



WCWI 

Organizing as a Theory of Change

Organizing is a theory of change where you combine influence and resources to equal the power to change. It's literally the people that are rubbing elbows together that have influence over one another. Join our conversation with Jesse Stukenberg as she addresses how you can create power with the people for whom the change is meant.

Expert Interview
WCWI Member Resource



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WCWI, a community of connected employers who are transforming Wisconsin's workforce.

The Wellness Council of Wisconsin is the only nonprofit organization in Wisconsin dedicated exclusively to helping employers design results-oriented wellness programs to maximize the health and productivity of their most valuable asset- their employees. As Wisconsin's premier resource for workplace wellness, WCWI's mission is to serve by:

- Empowering organization in transforming culture to change lives;
- Helping employers build comprehensive and sustainable programs;
- Dedicated to local support with a national network;
- Connecting over 700 likeminded professionals who support over 500 organizations.

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KR: Hi Jesse! Tell us a little bit about Bellin Health.

JS: Bellin Health is an integrated healthcare delivery system which includes; 3 hospitals (Bellin Memorial, Oconto and Bellin Psychiatric), multi-disciplinary clinics, sports medicine and fitness centers throughout Northeast Wisconsin, and upper Michigan, home healthcare, FastCare Retail Clinics, as well as Bellin College, Bellin Business & Community Health and Bellin Home Medical Equipment. We have 4,514 employees, and our health plan covers 6,505 lives.

KR: What is the biggest hurdle you encounter with having such a large employee group?

JS: The biggest hurdle that we encounter is communication. We really feel that employees still don't have a grasp of the breadth and depth of the services that we offer to improve health. We did a really great job bending the trend and saving money on our health care by being a leader in our own population health strategy. However, based on the results of our 2016 culture audit, it was time to look at all dimensions of our wellbeing. We found that our employees were actually struggling financially and we've taken a renewed focus on creating an intentional culture and building a strategy around that.

KR: How have you gone about creating an intentional culture?

JS: In the healthcare industry, we have a high incidence of physician burnout. We are working with Institute for Healthcare Improvement as an engagement and retention strategy to improve joy in work. We are caregivers and often times find ourselves taking care of ourselves last, so we've taken a pro-active approach. Along with burnout, we have to support other difficult struggles in healthcare, ranging from swing shifts, bringing your work home, lack of sleep, and dealing with hostile patients. We understand that it is a daunting task to work on culture, but we are hopeful and continue to have committed leadership in this area.

KR: You talk about committed leadership. How do they show support for your organizational wellbeing strategy?

JS: We have two teams that are vested in our health and wellbeing. One that is led by some of our senior leaders and one that is led by our ancillary care teams (ie: fitness, EAP, employee health and safety, nutrition, human resources, and our business and community health department) as we are the provider of the biometric administration and health plan. Collaboratively, we are trying to design our culture to support health by creating resources to assist individuals in gaining health strides.

If you know healthcare professionals, we put ourselves last and are often the "worst patients" almost expecting more from ourselves to be almost "super human". Combine that with the 24/7 & 365 nature of healthcare, doing more with less, and the constant state of change; we present with unique challenges to health and wellbeing. We aren't really any different than any other culture despite our educational background in health and wellness. We still have uphill battles to get proper sleep, ensure our staff can eat their lunch, get up from their desks and off the phones, feel psychologically safe to speak up and share their safety concerns, improvement or innovative ideas, bullying (from patients or other staff).

Our Chief Nursing Officer and VP of Learning & Innovation are really taking the lead on intentionally creating the "environment" that can best support our population with our unique needs, with the support of our new CEO whose top strategic goal is "team culture." This has become more organic in nature because they are involving us, "subject matter experts"- people with "lived experience" or "boots on the ground" in the team culture work.

KR: I love the shift to a "Team Culture" approach. That's so important when we talk about breaking down siloes.

JS: The war on talent will only get more and more competitive as we go along. And I believe that the millennials are really going to drive this change in workplace culture to become more human centric: where the employee becomes more and more of an asset. This is a change for many companies to see the employee as an asset versus a liability or a health care cost. Nobody really doubts that a well employee, is a more engaged employee, has a more positive attitude, enhanced productivity and costs less to insure or care for.

I believe our culture work really needs to continue to surround and uplift our employees. In order to get a good pulse of all the different departments and their challenges, we need to talk to them. In talking to them, we need to ask deeper questions than your typical wellness survey questions. I really believe that next evolution of worksite wellness will address the working environment as one of the most single powerful determinants of health.

This will take us out of that silo between wellness and leadership. They will have to be mutually symbiotic for true and lasting life giving change to occur which will be a win-win for the employee and their family of course, and the sustainability of the organization.

KR: You talk about asking deeper questions. In your view, how do employers go about making data collection more meaningful?

JS: We see benefits to both wellness certificates and biometric screenings. However, that being said, if the organization doesn't actually have someone in place that truly cares about the people and wakes up every day to remove the barriers to care, we see a lot of wasted opportunities on simply "checking the boxes" and offering Health Risk Assessments without proper and consistent follow up.

What will be a true turning point is when we look at the biometric scores as an outcome of a system not just an individual "problem." Take high LDL (bad cholesterol) and weight (two of the most common high risks) and view these results not as the individual "at fault" for making poor nutritional choices and not exercising but really pull back the layers of the onion to view this as a "system level" problem (a system is designed to produce the exact results it gets). As the Institute for Health Care Improvement urges us to ask; "Why is that?" and then ask that question again and again until we discover some root causes that we can actually do something about to shake up or redesign the "system" to get different results.

- Do people have the tools they need to complete their job and serve their purpose within the organization?
- Do they view their employer as "caring?"
If the answers to these are no, these scenarios alone can increase their stress levels and cause LDL to rise (even without poor nutritional choices).
- Are people connecting in meaningful ways with their peers and developing mutual respect and connection?
- Are people struggling with family or mental health issues?

In typical wellness form, we tend to say, if their LDL and weight is high, we need to give them a nutritionist consultation for free or let's work on our cafeteria food. And that's all good and all very necessary, but I think we really have to dig deeper.

KR: I love your wellbeing wheel and what it stands for in truly supporting the whole employee. Talk a little bit about this.

JS: The Lifesaver Wheel is based upon SAMSHA's 8 Dimensions of wellbeing. It is the backbone of our wellbeing message. We feature local Lifesavers each month that are both internal and external facing because we also highlight stories of our own Bellin employees that are making strides in their wellbeing. We believe that knowing isn't enough and people need to FEEL something and storytelling is just the ticket because it's really the oldest

form of transfer of knowledge and wisdom throughout generations. That message is actually best received if it doesn't come from an expert, and that's why we use the term, Lifesaver. Because our example can enhance or even save a life, it's all about the human connection.

KR: What have been some of your lessons learned in your shift of supporting the whole person through your wellbeing model?

JS: When we first switched to the Eight Dimensions of Wellbeing, there was a bit of resistance. It's hard to wrap your head around sometimes when you are used to using something that you could see, touch and feel and could ultimately measure. We can measure blood pressure, but it was harder to wrap your head around something like social wellbeing. What does that actually look like and how do we prove its value?

KR: We still get stuck in a programmatic approach.

JS: Right. We are trained to think it has to be this big program with incentives, and we need trackers, something to hand in, or big monetary rewards.

And, what we're saying is, we need to create the space for it and just give the concepts time to grow.

KR: Explain what you mean by creating the space for it?

JS: One of the things that we've been trying in our staff meetings within Bellin, is 10 minutes every month, we'll either watch the video, or I will read the Lifesaver story then I'll share a service at Bellin that matches that which again helps our communication barriers. What I'm really finding in these meetings, is that we get to know each other in really deep and meaningful ways when we engage with this content. Instead of just reading it and being white noise in a way, it comes to life. It plants the seeds that are going to grow in the days ahead that are just contemplation about a subject. It really gets to a deeper connectedness. But you have to just create the space for it. And it really is just slowing down, and talking and thinking about it rather than, coming at it with the mindset that we have to change our employees, or even change ourselves.

What if we just experienced wellbeing? That's what we're trying to create, experiential wellbeing.

KR: Creating connection at the workplace can be so powerful when we talk about shifting to a culture of wellbeing.

JS: Loneliness is the number one threat to our health right now. So we want to help facilitate connection between individuals through trusting, and loving communication. And I will tell you when given the chance, people are really craving these discussions. We really try to create the space where you set ground rules. For example, we tell people in our Lunch n learn meetings that this is not the place for advising one another. When you set those ground rules, you will be so surprised because a lot of our health issues, are stemming from these social conditions, or these complex conditions that a lot of people have a lot of shame around. We had our financial talk the other day and there was real honest conversation and support between people being honest about the state of their financial health. The more we put things we are "hush-hush" about and don't talk about, the more power that shame has over people. The more we just shine a light on it and say "hey, here is what we have going, let's talk about it and we are in it together" the shame dissipates and we can get to work at improving the situation.

KR: It's almost admirable in a way when people and organizations can talk about key issues in such a vulnerable way.

JS: I really commend Bellin for recognizing that employees were struggling in their financial wellbeing and doing something about it by addressing wages and offering a pilot program where they can reduce their debt and pay off their credit cards. It was a big step just to talk about it and an even more committed step to improve it.

KR: So where do we start?

JS: For people really wondering how to start. One course I highly recommend anyone taking is the Institute for Healthcare Improvement Leadership and Organizing for Change. It really changed the way I looked at campaigns. I love the quote, "we sit in a wood paneled conference room and decide what would be best for our employees." And what they taught me was that organizing is a theory of change where you combine influence and resources to equal the power to change. It's literally the people that are rubbing elbows together that have influence over one another. You or the organization's leadership hold resources but how can you really partner with and create power WITH the people for whom the change is meant. I think it was such a logical thing but it hit me smack dab in the forehead that again if you are not engaging with those people and having meaningful conversations with them it is still power OVER them. So you create a program and you think they are going to participate without having a hand in creating it, I think that's just a misnomer. Invite people to the table and to the creation process so that you can use organizing as a theory of change, along with awareness campaigns, education and marketing and your results will be so much more impactful and lasting.

KR: How do you invite people into your creation process?

JS: One of the things that one team member started doing was something as simple as an interactive whiteboard. On the whiteboard, you can write any question that you want and people engage with that in meaningful ways. We had first day of school pics, prom pics and our staff cut out pictures and put them on the white board and it creates discussion and connection...as humans. There was a cute picture of a baby, which I heard a staff member say, "Every time I look at that baby. I'm just so happy." One might think that's nothing. But that is wellbeing. People ask how do you measure success with that? Its people just doing it! Don't discount process metrics. Yeah, you have an outcome metric of your HRA score or your other health claims. Definitely don't discount people taking a deep dive into those metrics to build a better population health strategy. But process metrics can be simplistic in nature.

KR: In your opinion, how do we go about building this trust amongst employees?

JS: I think that we often try to force team building by saying, "Oh, let's have this fun together!" But what if your team doesn't even trust each other? Trust is built with actions over time. If we don't feel comfortable in a conversation, having the voice to say, "I am not comfortable with this, let's get some clarity." Get clear on cultural norms and hold people accountable to those "vital behaviors" because in order to build harmony amongst coworkers, you need a supportive work culture. We implemented a program called ICU "I See You" which helps us to feel empowered to talk with our co-workers about mental/emotional health and recommend our Employee Assistance Program. This has helped us all recognize the signs and symptoms of burnout or emotional stress and feel comfortable talking about it at work.

People need to feel that what they do connects to a higher purpose. Many of us go into healthcare because we feel it is our calling or purpose for our lives. But even outside of healthcare, connecting your purpose to your work will be the true indicator of being able to build trusting relationships. How can a person come to work and be, not only allowed, but invited daily to use their very personal gifts, strengths, talents, for a bigger purpose, and not hold back? Not using your strengths or passions just because it's not in your "official" job description is a big problem that contributes to the high levels of disengagement with the workforce today. People get to the point where they're scared to speak up and share their ideas, innovations and improvements and that is definitely not good for business. If you can create that atmosphere where everyone belongs and everybody, no matter how unique or different their gifts and talents are, feels a sense of purpose, then you can really draw the best out of people and ultimately out of your team and the results they can achieve.

KR: Is there anything, in closing, that you want to share as an influencer in our industry that you feel will resonate with other wellbeing practitioners throughout the state.

JS: It begins with you! It is not our job to fix or change people, it is inviting them into wellbeing through our example and influence. Inviting people in that relationship with you is the only way things are going to change,

power WITH people. Not power over them. This is super big for me because it allowed me to take off that “backpack” of responsibility. In this industry, that feeling of responsibility for someone else’s change is so disempowering for everyone involved and just isn’t sustainable. I love this quote from the Institute for Healthcare Improvement

“Organizing power begins with the commitment by the first person who wants to make it happen. Without this commitment, there are no resources with which to begin. Commitment is observable as action. The work of organizers begins with the acceptance of responsibility to challenge and enable others to do the same.”

3 KEY TAKEAWAYS:

1. *In order to get a good pulse of all the different departments and their challenges, we need to talk to them. In talking to them, we need to ask deeper questions such as, do people have the tools they need to complete their job and serve their purpose within the organization?*
 2. *Experiential wellbeing gets to a deeper connectedness. But you have to just create the space for it and simply invite people into wellbeing by example, influence and commitment to them.*
 3. *Jesse credits and highly recommends taking the course from the Institute for Healthcare Improvement: Leadership and Organizing for Change. They taught her that organizing is a theory of change where you combine influence and resources to equal the power to change.*
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ABOUT JESSE:

Jesse Stukenberg's business card identifies her as 'Nurse Jesse', but after listening to her story, one realizes that 'Nurse' Jesse is more than the traditional nurse who cares for a person's physical needs. 'Nurse' Jesse is a person who in the broader sense of “nurse,” promotes, trains, fosters and develops new dimensions of life in others, and in the process enhances that life in herself. After focusing too much on ‘checking the boxes;’ achieving socially acceptable goals, (i.e. academic degrees, ideal weight, marriage, kids, dream house) always striving...she woke up. She now views her life NOT as just a process of achieving specific external goals such as weight loss or a job title. Her goal is to change the way healthcare engages with the people they serve, viewing wellbeing as more than just a healthy body but the whole person, including positive thinking and an expansive view of life, which includes a healthy mind, body and spirit.

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