

WELCOA's News & Views

Dr. Steven Aldana Shares...

Culture Clash:

How We **Win**
The **Battle**
For **Better**
Health



ABOUT **DR. STEVEN ALDANA**



Dr. Steven Aldana is one of the nation's foremost experts on healthy living and worksite wellness. During his more than 20 years in academia, Dr. Aldana authored over 75 scientific papers and 7 books on health risk management, healthy living, and health promotion programs. Currently, Dr. Aldana is the CEO of Wellsteps, a worksite wellness solution that leads the nation in wellness program deployment and engagement. He has given over 350 keynote speeches across the U.S. on the ability of good nutrition and regular exercise to prevent, arrest, and reverse many chronic diseases. His books have sold over 1 million copies and are used by 4,500 companies and corporations. When asked why he is so passionate about promoting the importance of healthy lifestyles, Dr. Aldana responds, "This information saves and transforms lives".

WELCOA's News Views

An Expert Interview with
Dr. Steven Aldana

ABOUT **DAVID HUNNICUTT**



Since his arrival at WELCOA in 1995, David Hunnicutt has interviewed hundreds of the most influential business and health leaders in America. Known for his ability to make complex issues easier to understand, David has a proven track record of asking the right questions and getting straight answers. As a result of his efforts, David's expert interviews have been widely-published and read by workplace wellness practitioners across the country.

David Hunnicutt can be reached at dhunnicutt@welcoa.org.



In part II of this WELCOA exclusive, Dr. David Hunnicutt sits down with Dr. Steven Aldana, CEO of WellSteps and author of *Culture Clash, How We Win the Battle for Better Health*. In this interview, Dr. Aldana talks about the only long-term solution to helping individuals adopt and maintain healthy behaviors. This solution is more likely to work when individuals complete three fundamental steps.



Dr. David Hunnicutt: In Part I of this interview you shared with us how your new book “*Culture Clash*” provides individuals with a clear understanding of the real problem to our worsening health. Tell us more about the long-term solution to better health.

Dr. Steven Aldana: Over the a period of at least 50 years, our dietary and activity patterns have been slowly been changing. Highly processed foods, fast food, large serving sizes, and sedentary living have become normal, acceptable components of our culture. It is now normal to be over weight or obese. Since the problem is the changes that have occurred in our culture, the only long-term solution is to change our culture again. If we are going to be successful in improving our own health and the health of our employees, we will need to create and live in a new culture of health. This is the only sustainable solution to this problem.

DH: How can you be so sure that creating a healthy culture will really improve employee health?

SA: Chronic diseases are caused by elevated health risks. Health risks are almost exclusively caused by unhealthy behaviors and our behaviors are direct result of the cultural pressures we all face. A culture that promotes poor nutrition and sedentary living is the catalyst that starts this whole chain reaction. Studies of individuals who have been successful at adopting and maintaining healthy behaviors show us that the key to their long-term success is the fact that they have successfully created and live in a culture that promotes good health. The key to their success is the new culture they have created. Worksites are perfect locations for cultural changes to begin to take hold.

“Worksites are perfect locations for cultural changes to begin to take hold.”



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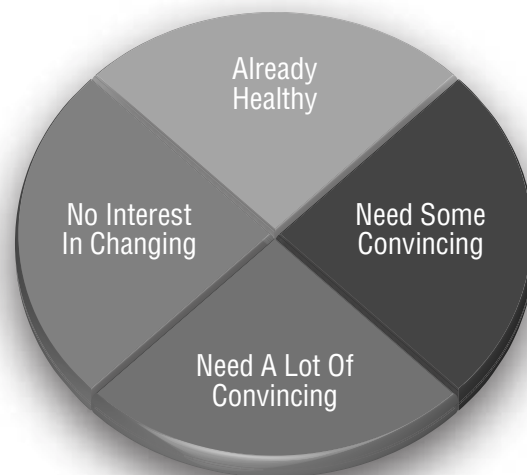
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DH: What does the average person need to do to create and live in a healthy culture?

SA: First off let me say that if this were easy to do and we would not have an obese population. It's hard to change 50 years of tradition and habits. But, we have found that individuals will follow three simple steps they will be well on their way to making this transformation. First, people have to find a reason to change, a really good reason that comes from within a person not from some external source. Incentives can help but incentives are external and may not be sufficiently motivational to help people make long-term changes. Second, it's important that people learn the tools, strategies, and skills they need to be successful at changing their environment. For example when traveling through airports it is challenging to find healthy food. With the right strategies anyone can be successful at avoiding the wrong kinds of foods even though it appears he or she is surrounded by unhealthy options. Lastly it's vitally important to get help from others. Every day we interact with other people and other environments. To be successful in changing our culture we need support from others, we need policies that make it easy to be healthy, and we need changes to our immediate environment that will support our efforts the healthy. Rome wasn't built in a single day and your ability to create a healthy culture will begin when you start following these three steps.

“First, people have to find a reason to change, a really good reason that comes from within a person not from some external source.”

The Four Categories Of Change Readiness



DH: Worksites use incentives as reasons to change. How can wellness incentives be used in this process?

SA: If you think about people who already have a healthy culture and healthy behaviors, what motivates them to make healthy choices? They are able to resist the pressure to be unhealthy because they have developed internal motivations or personal benefits that they acknowledge and enjoy every time they make healthy choices. These can be things like improved health or better quality sleep or improved physical appearance. Worksites can only encourage people to have healthy culture with the use of external incentives, things like T-shirts, insurance premium discounts, and gift cards. There is nothing wrong with these external incentives but external incentives do not usually translate into successful long-term behavior change and the creation of new healthier cultures. WellSteps uses external incentives with our behavior change campaigns but we go to great lengths to educate all of our participants about the intrinsic (internal) benefits that come from healthy behaviors. To successfully create a healthy culture people must have powerful, emotional, internal reasons to fight back against our unhealthy environment.

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DH: Once an employee has a good reason to change behaviors, what can we do to help them find success?

SA: Once people have good reasons to change, they are prepared and anxious to get started, all they lack is the right skills, tools, and strategies to be successful. Several years ago we developed the *Stop & Go Fast Food and Grocery Guides* to help guide people on how to make healthy food choices. These guides are just tools and if used correctly can be used to teach people how to make healthy food choices without the guides. There are tools and strategies that can be used to make healthy food choices, to be regularly physically active, and to practice a variety of healthy behaviors. If you cook healthy meals at home, you may not remember, but someone showed you how to do it or shared a recipe with you. You learned healthy cooking skills from somewhere and now you use those skills every day to create a new culture for yourself and your family. The right skills, tools, and strategies give us the ability to create and sustain the new culture we all need. In *Culture Clash* I've gathered an extensive list of all the different skills and strategies people can use to create a new culture. I've also provided clear examples of how individuals can incorporate them into their own lives.

DH: Okay, let's pretend employees have a good reason to change and they have been taught the right skills and strategies. Are they missing anything they need to be successful in changing their culture?

SA: From my experience they are still missing the most important step. The way we guide behavior and change our environment in our homes is with rules. Rules like putting limits on the amount of screen time our children have or only eating out at certain restaurants or doing family activities where everyone is active. They are called rules at home but at work we call these policy. A no smoking policy on worksite is a very good example of how worksite policy can help create a healthy culture. The single most important step in creating a healthy culture is to have effective rules and policies, make environmental changes that support healthy living, and get active support from friends and family members. Humans are social creatures, we interact with others on a constant basis. It's almost impossible to create a healthy culture without the help and encouragement of others. Employers will have little impact on employee health and cultures if they do not include those employees spouses and significant others. In the book I share several examples and research studies that demonstrate how important it is to have help from others. More importantly, I provide lots of ideas that people can use to build the support.

“The right skills, tools, and strategies give us the ability to create and sustain the new culture we all need.”



DH: How can a company use the *Culture Clash* book to improve employee health?

SA: I have found that when employers simply purchase copies of these books and hand them out to employees very few of them will get read. Because the book was free for that employees have the perception that it has no value. Rather than give the books away for free, give them to employees as an incentive when they've completed some behavior change campaign or task such as such as a biometric screening. Better yet create a campaign that uses the book. When you give them a copy of the book they will be expected to read it in order to complete campaign. It can be used in lunch and learns, as an incentive, or as awards. Handing them out in the hopes that people will read it and change behaviors is probably the least effective way to encourage them to create healthy cultures.

DH: What could a company realistically expect if they used the book in this way?

SA: The book is a summary of the best behavior change practices I know of. In my mind the most successful employee wellness programs are the ones that produce outcomes that can be validated and defended. For me that means having results that can be published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. When we let others scrutinize our evaluation our program outcomes it becomes blatantly obvious that some programs work and some don't. Because the book is based on the best practices we have at WellSteps that have been backed up by almost 100 published scientific articles, I'm confident in what employees can realistically expect. It will take time but employees who use the steps in this book will start to see significant improvements in health behaviors in as little as six weeks. Improvements in behaviors will continue for at least 36 months and at the same time employees will see significant improvements in biometric risks. Because the book helps people change their culture they will also change their behaviors and improve their health risks.

“In my mind, the most successful employee wellness programs are the ones that produce outcomes that can be validated and defended.”

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DH: Dr. Aldana you are one of the nation's leading authorities on healthy living and worksite wellness programs. Your WellSteps wellness program is being used by hundreds of employers, in your opinion, what does the future look like?

SA: Yikes, that's a scary question. I try to be very skeptical about predictions about the future, but I'll give it a try. Here are four of my predictions:

1. The cost of healthcare is horrendous now and it is going to continue to get worse in the future. This year healthcare cost increases are averaging well into the double digits.
2. Americans and our employees are going to continue to gain weight. There is little that will change this trend in the short term.
3. Even with the affordable care act, the number of employers doing wellness will continue to grow dramatically.
4. Many people, including those reading *Culture Clash* will be successful at creating cultures of health and living long, healthy life spans. Unfortunately not everybody sees a problem with our current culture. 

“Many people, including those reading *Culture Clash* will be successful at creating cultures of health and living long, healthy life spans.”



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