

CASE STUDY

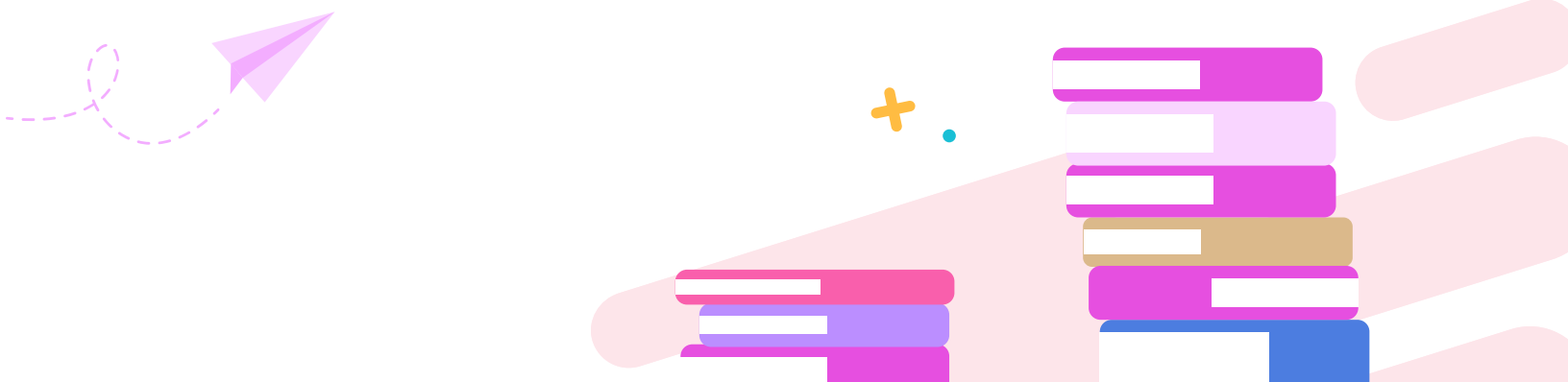
BH Companies and Zoobean: Building a Culture of Wellbeing and Inclusion With a Corporate Reading Challenge

In 2020, the challenges of working from home, coupled with a renewed interest in social justice in the wake of the global BLM marches, prompted many organizations to commit to building a more unified and inclusive company cultures.

Joanna Zabriskie, President and CEO of BH Companies (BH), set a goal in 2021 to prioritize building community across all branches of the company, spread over 26 states and more than 300 properties. But Zabriskie's solution wasn't lunch-hour yoga classes or monthly Zoom happy hours. She chose to unite her staff around a shared love of reading.

In January 2021, BH became the first corporation to use [Beanstack for Employee Wellbeing](#), the corporate version of the top-rated reading challenge mobile app used by schools and libraries across the country. For Zabriskie, Beanstack is the ideal tool to integrate her commitment to inclusion and her focus on employee health. "This challenge is a great opportunity to head into the new year with a sense of unity, a focus on personal wellbeing, and a shared enthusiasm for reading," [she says](#).

Corporate reading challenges aren't just a throwback to high school English class; BH's decision is backed by science. Studies have shown that cultivating a culture of reading can make your employees more empathetic, reduce stress, and promote long-term physical and emotional health. Keep reading to learn how you can use reading challenges to support employee wellness and prioritize diversity and inclusion at your organization.



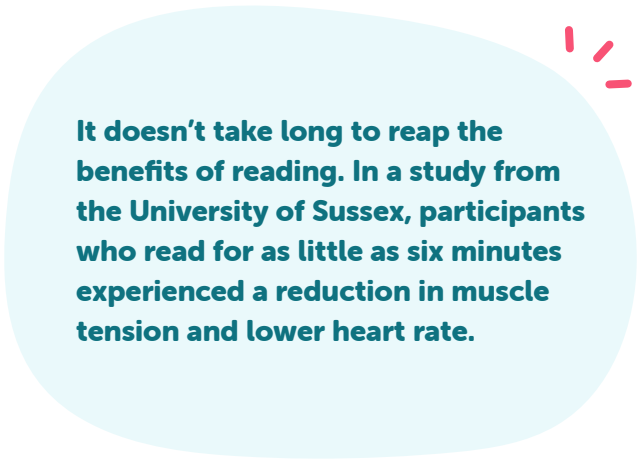
Reading for Wellness



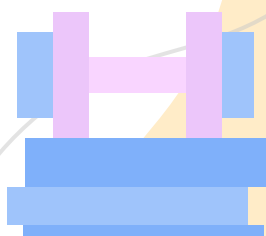
While complimentary subscriptions to meditation apps might be the new trend in corporate wellness, [one study](#) from the University of Sussex found that reading is one of the most effective ways to relax the mind and body. In fact, reading was shown to reduce stress by up to 68% – more than other popular stress-reducing techniques like listening to music or drinking a cup of tea. And it doesn't take long to reap the benefits – in the Sussex study, participants who read for as little as six minutes experienced a reduction in muscle tension and lower heart rate.

Reducing stress has long-term benefits for your staff. According to [some studies](#), stress is believed to contribute to 60% of all diseases, including stroke and heart disease. And stress reduction isn't the only health benefit of reading. Studies show that reading [improves sleep quality](#) by limiting exposure to blue light (from phone screens or televisions) before bed, and may even [slow cognitive decline](#) as we age.

At BH, staff and their families are reaping the health benefits of reading via their "New Year, New Beginnings" challenge, which encourages them to read daily through features like streaks, a barcode scanner, and leaderboards that foster friendly competition among peers.



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• Cultivating Empathy

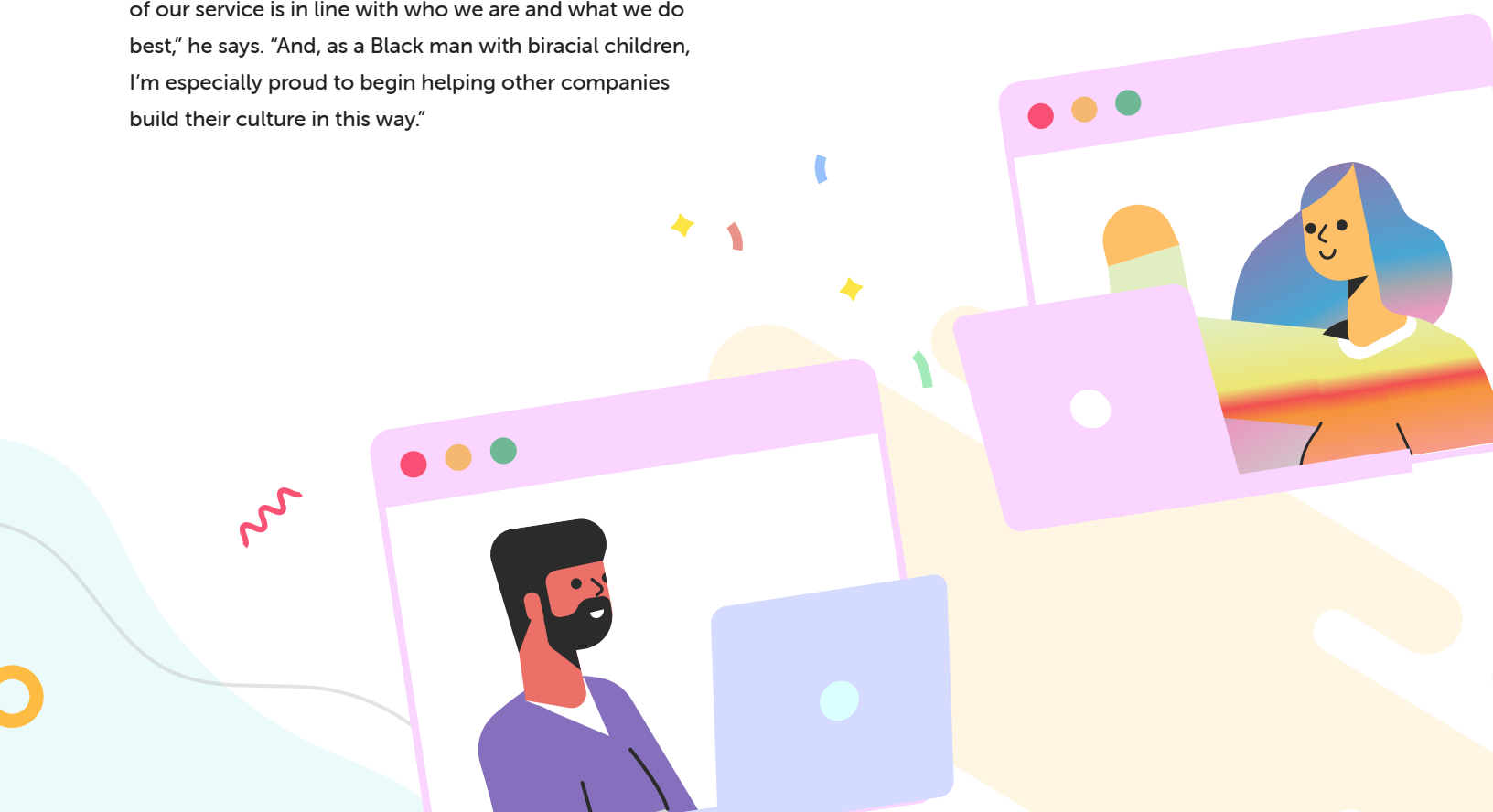


Reading has clear health benefits – but how does it support diversity and inclusion? [One study](#) found that reading fiction increases empathy. To prove this, scientists measured how readers and non-readers fare in “theory of mind” exercises, or exercises that test, “the human capacity to comprehend that other people hold beliefs and desires and that these may differ from one’s own beliefs and desires.” This study shows that reading literary fiction, which dives into the complex thoughts and emotions of characters, improves empathy, and makes it easier for subjects to understand the experiences of people who are different from them.

As Keith Oatley, lead researcher of one empathy study from the University of Toronto said, “Fiction can augment and help us understand our social experience.”

For CEO and co-founder Felix Lloyd, cultivating empathy and centering diversity is a [vital part of Zoobean’s mission](#). “Since my wife and I started Zoobean, one of our three core values has been inclusion... this evolution of our service is in line with who we are and what we do best,” he says. “And, as a Black man with biracial children, I’m especially proud to begin helping other companies build their culture in this way.”

BH’s first month-long reading challenge started on January 4th, 2021. As of January 28th, 477 readers had logged 124,431 minutes, or more than 2000 hours. Teams are separated by department, region, and even favorite genre (with fiction in the lead, followed closely by romance and mystery).



A Simple Solution With Big Impact



Often, companies associate investing in “culture” with the frequently touted, expensive strategies adopted by startups: catered lunches, game rooms, in-office gyms. But BH proves that cultivating company culture doesn’t have to be complicated.

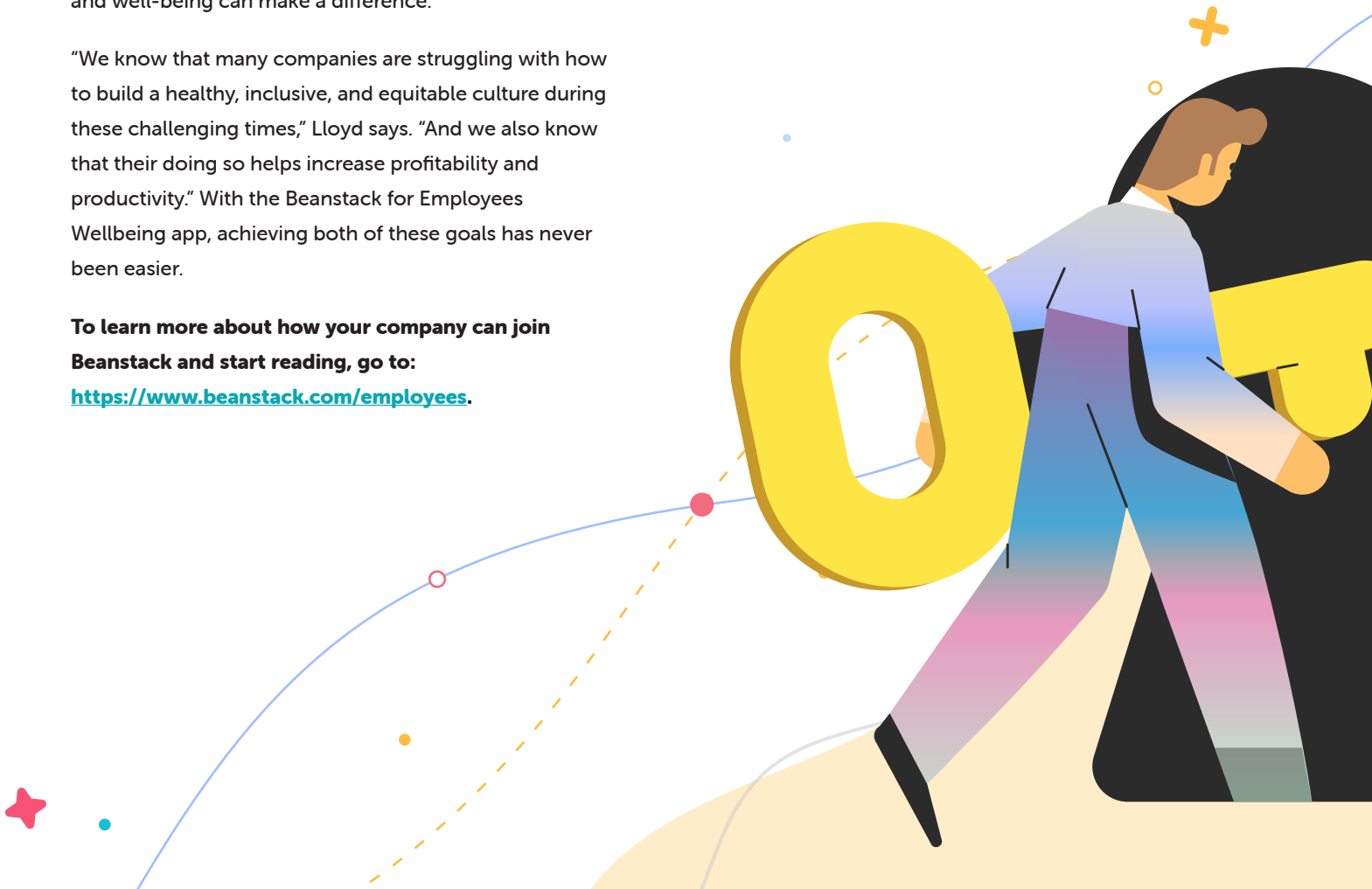
“One of our guiding principles at BH is to first invest in our employees as they are the foundation of our success,” Zabriskie notes. “Once we evaluated Beanstack, its low per-employee-per-month cost and minimal implementation requirements made it the perfect employee benefit for us.”

With a “Read Diverse America” challenge set to launch in March 2021 for national reading month, Zoobean is demonstrating how their unique approach to inclusion and well-being can make a difference.

“We know that many companies are struggling with how to build a healthy, inclusive, and equitable culture during these challenging times,” Lloyd says. “And we also know that their doing so helps increase profitability and productivity.” With the Beanstack for Employees Wellbeing app, achieving both of these goals has never been easier.

To learn more about how your company can join Beanstack and start reading, go to:

<https://www.beanstack.com/employees>.





About Beanstack

Beanstack helps company leaders improve their workplace culture by motivating employees to read more and read together. Companies use Beanstack to inspire team building, promote DEI initiatives, and increase employee engagement - especially for teams with remote employees. Reading is exercise for the mind. Regular reading habits are associated with reduced stress, increased empathy for others, and positive mental health.

Beanstack is the flagship product of Zoobean, Inc., created to help people read more and read together. Beanstack is licensed by over 10,000 public libraries, school districts, and corporations around the world. Zoobean's investors include Kapor Capital, Mark Cuban, RevUp Capital, the AT&T Aspire Accelerator, and Amazon's Alexa Fund. Its founders were previously Washington, DC's Teacher of the Year and Google's first Head of K-12 Education Outreach. Learn more at beanstack.com.