



LEADERSHIP GUIDE

Making a case for HR initiatives

A step-by-step guide for getting the budget approved for your health, wellbeing, and benefits navigation strategy.



Faced with talent challenges, attracting and retaining the right employees is the number one issue for organizations.

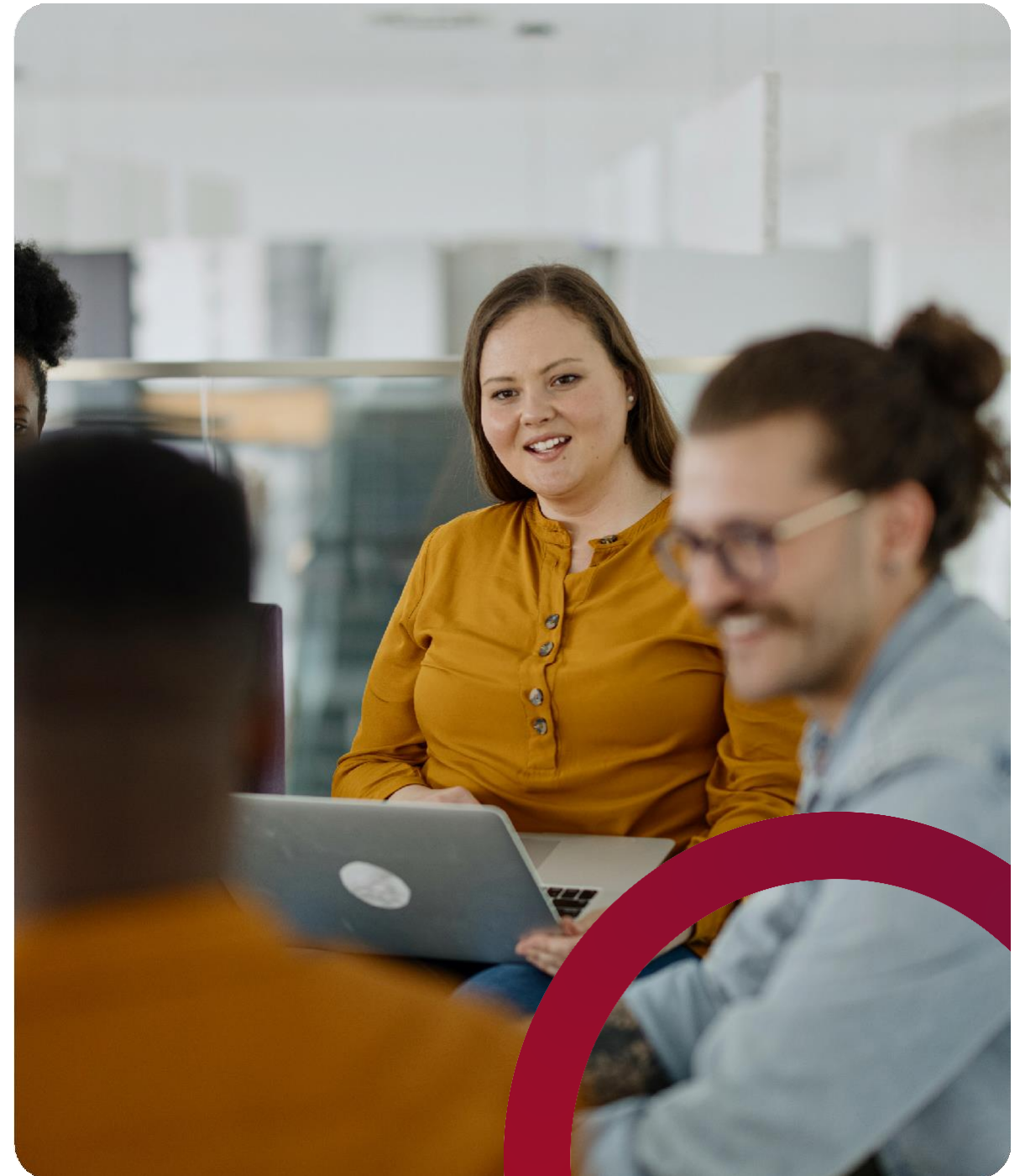
As an HR professional, you know that an economic downturn imparts even more significance to your benefits initiatives. When faced with hiring freezes and layoffs, retaining talent and leveling up productivity have a greater focus on the bottom line, which means you need a budget to support your health and wellbeing initiatives.

The alternative, doing nothing, will [spell peril](#) for your organization. People expect their organization to support them at work and in life and are clear about the benefits they want, including [robust health and wellbeing benefits](#).

Organizations can take a moment to build proactive health and benefits strategies for their workforce that are proven to increase accessibility, affordability, and wellbeing through science-baked behavior change. To get there, you need an approach that will get support, then prioritize it.

The key to HR health and wellbeing initiatives getting funded is a three-point approach:

- Build a value case
- Negotiate buy-in from stakeholders
- Mobilize executive support (and keep it)



1 Building the value case

Executives have people appealing to them for budget requests all of the time, and it's their job, especially during an economic downturn, to scrutinize these requests.

You can make their decision-making easier by presenting a solid value case on how this health, wellbeing, and benefits navigation solution will bring the organization closer to its goals or improve outcomes. When making budget requests, you can typically speak to three levels: action, outcome, and impact. For example, an action might be investing in wellbeing. The outcome of that investment could be better retention, and the impact could be the company performing at a higher level.

Connecting all three is the most robust approach to getting executives to say yes and keep saying yes.

Let's say you want to invest in a [benefits navigation solution](#). Your employee survey results suggest that employees do not know about their benefits, which is why they are considering leaving for another organization. Based on this, you know that making benefits more accessible will improve retention.

At the same time, executive leadership emphasizes projects that increase productivity. As you build your value case, speak to how retention positively influences productivity and efficiency and ultimately drives organizational success.

With a value case built around action, outcome, and impact, HR tells a well-defined story about how investments will serve the company.



Value case best practices

Many HR benefits initiative budget requests will be aligned with retention, culture, or business performance. To narrow your scope of focus in creating a strong value case, first reflect on how retention, culture, and performance advance the organization and then consider the metrics that indicate successful initiatives across all three. For example:

- **Retention:** Retention equals momentum. The better your retention is as an organization, the better the health and success of your organization. A robust retention strategy is like an insurance policy for companies – strengthening the entire organization.
- **Culture:** Strong cultures make for more resilient organizations. Culture drives dedication to a company and ultimately can give you a competitive edge.
- **Performance:** Talk of performance is really talk of productivity, the ability to cope with change, and outcomes. Since productivity makes a company operate more efficiently, and performance is linked to productivity, budget requests focusing on business performance will appeal to executives concerned about efficiency and quality.

When it comes to data, use a combination of internal and external. Internal data will come from employee surveys, [pulse surveys](#), performance reviews, exit and stay interviews, and other metrics tracked to [demonstrate a return on investment](#) (ROI). Internal data can also be made up of expense reduction when manual tasks are automated or replacement of outdated wellbeing program.

External data can be found through reputable sources such as Forrester, Harvard Business Review, McKinsey & Company, and Gartner, among others.

For example, a strong piece of external data for a budget request for health, wellbeing, and benefits navigation solution could be:

Research by Forrester found that organizations that implemented wellbeing platform Virgin Pulse saw productivity increases of \$6.6M over three years thanks to increased benefit utilization. They attributed the bump in performance to using preventive healthcare, increasing awareness, and utilizing programs like backup benefits.

Demonstrating how an initiative will provide cost savings, improve business outcomes, boost retention, or help keep the company competitive, and then connecting that to organizational impact through internal and external data is a surefire strategy.

2 Negotiating stakeholder buy-in

After you've built a strong value case, work with stakeholders to strengthen your case, gain buy-in, and build shared definitions of success.

Secure buy-in across the organization

First, go to your most trusted stakeholders and socialize the idea. These individuals will help you spot holes in your value case, refine your messaging, and give you ideas on who else can support your cause.

Next, reach out to those most affected by the issue you're trying to solve and speak with them. Say your sales and marketing team is experiencing retention issues, and a recent survey shows the lowest wellbeing metrics of the organization. Reach out to the chief revenue officer (CRO), make your pitch, and secure their approval. It's important to have internal champions on your side.

Finally, speak to the people (including any consultants) who will be in the room with you while you're making the case. You'll want to know what they think of the idea to avoid derailing your strategy if people begin to speak out against it.

Create a shared definition of success

Align on the metrics that would indicate success for this initiative as you're socializing the idea with stakeholders. Define what you'll measure, what the timeline looks like, and what you need to deliver to have an impact.

Leverage these talking points for your value case

- "There is no better time to lead with a people-first benefits strategy." Lack of accessible or affordable care can prompt employees to consider searching for a new job, according to [McKinsey](#). McKinsey & Co. also found that diverse employees were less likely to report feeling that their current benefits showed that their employer cared for them because they had challenges in using benefits to meet their needs.
- "Wellbeing strategy right will help us win in the long term." According to [Forrester](#), employees' energy and productivity are drastically affected by their state of wellness and wellbeing. According to Forrester's data, employees who are healthier in their work environment have more trust in their manager and corporate leadership. And higher confidence and trust in the organization's leadership and mission means the employee's capacity for innovation is significantly higher.

Maintain open lines of communication

Develop a plan to keep these stakeholders involved or ask them to contribute further. A follow-up email cadence with regular updates may be sufficient for less involved stakeholders, while putting others in face-to-face meetings with leadership may be appropriate.

3 Mobilizing executive support

Once you've secured buy-in from valued stakeholders and coworkers, you'll need to get the executives on your side and in agreement with the strategic objectives you are aiming for. Before making the pitch, reflect on the level of support and involvement you will need from leadership – it may be as simple as an email nudge or more involved to model behaviors. It's important to be explicit about the support you'll need while requesting approval, so everyone is on the same page from the beginning.

Know your executives

To gather your leadership team's support, you must understand what makes them tick. This means knowing everything from how long their attention span is to what's currently top of mind for them at your organization.

Present the idea as a business problem

One thing you may have noticed is that when building the business case we focused on solving a business problem (retention and business performance), not an HR problem. This was intentional as executives will take an organization-focused, strategic approach more seriously than a department-level one. In addition, you can establish internal credibility with executives by working with your organization's finance team to make sure the initiative has a positive and reasonable payback period.

Your Virgin Pulse team can also help you out here. We also built a value on investment (VOI) and return on investment (ROI) [toolkit](#) from Virgin Pulse, including the ROI, Cost Savings, and Benefits of Employee Wellbeing by Forrester.

The question you should always have top of your mind when pitching to executives is: "How will this initiative directly impact our bottom line or increase our competitive advantage?"

Don't forget about the human aspect

The human aspect of HR should always be recognized. Executive teams usually don't have direct insight into employee sentiment, so hearing first-hand accounts of their experiences, pain points, and feedback can be eye-opening and help them better understand the need for a specific initiative.

Use the strategic plan outlined here to identify your focus and initiatives, build your value case, negotiate buy-in, and mobilize support from decision-makers for a greater chance of success.

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In times of uncertainty, conventional wisdom tells us to proceed forward cautiously. At Virgin Pulse, we have another take. This is a goldmine of expert insights, eliminating guesswork, so you can focus on what matters most – leverage these resources for even more insights to build your value case.



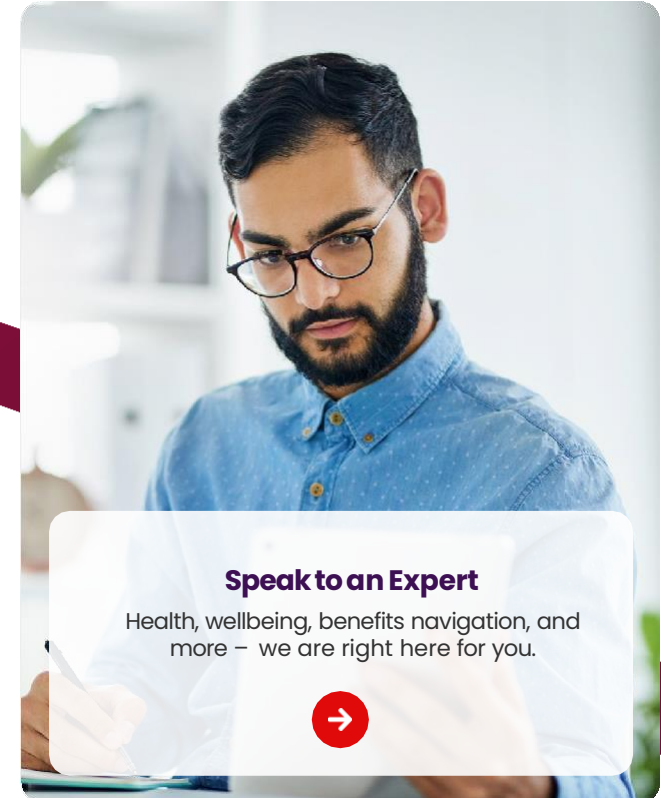
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Talk to an expert

About Virgin Pulse

Virgin Pulse is the leading digital-first health and wellbeing company that empowers organizations across the globe to activate populations, improve health outcomes, and reduce spending in an era of accelerating cost and complexity. Virgin Pulse's Homebase for Health® connects data, people and technology to deliver high-tech, human-touch experiences that engage and reward individual journeys. Virgin Pulse impacts over 100 million people across 190 countries by helping Fortune 500, national health plans and many other organizations change lives – and businesses – for good. For more tips and insights, connect with us on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

