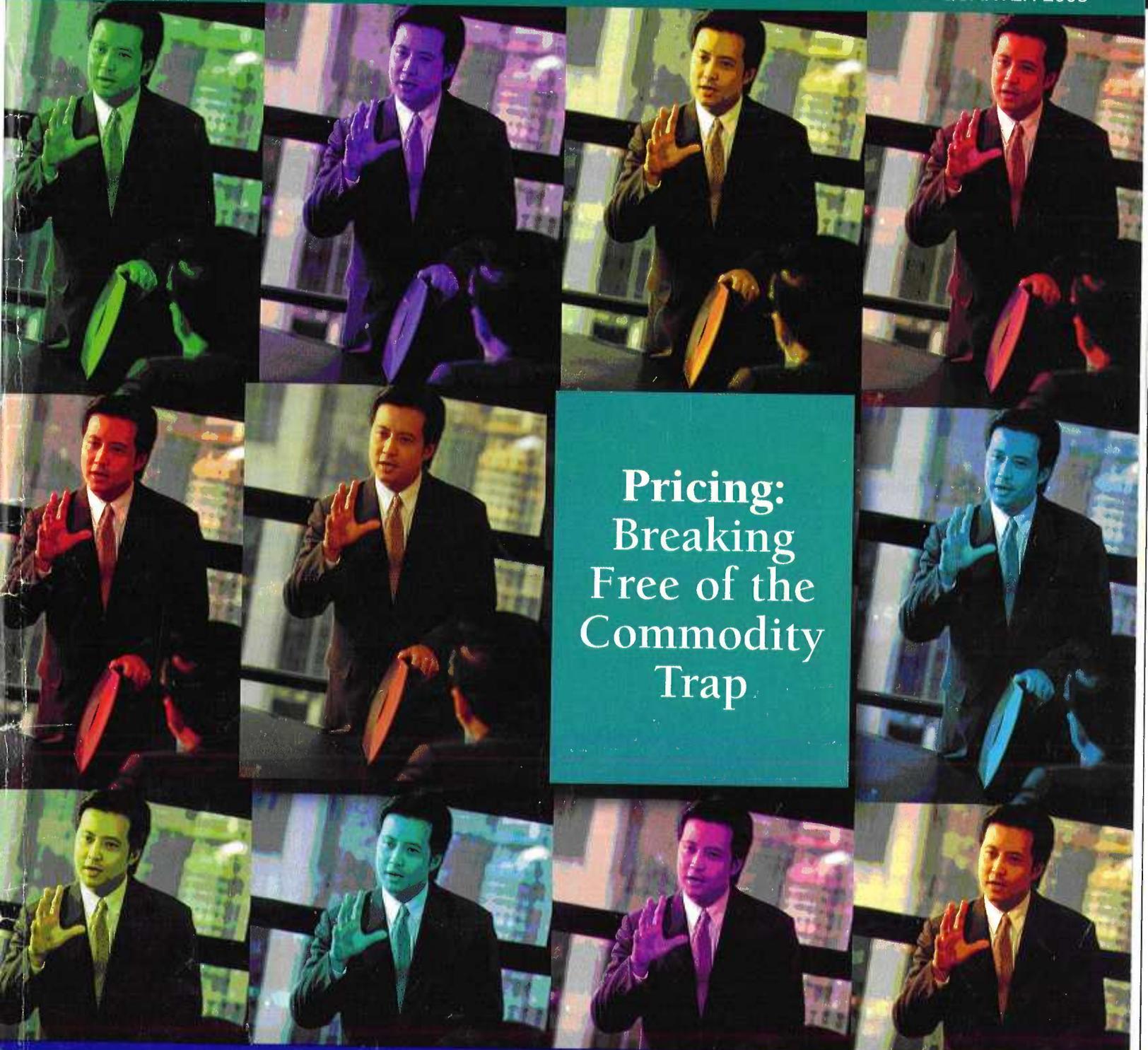


Journal of **Employee Assistance**

The magazine of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association

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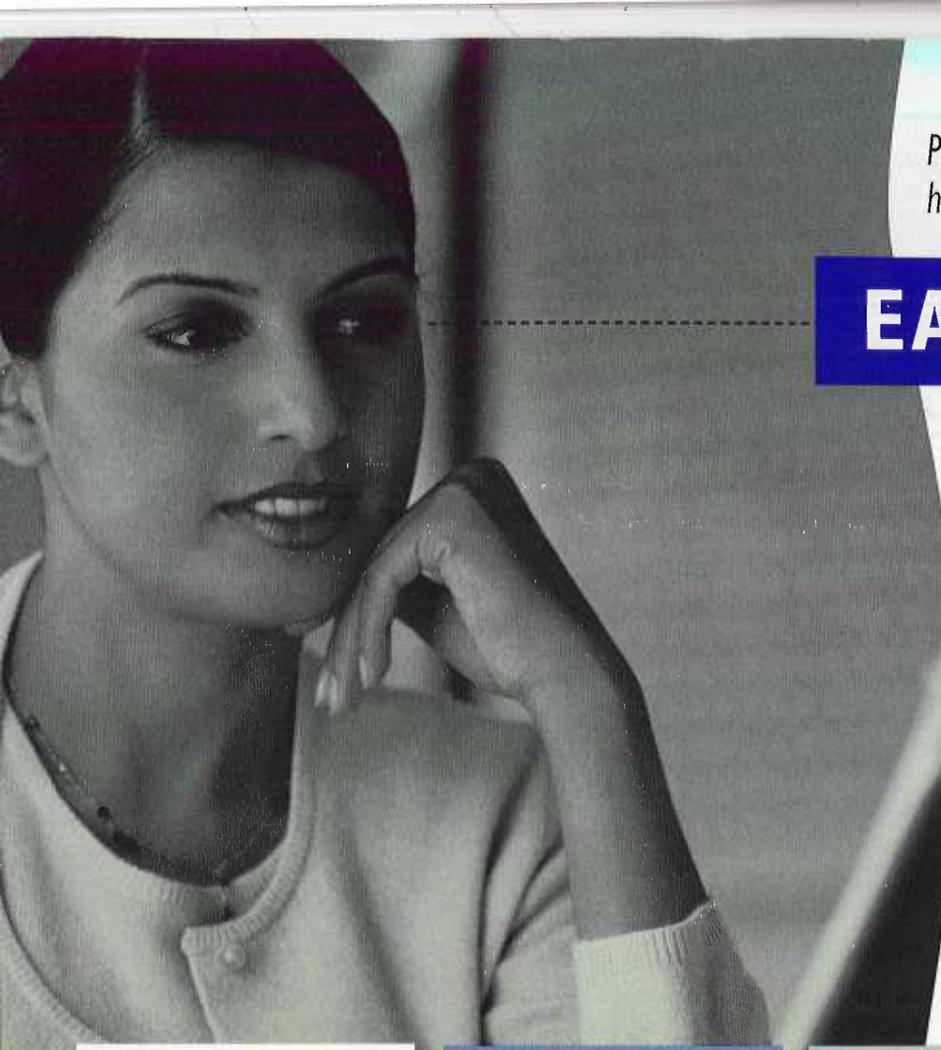


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Focus

Pricing: Breaking Free of the Commodity Trap 15

Capitated rate structures and look-alike products and services have resulted in falling prices and stagnant profits for EAPs. Five leaders in the EA field offer their suggestions for breaking free of the "commodity trap" and creating greater value for work organizations.

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by An Brunelle, CRC, CDMS, and John Lui, CAGS, CDMS, CRC, CCM

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Research on substance abuse prevention has led to the development of four training programs that can increase EAP utilization and perhaps suggest an additional focus for the EAP Core Technology.

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The “Market” Doesn’t Drive Pricing—We Do



John Maynard, Ph.D., CEAP

by John Maynard, Ph.D., CEAP

Economists have been expressing concern lately about the possibility of deflation in national and world economies. Public policy makers, knowing the insidious effects of this condition, are considering taking far-reaching measures to prevent it.

Meanwhile, we in the EA profession have been caught in a deflationary spiral of decreasing prices and budgets for more than a decade. How can we break out of this spiral? What measures can we take to influence pricing and help ensure we are compensated fairly for the services we deliver?

Pricing affects everything we do. Our ability to charge a reasonable price for our services affects the quality of our programs, our own livelihoods and professional self-esteem, and ultimately even the survival of EAPs as a viable concept.

This issue of the *Journal of Employee Assistance* focuses on pricing and how EAPs can break out of the “commodity trap” in which they find themselves. Many of us blame the “market” for our pricing predicament, and certainly our corporate and organizational customers are always on the lookout for ways to reduce the prices they pay for EAPs (and all other goods and services). But this natural customer behavior is not the source of our pricing problem. That problem—and the solutions to it—lie within our own profession.

For years, we have talked about the importance of “making the business case” for EAPs. Unfortunately, this alone will not help us with our pricing problem unless we can make

a “differential business case” that demonstrates that the more a company invests in its program, the greater the return it can expect from its investment. EAPs that demonstrate better outcomes in terms that their customers value will be able to charge higher prices.

In the first issue of the *Journal of Employee Assistance*, we focused on strategies for positioning EAPs to exert maximum influence within work organizations. We explored the importance of developing a long-range strategic plan to create value within each organization and the need to avoid the “commodity” phase of the product life-cycle by redefining the very essence of employee assistance.

In this issue of the *Journal*, we tackle pricing directly. Five leaders in the EA field offer their insights on how we might break out of the deflationary spiral. Their articles address pricing from a variety of perspectives, including the relationship between pricing and quality, how to raise prices (and profits) by providing more services, the role of marketing in increasing employers’ perceptions of the value of EAPs, and the use of pricing models that more accurately reflect the benefits EAPs provide.

This issue also includes a look at other topics of interest to EA professionals, such as workplace bullying and disability management. In addition, you will find references to several studies, resources, and programs that may be helpful to EA professionals, including a new initiative to educate businesses, communities, schools, and policymakers on alcohol addiction and treatment. As always, we

invite your ideas for future articles and themes, as well as your letters and comments about this issue.

P.S. You may have noticed that the masthead on the cover says this is Vol. 33, No. 2 of the *Journal*. Don’t worry; you haven’t missed a few dozen issues. When we changed the magazine’s name from *EAPA Exchange* to *Journal of Employee Assistance*, we started with Vol. 1, No. 1. But the Postal Service considers the *Journal* to be a continuation of the *Exchange*, so to comply with their rules, we’re reverting to the indexing system we had begun with the *Exchange*.

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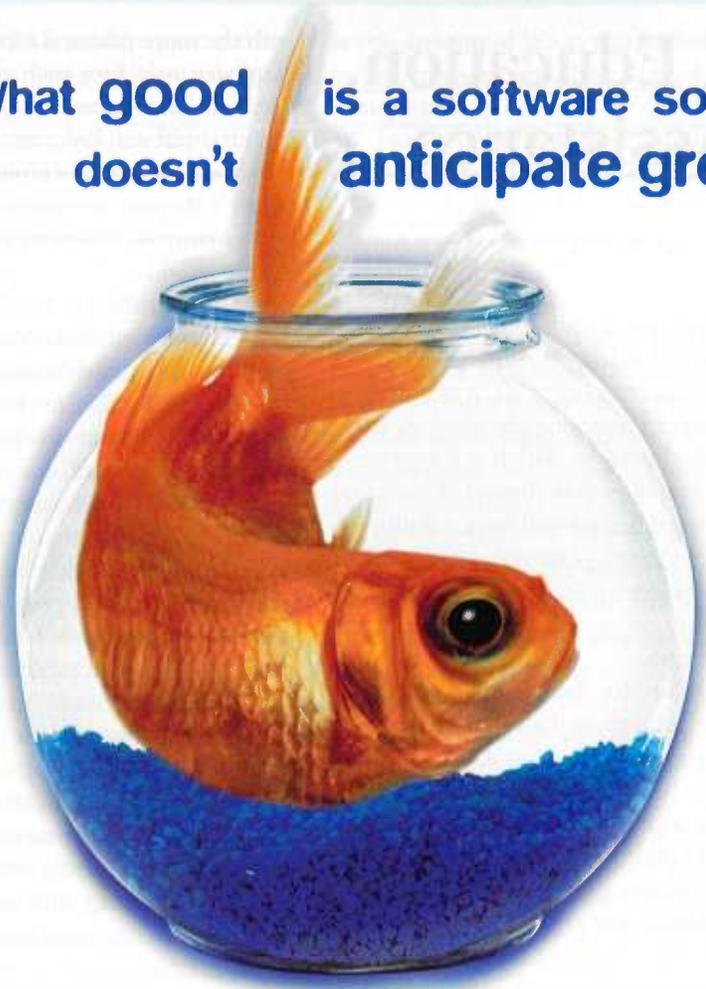
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Professionalism, Education, and Employee Assistance

It was with considerable interest that I read the four essays under the heading of "Training the Next Generation of EA Professionals" in the May/June 2002 issue of the *EAP Association Exchange*. Professionalism and education are necessarily related; without a coherent and unifying body of thought and practice, there is no such thing as a profession. At most, there will be only a diverse group of individuals whose only guideline or standard will be a kind of pragmatic one. Unfortunately, this is the state of the employee assistance field today.

The first article is by Michal E. Mor Barak and is titled "Managing Diversity: Preparing EA Professionals to Practice in the Age of Globalization." Mor Barak's major thesis is that "[t]he next generation of employee assistance professionals will practice in a corporate environment that will be increasingly diverse and where national boundaries will blur when it comes to doing business." These EA professionals, she says, will need training that "should include instilling knowledge of diversity, discrimination, and empowerment so they will be able to initiate focused interventions, such as diversity training, support groups for women and minority constituencies, and mentorship programs to facilitate the inclusion of women and minority workers in management and supervisory positions."

The first and most obvious thing to be said about Mor Barak's essay is that however well-intentioned it may be, it is not about employee assistance. Nowhere in her essay is there any mention of the troubled employee—who is, or should be, the central focus

of employee assistance—or the EAP Core Technology. If employee assistance interests her at all, it is only as a means of promoting the ideology of multiculturalism, which is a very certain guarantee that instead of inclusion and tolerance we will have a multiplicity of groups—cultural, racial, and ethnic—competing with one another for whatever corporate spoils there are to be had.

If for Mor Barak employee assistance is no more than a function of ideology, for Dale Masi it is no more than a function of social work. Masi's is the second article in the series and is titled "Professional Education: The Key to Developing Conceptual Thinking." Essentially, her essay is about social work, not employee assistance; indeed her essay might be more aptly titled "Social Work and Clinical Practice in a Corporate Setting." Almost the entire thrust of her graduate EAP curriculum at the University of Maryland is in the direction of social work. In the first year (required for all students) of the two-year program, five of the nine courses are directly related to social work. The second year of the program, on both the management track and the clinical track (especially the latter), continues the litany.

Simply put, the problem with this kind of curriculum is that it has little or nothing to do with employee assistance. Missing entirely from her article are those concepts that constitute the fundamentals of employee assistance—the troubled employee, constructive confrontation, productivity, the division of labor, the role of management in an EAP, and the nature and structure of the corporation. These, along

with the more practical aspects of employee assistance such as consultation with management, supervisor training, and employee education, are the nuts and bolts of employee assistance. If they are missing in the education of employee assistance practitioners, no amount of training in clinical theory and practice will suffice to develop and maintain effective employee assistance programs.

The third article in the series is by Cynthia Sulaski and is titled "Back to Our Roots: Learning From the Earlier Generations." For Sulaski, "the premise of employee assistance made sense—a workplace resource allowing professionals to help people in the workplace. This 'hook' is what I fear is missing for many who entered the EA profession in the second half of the second generation and most likely will be missing for the third generation as well. With changes in EAP models and services, people entering our field today aren't conducting supervisory training, consulting with managers, working with human resources staff, or performing any of the other activities that provided the breadth of experience for those of us from the earlier generations."

Sulaski suggests that we must "[g]o forward by going back to our roots, to the EAP Core Technology, and learn from those in the first and second generations who previously practiced it or still do so now." Indeed, the only way the employee assistance field will survive is to return to its roots—that is, to its principles and practice as outlined in the EAP Core Technology and embodied in the experience of earlier generations.

The last article in the series is by Helene King and Angela Pittman and is titled "Our Profession Needs to Encourage Mentorship." The article is brief but very much to the point: King and Pittman state that "[e]mployee assistance is not clinical work," which is something that needs to be said over and over again in view of the fact that