

---

# **50 Ways** You Might Have Wellness Privilege at Work

**BY LAURA PUTNAM AND KAREN CATLIN**

---

**JUNE 2021**

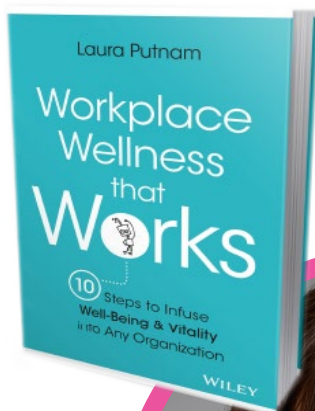
# A coming together

What happens when you introduce a workplace wellness expert with a workplace inclusion specialist? It's like a peanut butter meets chocolate moment: two great ingredients that go well together. Two important disciplines that belong together.

We're pleased to announce just such a collaboration between Laura Putnam, author of *Workplace Wellness that Works: 10 Steps to Infuse Well-Being & Vitality into Any Organization*, and Karen Catlin, author of *Better Allies: Everyday Actions to Create Inclusive, Engaging Workplaces*.

Together, they developed an assessment, **50 Ways You Might Have Wellness Privilege at Work**, highlighting how wellness and DEI are inextricably tied together. (You'll find the assessment on page 9.)

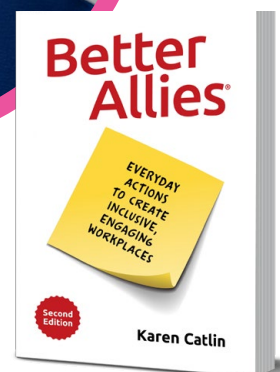
But first, here's a behind-the-scenes look at the intersection of these two disciplines, why Laura and Karen decided to join forces, and why it's critical for anyone working in wellness or DEI to look holistically at the combined discipline.



**Laura Putnam**



**Karen Catlin**



## Laura's story

In a world that is always on and with lifestyle-related conditions and illnesses on the rise, leveraging every workplace to promote better health and well-being is a really good idea. The problem is that most of our workplace wellness efforts fail. Consider, for example, that over 80% of eligible employees opt out of company wellness programs. Why is that, and what can we do better? This is the question that motivated me to write *Workplace Wellness That Works*.

In writing this book, I applied my educator sensibility toward coming up with better solutions for promoting wellness at work. I think that we can all agree that teachers know a lot about motivation, mindset, or how to build a culture of growth - all of which are relevant to engaging people in the pursuit of better health and well-being. This realization gave rise to my developing The Motion Infusion 4-Levels Model. (See page 7.)

Recently, though, I had a sinking realization that I had failed to adequately address DEI in my book and in my work - which is weird because this is what I thought about all the time as an urban public high school teacher. I began seeing just how much privilege plays a part not only in achieving the American Dream, but also in achieving optimal health and well-being.

Meanwhile, in the world of health and wellness, the "Take personal responsibility for your health and well-being" mantra continues to prevail – and the role that privilege plays continues to be underestimated. My work has become increasingly about helping others to understand that there's a bigger picture when it comes to forming better habits. It's much more than building a positive mindset, setting SMART goals, finding the right digital device or getting a reward. Habits are never formed or carried out in a vacuum. Rather, they are formed within the context of circles of cultural and environmental influence – or ecosystems.

Moreover, there are systems at work within each of these circles that need to be addressed. This is where Karen's work is so vital.



## Karen's story

After spending 25 years working in tech and serving as a vice president of engineering at Adobe, I witnessed a sharp decline in the number of women working in tech. Frustrated but galvanized, I knew it was time to switch gears. Because I wanted to help other women grow their careers in tech, I started a leadership coaching practice. Yet, I soon realized I had a big problem: My clients all worked in organizations where the closer you got to the C-Suite, the more male and pale it got. I realized that to truly help my clients, I needed to make all of tech more inclusive.

So I started a Twitter handle, @betterallies, to share straightforward, simple actions that anyone could take to make their workplace more inclusive. I wanted to demystify allyship and help people in positions of power — particularly men — do their part. Through my tweeting, coupled with responses to my posts and interactions with others working in tech, I amassed many great examples of how allies act in real workplace scenarios. And because they were far too good to let them fade into the Twitter twilight, I compiled them into my book, *Better Allies: Everyday Actions to Create Inclusive, Engaging Workplaces*.

In *Better Allies*, I write about the “p-word” (aka “privilege”). Understanding privilege is key to becoming a better ally. At its core, privilege is a set of unearned benefits given to people in a specific social group. Due to our race, class, gender, sexual orientation, language, geographical location, ability, religion and more, all of us have greater or lesser access to resources and social power. Within the workplace, we need to understand and be aware that people who don't have the same privilege as us will have different experiences and that we can use our privilege to stop non-inclusive behavior in its tracks.

To help my readers understand their privilege, I curated a list of 50 ways you might have privilege at. This list became a foundation for the work that Laura and I did to understand wellness privilege and what it means to thrive personally and professionally.



## What does it mean to thrive?

This is a question that researchers have been trying to unpack. What is it that makes the difference between a good life versus a great life? While it's different for everyone, there seem to be universal themes. In a Gallup-Healthways study that surveyed people in over 150 countries, five themes emerged: physical, social, financial, career and community. The researchers believed that emotional well-being was intertwined in each of these five elements. I chose to pull it out as a sixth component.

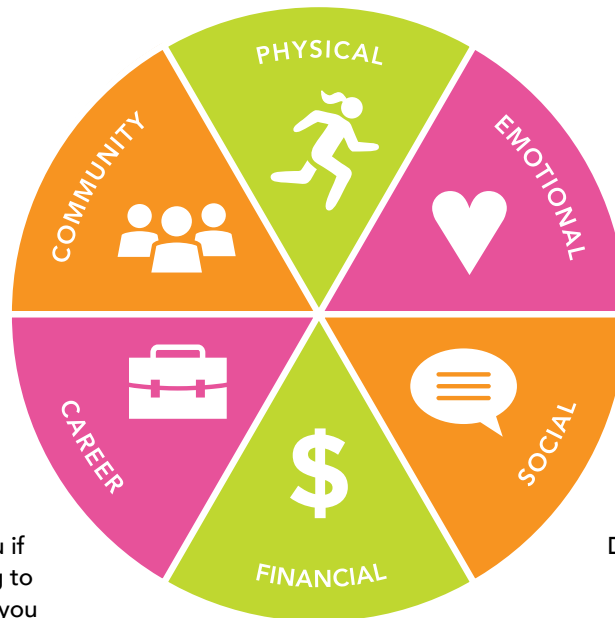
### WELL-BEING WHEEL

#### COMMUNITY = where you live and what you give

Are you engaged with your neighborhood? Are you giving back and "being the change" for your community?

#### CAREER = what you do

If someone were to ask you if you are excited about going to work in the morning, would you be able to give an enthusiastic "Yes!"? Is your work a job, is it a career, or is it your calling?



#### PHYSICAL = fuel

Are you meeting the basics – eating well, drinking plenty of water, exercising, and avoiding smoking?  
Are you getting enough rest?

#### EMOTIONAL = resilience

How are you feeling? Do you have regular practices such as meditation, noticing what's good or getting out into nature that help you to better respond to daily stressors?

#### SOCIAL = love and connection

Do you have friends and family you can rely on? Are you in a loving relationship? Are you connected with your team members?

#### FINANCIAL = resource management

How are you doing in managing your finances? Are you living within your means, and are you spending money in a way that improves your life satisfaction?

## Personal responsibility is important, but not enough.

In each of these domains, there are seemingly simple things that we can each do to self-optimize and fuel better health and well-being. For starters, eat better, move more, don't smoke. So, now it's just a matter of putting that knowledge into action – right? *Think again.*

While the array of self-help books would have you believe that becoming your best self is well within reach and is easy to achieve with a few tweaks in habits, a growing body of research suggests something else.



It is unreasonable to expect people to change their behavior when the social, cultural and physical environments around them fully conspire against them.

- ADAPTED FROM SIR MICHAEL MARMOT,  
INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE REPORT



### THE KNOWING & DOING GAP

The truth is, most of us already know what we need to do to improve our health and well-being. You'd be hard pressed to find any smoker who doesn't know that smoking is bad for them, or anyone who doesn't know that it's a good idea to eat more veggies or exercise more. And yet, less than 3% of Americans put these three basic behaviors into practice every day, according to a Mayo Clinic study. Why?

This is where privilege comes into the picture. The time is now to make well-being, in all of its dimensions, more accessible to all. This calls for collective action – and it calls for recognizing the role of **Wellness Privilege**.

## WHAT IS WELLNESS PRIVILEGE?

Like any privilege, Wellness Privilege is an unearned benefit or advantage enjoyed by some individuals or groups and unavailable to others. You may have Wellness Privilege because of the world you live in, the organization you work for, the team you're on, or the boss you work for. You may have wellness privilege because the systems within each of these concentric circles of cultural influence may be benefiting you. The more Wellness Privilege you have, the more likely you are to be well and to be thriving, both personally and professionally.

Ask yourself: Am I healthier because of where I live – or less so? Am I healthier because of where I work – or less so? Am I healthier because of the team I'm on and the boss I work for – or less so? And, am I healthier because of the systems I operate within – or less so?

Within the midst of these concentric circles of influence is the idea of Me At My Best®. Yes, we can each take steps to become our better selves - but we need first to call out the extent to which we are positively or negatively influenced in our efforts to become healthier and happier. We need to be asking ourselves: How might I have greater or lesser access to resources and social power because of my gender, race, religion, sexual orientation and identity, age, or abilities? We need to recognize the extent to which we hold Wellness Privilege – or don't.

### 4-Levels Model



© Motion Infusion 2021

## Why is it important to understand the role of Wellness Privilege?

Ally has traditionally been more associated with just DEI, whereas “Wellness Champion” is often the term that is associated with workplace wellness. Now is the time to think about how we might serve both roles.

And that’s where the Wellness Privilege checklist comes in.

### HOW SHOULD YOU APPLY THIS CHECKLIST?

Now it’s time to roll up your sleeves. Review this list of potential privileges to assess how much wellness privilege you have or don’t have. The goal is to take stock and realize it’s not a personal failure, but that larger forces are at play.

**For individuals:** This is a chance to identify what systems are working in your favor or against you. What systems do you need to navigate, and what changes do you need to make in response to these systems to achieve better wellness?

**For managers and allies:** Are there changes you can make to create more wellness privilege for your team?

**For organizational leaders:** Are there changes you can make to create more wellness privilege across your workforce?

With these questions in mind, let’s dive in.





# 50 Ways You Might Have Wellness Privilege at Work

## PHYSICAL

- 1. I have access to a gym, wellness center, or fitness classes in the workplace.
- 2. I can carve out time to engage with well-being activities during the workday (walking 1-on-1s, 10-minute stretch break) without organizational repercussions.
- 3. I have access to healthy food options that fit within my dietary choices.
- 4. I do not have caregiving responsibilities that preclude me from daily well-being activities.
- 5. I can take breaks to rest during the day.
- 6. My workplace supports time off to rest and recover (paid vacation days, discouraging after-hours emails and meetings outside of normal work hours).

## EMOTIONAL

- 7. I can show up as who I really am. I don't have to "code switch" to hide some aspect of my identity.
- 8. I have control over how I manage my time at work.
- 9. I believe I'm treated fairly at work.
- 10. I feel my organization cares about me as a human being, above and beyond the work I do.
- 11. I have access to mental health resources such as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- 12. I feel safe and supported at home.
- 13. I receive adequate support with household and family responsibilities.
- 14. I can observe the holy days in my religious tradition without having to use vacation days.

## FINANCIAL

- 15. I feel I'm fairly compensated for the work I do and for my performance.
- 16. I can afford my medical insurance co-pays and any deductibles.
- 17. My employer pays for professional development classes and books, or I can afford these myself.
- 18. I'm confident that if I were to lose my job, I'd be able to land another one without worrying about paying bills.
- 19. I can afford to join out-of-office lunches or after-work social activities.
- 20. I can manage monthly payments on any debt.
- 21. I don't have to decide which bills to pay or go without meals because of not being able to afford food.
- 22. I can afford stable housing within a reasonable commuting distance from work.

## CAREER

- 23. I have clarity in my role and responsibilities.
- 24. I feel a sense of control over my time at work.

- 25. I do not rely on my employer for a work visa.
- 26. I'm confident that I can find work that matches my skills and passions.
- 27. I'm not asked to do menial tasks that colleagues of another gender or race are asked to do.
- 28. I have opportunities to grow my career.
- 29. I haven't been told to wait my turn for a promotion or plum project assignment behind an equally qualified peer.
- 30. I'm confident that I can raise concerns, share bad news, and take risks without fearing retaliation or damaging my job status.

## SOCIAL

- 31. I get equal air time in conversations and meetings; I feel valued and rarely interrupted or ignored.
- 32. I'm confident that if I raise an idea in a meeting, I'll be credited for that idea.
- 33. I feel welcome and valued on group projects.
- 34. My team and manager know when I'm feeling upset or left out and reach out to check on me.
- 35. I feel mentally and emotionally safe at work.
- 36. I don't face discrimination in my day-to-day work activities.
- 37. I feel physically safe at work and professional events; I don't receive unwanted sexual advances at work.
- 38. I feel welcome at networking opportunities.
- 39. I'm rarely, if ever, late to work or miss work because of a child's illness or family emergency.
- 40. I have gotten a job or a promotion with the help of a social, family, or school-related connection.
- 41. My employer provides a paid family leave policy.
- 42. My manager supports my well-being, talks about it, and creates systems within the team to promote well-being.

## COMMUNITY

- 43. There are public green spaces that I can access during breaks at work.
- 44. There are sidewalks and safe places to move about in the neighborhood of my workplace.
- 45. The air quality is good at my workplace.
- 46. I can take public transportation to and from work.
- 47. I am not concerned about my personal safety when I take public transportation or take breaks outdoors.
- 48. My employer provides paid time off to volunteer in my community.
- 49. My workplace provides easy access to good healthcare.
- 50. I can speak to medical providers in a language I'm fluent in.

## About the Authors

### LAURA PUTNAM

Laura Putnam, MA, author of *Workplace Wellness that Works*, is CEO and Founder of Motion Infusion, whose work has been covered by MSNBC, The New York Times, TODAY, Fox News, US News & World Report, Business Insider and NPR. She is a former teacher, dancer, gymnast and now a movement builder in the world of health and wellness.

A leading authority on how organizations can promote well-being at work and how leaders can inspire employees to adopt healthier behaviors, Laura is a frequent keynote speaker and training facilitator. Laura teaches at Stanford University, served as the chair of the American Heart Association's Greater Bay Area 2020 Task Force and is the recipient of the American Heart Association's "2020 Impact" award as well as the National Wellness Institute's "Circle of Leadership" award.

A graduate of Brown University School of Education and Stanford University in International Relations, she lives in San Francisco with her fiancé.

Learn more at [www.lauraputnam.com](http://www.lauraputnam.com)

### ABOUT KAREN CATLIN

After spending 25 years building software products, Karen Catlin is now a leadership coach and a highly acclaimed author and global speaker on inclusive workplaces. She is the author of three books: *Better Allies: Everyday Actions to Create Inclusive, Engaging Workplaces*, *The Better Allies Approach to Hiring*, and *Present! A Techie's Guide to Public Speaking* (co-authored with Poornima Vijayashanker). Her writing has appeared in Inc., the Daily Beast, Fast Company, and The Muse, and she's consulted on articles for the Wall Street Journal, Forbes, and the New York Times. In 2020, her unique approach to allyship was featured in the BBC's Ally Track tool.

Karen is a self-proclaimed public speaking geek who has spoken at hundreds of conferences and corporate events, delivered a TEDx talk, and even had a brief cameo on the TODAY show.

A graduate of Brown University's Computer Science department, she lives in San Mateo, CA with her partner Tim.

Learn more at [www.karencatlin.com](http://www.karencatlin.com)