





WHY YOUR CAMPUS WELLNESS MESSAGING REALLY MATTERS

by Rob Rideout

As a graduate of a private liberal arts university (Whitworth—Class of 67'), it is a pleasure for me to offer the following brief insights on a subject which I have dedicated my entire professional career to promoting—namely improving population health, community fitness standards, and encouraging sound wellness behaviors with a primary emphasis on regular exercise, good nutrition, and a positive philosophy of life, based on service to others, in order

to empower them to set their own personal health and fitness goals so they too can realize realistic and reliable results. In an information age where outcomes really do matter, your wellness messaging is essential and here is the Why: America is in the throes of a national health crisis which, if not abated soon, could bankrupt our nation. The good news however is that we still have time to make significant lifestyle changes to reverse this dangerous trend.



Exercise is Medicine

In my opinion, student health and recreation centers are clearly two of the best places to provide your wellness messaging for those who are willing to listen. In fact, U-REC centers are not unlike many other fitness/wellness facilities even though they are considered to be non-profit entities like the Y.M.C.A., J.C.C., and community Parks & Recreation Districts which are all starting to use more effective wellness messaging. The reason is quite simple; the general public is buying into a variety of wellness programs and paying more attention to the emerging “Exercise is Medicine” objectives set forth by the American College of Sports Medicine, Medical Fitness Association, Medical Wellness Association, National Wellness Institute and other organizations such as the renowned Cooper Aerobics Research Institute in Dallas, Texas.

As an important historical side note, it was Kenneth Cooper, M.D. (AKA “Father of Aerobics”) who, early in his career, bucked the existing medical establishment and is often credited with taking the first major steps away from a flawed and highly expensive “treatment of disease” oriented medical model to a less costly preventative healthcare approach based on sound medical-fitness screenings and followed up with a “wellness strategy” emphasizing better lifestyle choices (AKA behavioral changes) which

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has consistently resulted in improved health outcomes. This “evidenced based” methodology of evaluation, tracking of results, and reporting them in an informed wellness context has contributed greatly to the continuing popularity and growth of wellness programs to this day. This phenomenon is often referred to as the “Cooperization” process or effect.

Promoting Safety and Health

Universities themselves are uniquely positioned to capitalize on this shift toward wellness programs for several reasons. First they are institutions of higher learning committed to promoting the safety, health, and general wellbeing of all their students, employees, and members of their local communities. Secondly, wellness messaging requires an educational focus along with valid measurement tools to establish the effectiveness and impact of a variety of healthy behaviors and activities which is a primary goal of universities in the first place. Thirdly, many of the more significant initiatives to improve public health have been the result of research studies conducted with students, faculty and, in many instances, the

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general public. The famous Boston University Framingham Study (1948) and ongoing work of the Stanford Prevention Research Center (1983-HIP) are just two excellent examples of how private universities have and are still contributing to our better understanding and acceptance of the truth that prevention of chronic disease is a better way to go than those costly treatment options after the fact.

Being Well Means Living Well

As a result of this type of “evidence based” research, health and fitness professionals today recognize that “being well” is not merely the

absence of disease; rather it is really all about “living well” that matters most. They also recognize that wellness is a very broad term and there are several critical components to personal wellness which are often illustrated by some type of creative “Wellness Wheel” and this concept is not new. The National Wellness Institute, which I referenced above, was co-founded by Bill Hettler, M.D. on the campus of the University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point. He developed and copyrighted “The Six Dimensions of Wellness” back in 1976. This may have been the first “Wellness Wheel” for all I know, and their wellness messaging is

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stronger than ever. As a matter of fact, The National Wellness Institute is holding its 44th Annual Wellness Conference in Florida October 1-3, 2019, and I suspect that some of you who are reading this article are planning to participate because it has historically been one of the most well attended conferences in the world on health and wellness related topics.

Wellness Wheels

I would also encourage you to do an internet search on “wellness wheels” because there are literally hundreds of great examples to consider if you are interested in creating one that best suits your wellness messaging and specific program offerings. You will note that some are very simple, others more detailed, and many of them have been produced by other private universities. There is little doubt in my mind that a simple “wellness wheel” graphic can be a very powerful teaching and motivational tool in the hands of your staff members who are tasked with helping individuals on your campus to achieve their wellness objectives. A customized “wellness wheel” branding will make a positive impact on all those participating in your wellness programs.

Additionally, the growing interest in wellness also helps to explain why Health and Physical Education, Nutrition, Kinesiology, Sports Science, Athletic Training, Wellness Coaching, Physical Therapy, Personal Training Certification and other similar courses are becoming some of the more popular areas of study. In fact

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most students are enrolling in some sort of “healthy living” class to fulfill one or more of their general education requirements, and this is ultimately heading us all in the right direction. These very same programs are providing well trained and highly motivated students who are eager to join your wellness team to assist you in realizing your own Campus Wellness Vision. They can also help to prepare your students for a rewarding career in an expanding wellness and healthcare industry which clearly needs them with our aging population and other demographic factors such as the rise in obesity, type II diabetes, hypertension, and the list of chronic, yet preventable, diseases goes on. If we are to impact the Healthcare Crisis in America and drive down medical costs, we are going to need many more “Wellness Warriors” on the front lines than we currently have dealing with these serious health conditions.

Embracing Wellness Culture

I have personally been in the wellness business for over forty-five years and visited many college and university campuses. I have definitely witnessed a very positive shift away from the stereotypical unhealthy student practices of the past; you know the “cool to smoke, take drugs, and get wasted on the weekends” type behaviors. As students are becoming better informed they are moving toward a wellness-oriented culture because they see it in their own best interest to remain healthy, physically fit, more productive, and less stressed out during the day. There is probably

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nothing better for a student to do on a weekly basis than to get at least four to five hours of regular exercise at the U-REC center or having some fun with their peers in the great outdoors. Group exercise classes have really caught on as well and this provides a healthy socialization process which brings students together in a positive environment. Your wellness messaging can help them to meet on common ground regardless of their diverse backgrounds. Shared wellness objectives can also create a certain type of empathy or connectedness which can help to overcome a lot of socioeconomic, political and ethnic differences which can be very divisive in nature.

An All-Inclusive Value Proposition

Of course not all students have a wellness mindset but we are making marked progress, and there is no better group to promote healthy lifestyles with than our younger generation and future leaders. They will be very receptive to our wellness messaging as long as we present an all-inclusive value proposition framed in very positive terms—free of guilt or shaming because some students do not feel that they are on par with others in

terms of their general health or fitness. However, these are precisely the ones who are most at risk and need our help. We must strive to make everyone feel welcome and valued in our wellness messaging and give them an opportunity to learn better lifestyle choices and to move forward in their own personal quest to achieve improved health and fitness.

This objective also requires that everyone participating in a wellness program should be given the opportunity to go through a comprehensive fitness and wellness assessment at the very beginning of their participation in your wellness programs in order to find out what their strengths and weaknesses are so that they can set realistic goals, receive proper instruction on how to make the right lifestyle changes to realize the results which will keep them motivated to stay with your programs. Even modest improvements along with your staff's encouraging support will retain these at-risk individuals longer which will inevitably result in their referring friends and associates. This is not rocket science; realizing realistic and reliable results should be the goal of anyone participating in fitness and other wellness activities. It

is our job as health educators, personal trainers, lifestyle coaches, and rehab specialists to make sure that our wellness value proposition is actually realized by a majority of those we serve. This can only be done with a system in place that allows for an ongoing opportunity to assess their progress on a regular basis.

A Meaningful Campus Experience

After considering some of the main points which I have covered, most individuals will generally agree that wellness education, evaluation, proper reporting, and the resulting motivation, which a quality wellness program will provide, should be a major cornerstone of any well-rounded university curriculum, thus contributing to a much more meaningful campus life experience.

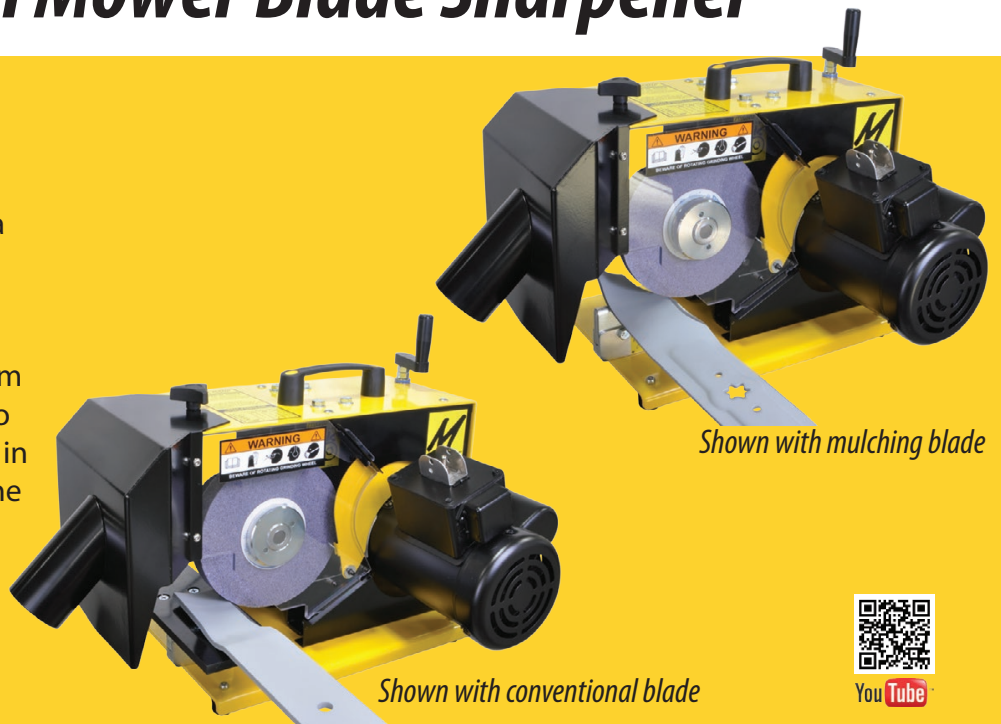


ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Rob Rideout has been a successful high school teacher and winning wrestling coach, sports conditioning consultant to several professional teams, keynote motivational speaker, corporate wellness consultant, and Co-founder of MicroFit, Inc. in 1986.

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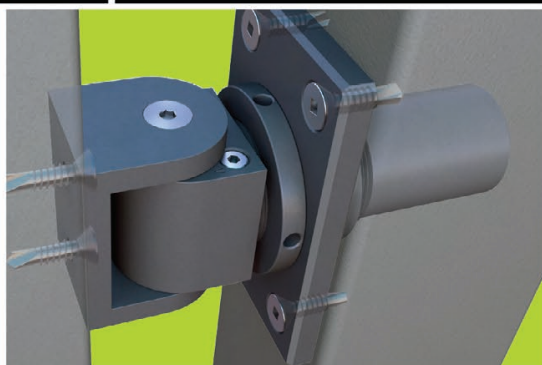
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