

INSIGHT INTO THE WORLD OF EAP / EFAP LEVERAGING THE VALUE OF HUMAN POTENTIAL

As I meet with counsellors and psychologists, I am often asked about the essence of the employee assistance profession. Such questions asked with genuine curiosity seem to whisk me on a metaphoric soap box bringing out my passion for the work and resulting in listeners getting way more than they have bargained for. I have often said that conscientious EAP work can be viewed as a modality onto it self. Delivered well, EAP is a model in terms of its purpose, structure and skill-set that can be the 'modality of choice' when rendering professional services to many private clients. The structure, focus and parameters of EAP fit with the take-charge and pro-active clients that are emerging in this early part of the 21st century.

Simply put, EA professionals exist to leverage the value of human capital. That is to say, the field of EAP is in place to help organizations get the most from their employees. Getting the most from their employees does not mean 'maxing' them out on a daily basis. It means having well-balanced employees who are productive; who know how to increase their productivity during busy times; and, who can plan and enjoy their daily breaks, weekends and holiday time. Therefore, it is important to understand that employee assistance programs are seen as a critical component of workplace operations rather than a component of health care.

Employee Assistance professionals (counsellors) are in a unique position in every client-case of always considering both the employee-client and the employer-organization. In this way the EA professional's clinical work makes a difference to the client and to the workplace. EA professionals do this while maintaining the highest ethical standards of confidentiality.

The Employee Assistance Professional Association (EAPA) describes the "essence" of EAP as "the application of knowledge about behaviour and behavioural health to make accurate assessments, followed by the appropriate action to improve the productivity and healthy functioning of the workplace."

The essence of EAP links to the EAP mind-set that "a healthy employee is a fully productive employee". This is the age of Information-technology with the mosaic of the workplace being multi-generational and multi-cultural. Employees are knowledge workers today. And, when stress mounts, individuals are impacted (at varying degrees of severity) emotionally, mentally, sexually, socially, financially, in their families, workplaces and in relationships throughout their community. Like most clients, EAP clients come to us when their coping mechanisms have broken down. Given that this is the era of knowledge-workers, if a client's coping mechanisms have broken down then their functioning at work has probably reduced significantly.

Having been associated with the field of EAP for 17 years, I believe the work that can be done in EAP or within the EAP skill-set truly leverages the value of human potential. Skilled EAP professionals help their clients begin to take responsibility for their 'whole' lives. Clients are dealing with the issue(s) that brought them into counselling from a systemic approach. As the issue is addressed and begins to be dealt with, clients step into their confidence and become happier with increased energy and readiness to craft their immediate future. They become more productive at work because they are functioning better in their 'whole' life or vice versa.

These are difficult times. There is much uncertainty about the economy, the rise in unemployment rates, national and world affairs, the swine flu pandemic and the senseless kidnappings and killings that keep occurring. To stay current in our field means understanding the world that we live in. That is to say, along with updating our professional knowledge, we need to keep current with a general sense of business, health and world affairs because we are all connected directly or indirectly to these events. We must understand too how we as counsellors can prepare and respond to change in our own lives. We are role models for our clients – often times the tid-bits of information we give clients (or client's pick-up) about ourselves in the session impacts the client much more than we ever imagined. And, we are role models to the counsellors that are coming up after us in terms of how we conduct ourselves and how we negotiate our career paths.

It is the EA counsellor who understands the essence of EAP, the core competencies and the parameters of service delivery that will thrive within the context of EAP as well as with any non-EAP clients. As I mentioned above, most clients today appear to have a more take-charge and proactive outlook. And, like EAP-clients, they will not be dependent on their therapist/counsellor. As counsellors mindful of the EAP skill-set, we are actively in the position of leveraging human potential – WOW!!!

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