

# It pays to be WELL: Beyond Going Green

November, 2023 | Margit Whitlock, AIA | Architectural Concepts Inc.

For many years LEED certification by the Green Building Council has defined building sustainability and efficiency. Now, healthy buildings have a new rubric, thanks to the WELL Building Standard® Version 2 Certification. Evidence-based interventions, peer-reviewed studies and over 20,000 industry leaders and professionals compiled knowledge to create a new perspective on a building's impact on environment and inhabitants and it is called WELL. With WELL, the industry is taking a holistic look at sustainability, emphasizing the way livable spaces support wellbeing and quality of life. Activating the concepts considered through WELL serves your guests, owners and your bottom line by taking a holistic approach to hospitality.

## THE WELL BUILDING STANDARD™

SEVEN CONCEPTS FOR HEALTHIER BUILDINGS



## Why the Change?

Concerns for the environment as well as human wellbeing are at the forefront of change across all industries. Companies are being held to a higher standard of care for employees & customers within the workplace. In the design world, health centered endeavors have been on the rise over the last decade and were propelled forward by the post pandemic world. I outline the history of transitions in workplace design in The Best Place to Work and give some design ideas and implications in Employee Satisfaction Affects Top Resorts with a focus on better break rooms. WELL takes healthier workplace attributes from the micro to the macro, both in looking at the overall building and the overall human experience.

The World Health Organization defines health as, "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Addressing health more broadly and inclusively is right in line with current long term trends (see article). Shifting your resort's approach to health beyond the additional spa amenity and looking instead to upgrades for a sustainable ecosystem puts your guests and staff first with dynamic architecture and design. The WELL standard works to quantify the shift.

## What is WELL:

Dubbed, "Concepts," the WELL Building Standard is organized into categories of wellness, tailored to building type and measured by project space and scope considering:

- **Air:** Healthy indoor air circulation to mitigate allergies, asthma, chronic fatigue and an overall inability to focus
- **Water:** Good quality water source to improve overall health

- **Nourishment:** Healthy snack program or lunch environment to reduce risk of obesity
- **Light:** Optimal lighting supports daytime energy and improves overall health by balancing natural rhythms
- **Movement:** Opportunities for physical activity during the workday
- **Thermal & Sound Comfort:** Good acoustic and temperature-controlled design increases cognition and productivity while decreasing anxiety and fatigue
- **Mind:** Implementing Biophilic design stimulates the senses to mitigate chronic pain
- **Building Materials:** Sustainable materials protect health and help the environment
- **Community:** Building a truly equitable, diverse and healthy community and work environment.

## The Results? A Better Work Environment

Implementation of the WELL concepts is not only sustainable, but it has also yielded high results in employee work satisfaction and productivity. The struggle to keep staff in the office since the pandemic is lessened when the office environment supports overall health. It has been proven that a WELL environment is viewed as a bonus in terms of employee benefits. And the tracking of WELL certified buildings has the statistics to prove it: boasting less sick days, less workplace animosity, and higher employee retention. They have also seen an 8% increase in employee performance due to an improvement in air quality alone. Employees are happier to come to work and stay at work!

Utilizing the building design itself as a platform to improve human health, benefits every person. Embracing wellness gives you an advantage in attracting employees and keeping them, which yields significant economic benefits because turnover is expensive! Moreover, a happy and loyal employee makes for a happy customer experience.

## HUMAN FIRST!! Implementing WELL into your Resort designs

WELL-centric design moves us past a one note amenity solution for health and instead creates an entire ecosystem of wellness as a whole resort experience. And you can take the approach of improving your resort one concept at a time with thoughtful design solutions, ideally using natural resources available.

- Focus on air flow variability by emphasizing the importance of adequate fresh air ventilation and air movement. This might be improved by HVAC delivery and the use of cross ventilation.
- Thermal improvements require a look at the sun's daily movements over your structure and variability can be addressed with window treatments
- Harnessing the sun for [warming and a light source](#) with different technologies can make a big impact. Solotubes, programmed light shades and light adjusting technologies work with natural human circadian rhythm's.
- Indoor gardens, green walls and eco-friendly products have a positive impact on air quality and mental health and plants can be an easy add on to an existing building.
- Natural materials and textures tend to have the same benefits on a built environment as living plants. Look to incorporate bamboo, wool, cork, real wood. And when you can't have the real thing look for recycled content.