Healthy Work Culture

On the surface, signs of corporate culture are simple and obvious -- logos, celebrations, décor -- but there are tacit company beliefs that are less obvious and yet more significant and persistent. “We always do it this way.” “They’ll fire me if I don’t...” These invisible “truths” are the result of our experiences and our collective history of successes or failures. And these beliefs tend to persist because they are rarely discussed openly and questioned. Many times these hidden beliefs are limited or false.

Thus, when a company publishes its values and the values don’t align with the history and invisible beliefs of the workplace, people don’t buy-in or commit. By evaluating your organization’s underlying beliefs, you may discover assumptions that are blocking the health of your organization. Time spent surfacing and releasing non-productive assumptions will improve flow and lead to vitality. Reinforce “desired” beliefs with appropriate policies, celebrations and modeling.

## NEXT STEP:

- Look at the artifacts, values and deeply held assumptions of your company. Are these “levels” of culture aligned and elegant? Do they support a healthy environment?
- Re-align your company’s beliefs with your wellness strategy.

## 5. Tear Down the Walls Between Wellness, Risk Management and Quality Control

Structure has a way of reinforcing itself and turning simple walls into complex barriers. Although departments such as Benefits, Risk Management, Human Resources, Wellness and Quality Control share organizational goals, their discrete goals may be compartmentalizing, restricting your company's health. Blocks in communication, planning and resource allocation, for example, can keep an organization from thinking collaboratively and finding elegant solutions. Keep department pathways open so that relationships don't get blocked.

### NEXT STEP:

- Reorganize departments for a healthy fit.
- If you can't reorganize, then bring these departments together regularly and formulate a joint, integrated strategic plan.

## 6. Formally acknowledge the Link Between Individual Well Being and Organizational Health

Healthy employees are efficient, reliable, and productive. Healthy organizations are built by healthy employees. Legitimize this relationship by promoting individual health as vital to the success of the company. There are many ways to make this connection: professional development of staff, healthy benefits, leadership coaching and mentoring or promoting inclusion and sharing of information. Support individuals by connecting them to the larger vision of the organization. Find out what employee's value and provide programs and benefits based on these values.

### NEXT STEPS:

- Create success factors for the organization tied to individual results.
- Organize a company wellness fair.
- Write an article on individual wellness for the company newsletter.
- Offer a practice class such as yoga or aerobics before and after work.

## 7. Keep Training Relevant and Current

Is "canned" training relevant to daily work? Only insofar as it is integrated with the goals and needs of the participants. Training can be a powerful force for learning, and learning is the integrating mechanism by which individuals promote the success of the organization. If it is boxed and distilled and reduced to disintegrated information, training can feel like a waste of time and can actually confuse rather than clarify.

## NEXT STEPS:

- Include as many experiential exercises as possible in your training programs.
- Design training that promotes flow, integration focus and clarity regardless of subject matter.
- Encourage everyone in your organization to coach and mentor one another on the job.
- Hire outside trainers who customize their materials to meet your needs.

## 8. Endorse Healthy and Relevant Social Networks e.g. Wellness or Sustainability

There are people in every organization eager to improve the company's vitality. Endorse these committed individuals as a network dedicated to keeping communication and flow alive. These networks function as a liaison between employees and managers, can organize events, mentor the organization through major changes and challenges, and represent the voice of individual employees to executive leadership. In order to utilize corporate intranets and meeting rooms, interested groups should be required to apply to be endorsed. Endorsement documents might include a Charter, membership requirements, Mission statement and a Business Case Statement.

## NEXT STEPS:

- Assign a point person to pilot networks and make recommendations to executives.
- Research Social Networks and find out how they may be of use to your organization.
- Survey your staff to find individuals interested in working on a Corporate Wellness Team, a Sustainability Network or other focus areas that would promote health as you define it.
- Have an initial meeting with these individuals to discuss their goals and ideas.

## 9. Reinforce Health in Your Environment

It's hard for people to work well in sick environments. From ergonomically correct chairs, to clean airflow, your organization's physical environment impacts productivity. Keep equipment up to date and safe. Encourage informal movement, such as on-the-job stretching and breath awareness. Design your floor plans and cubicles with flow in mind. Provide healthy food items and special diet alternatives in your company's cafeteria and during meetings.

## NEXT STEPS:

- Form a cross-functional "Work Environment" team with representatives from Safety, Maintenance, HR and Wellness.

- Designate a relaxation space for employees to retreat to during breaks.
- Distribute “Breathe” reminder stickers for staff workstations.
- Analyze your health care costs and workforce health and disability statistics.

## 10. Make Diversity Safe

Diversity in any ecosystem represents hardiness, stability and health. Diversity helps systems to survive internal and external hardships. Healthy organizations are not confused by nor do they try to suppress differences. What may seem destructive from one perspective may be viewed as constructive from another. With perspective in mind, healthy organizations re-frame and celebrate contradictions as opportunities for growth.

Diversity assumes difference is a positive quality. It believes that better ideas and better solutions come from an exploration of difference. Don't reduce diversity to the simple fulfilling of quotas. Social justice and fairness is critical, but racial, cultural or gender formulas without an underlying appreciation of difference often result, not in appreciation of differences, but resentment and suppression of viewpoints. Real diversity programs work to remove fear and replace it with openness, exploration and a willingness to learn. Leaders need to model openness and tolerance. Employees will then feel safe being different and sharing opinions.

### NEXT STEPS:

- Talk about diversity as it relates to your company and approach it from a behavioral and outcomes perspective e.g. respect, listening and the variety of approaches it lends to work and problem solving.
- Weave it into the framework of your company's strategies and performance management system.
- Grow in-house experts in collaboration and facilitation and use these employees as coaches and models.



## Other Healthy Systems How-To Guides

You have completed the How-To Guide. Each Guide and Series fits into our leadership and management model that is shown above. The table below is a 2-D representation of the graphic above. It provides a sampling of the topics covered in other **Healthy Systems products**.

<u>Content</u>	<u>Process - steps</u>	<u>Principles - guidance</u>	<u>Person - roles</u>
Identity and Direction	Strategic purposing and planning	If you don't know where you are going, any road will do. Identity is self-organizing.	Executive Leadership Leaders at all levels Management
Process Design	Redesign and improvement	Processes are designed to serve the goals and strategies of the organization.	Operations Managers Quality Improvement Teams
Project Management	Defining to implementing	Cross boundaries judiciously	Project Managers Teams
Meetings	Start up to wrap up	First Understanding and then agreement	Facilitators Teams
Relationships and Teams	Communication, collaboration and conflict resolution	Relationships are the most personal and meaningful way to practice integration and alignment.	All people, all positions
Culture	Aligning through story telling, surfacing assumptions, problem solving and celebrating	Surface assumptions Define Values Create heroes that define your ideal culture.	All people, all positions
Corporate Wellness	Including a human resource goal in your strategic plan.	There is a reciprocal relationship between the health of the organization and the well being of the people who work there.	All people, all positions
Design and Change	Involving, designing, redesigning, diffusing	Structure dictates functioning	Organization Development Leaders at all levels Managers
Healthy Organization	Integrating all the processes above	Focus on flow, integration and alignment. Release tensions and bottlenecks.	Organization Development Leaders at all levels Managers



## About Healthy Systems

Healthy Systems is a management consulting firm that aligns and integrates the people, processes and strategic directions of an organization—for the health of the organization and the well-being of its employees.

We train and coach organizations in the dynamics of complex systems and in the skills, tools and strategies for creating and sustaining a vital and balanced workplace.

Healthy Systems works in collaboration with organization development and training specialists to meet your specific and customized needs.

Healthy Systems provides consulting and customized training for organizational effectiveness, focusing on methods to create and sustain vitality and relevance in meetings, projects, processes, planning and interpersonal relationships.



## About Sara Grigsby

Sara Grigsby has worked professionally as an organizational development consultant, trainer and facilitator since 1985, providing project-based management, coaching, training and event facilitation services to a variety of corporate, public agency and health care clients.

Sara is the founder of Healthy Systems and its lead consultant.

She has been writing about Organization Development and creating tools to help others create healthy systems since 1995. Her CV is available online: <http://healthysystems.net/htmls/about/sara.html>

Sara is currently Senior Organization Development consultant for NWNatural in Portland, Oregon. She lives in Corbett, Oregon at Benfield Farm <<http://www.benfieldfarm.com>>.