

# Journal of Employee Assistance

The magazine of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association

VOL. 36 NO. 3 • 3RD QUARTER 2006



## Supervisory Training

Also Inside:  
Strengthening Marriage: A Role for EAPs?  
Minimizing Disaster Response Stress: Lessons from Katrina



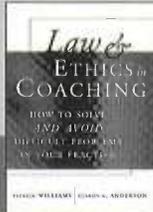
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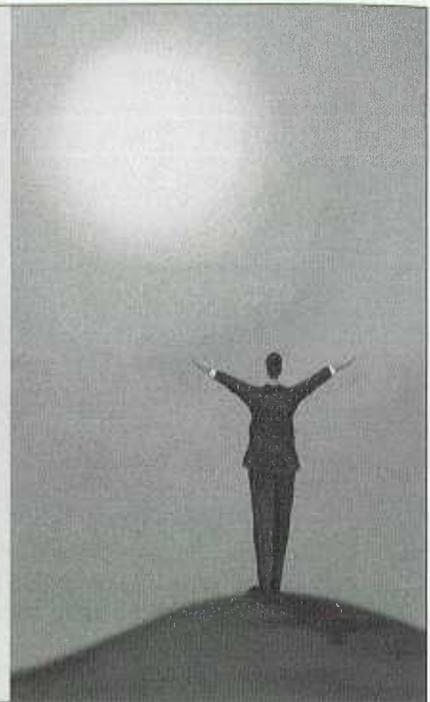
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*“Without a formal referral, a supervisor is unable to play a role in the unique process that a supervisory referral to an EAP sets in motion.”*

Tamara Cagney  
“Supervisory Training:  
The Policy-Practice Gap”

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# We're Only Human

by Maria Hartley, LEAP



Maria Hartley

One of the most popular U.S. television shows in recent years has been "The Apprentice," which features people from all walks of life performing difficult job assignments in hopes of earning a position with Donald Trump's real estate investment firm. Each week, millions of viewers tune in not only to watch the contestants use their intelligence, street smarts, and chutzpah to outdo each other, but also to hear "the Donald" utter the words every worker dreads—"You're fired!"

The show plays on Mr. Trump's reputation as a demanding and mercurial executive, and certainly many viewers take satisfaction in watching him terminate someone who isn't performing as well as everyone else. But the truth is that his behavior is the exception among leaders, not the rule.

Leaders at all levels—from executives to front-line managers—are people, and most people avoid confrontation. In the workplace, supervisors tend to avoid addressing performance problems until the consequences of continuing to tolerate them outweigh the benefits. Many supervisors also worry that confronting an underperforming worker may reflect poorly on their managerial skills and hurt their chances for promotion.

But even supervisors who address performance problems early are unlikely to mention the EAP as a resource. They may see an EAP referral as a form of punishment, or they may have already decided that the problem worker is not worth keeping and thus undeserving of any opportunity for improvement.

Training supervisors to use EAP services is absolutely critical to our industry's success. Unless we overcome what I call the "human side" of person-

nel supervision, we will never reach our full potential in the workplace in terms of utilization, cost savings, or any other performance measure.

How can we respond to this challenge? We must position EAPs as a human resources best practice—as a service that leading managers use to ensure their own success and that of their workers. We must promote EAPs in such a way that supervisors will see referrals as evidence of caring and professionalism, not punitive discipline.

These strategies are all the more necessary as employers race to adapt to the pressures of a global economy. More managers are finding themselves supervising larger numbers of workers and/or workers in dispersed locations. They no longer have the luxury of holding regular face-to-face meetings with employees and closely monitoring each worker's performance. Training them to consider the EAP as a resource at the first sign of trouble can make their jobs much easier.

This issue of the *Journal* looks at the "gap" between the need to train supervisors about EAPs and the many reasons why it doesn't happen. One article describes an attempt to "normalize" EAP training by creating a two-year certification program, while another discusses the many opportunities available through technology to provide training materials that employers will use. There's also an overview of so-called "mandatory" referrals and the role they play in the employer-employee-EAP relationship.

In addition to supervisory training, three other topics of importance to the workplace also receive attention in this issue—the impact of divorce on workers' performance and what employers can do to minimize it; the stress of responding to disasters that affect work organiza-

tions and how EA professionals can reduce it; and the problems caused by supervisors who confuse employees with conflicting messages and how workers can address them.

The various topics addressed by these articles reflect the daily challenges we and our clients face as we seek to be successful in the fast-paced, ever-changing global economy. EA professionals must be knowledgeable about these challenges and flexible enough to address them—and help employers and employees do the same. In the high-tech world of work, our best strategy is to lead with our strength—our expertise in human nature. ■

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## A Scare Tactic

In regard to "The Evolution of Psychological First Aid" (2nd quarter 2006) by Bob VandePol, Lyle Labardee, and Richard Gist, I was greatly bothered by the use of inference and innuendo to tell EA professionals that our training is outdated and may be harmful and that we should subscribe to their version of "evidence-based practice." Let's look at the evidence on which they base their criticisms.

The authors assert that some "widely practiced and promoted approaches—most specifically debriefing [which they do not define] and related techniques—have proven, in a growing range of controlled studies, to be ineffective ... and a few well controlled studies have reported adverse outcomes." The problem with that statement is that it simply is not true. Let's check their assertions against their references.

Rose et. al. (2002, not 2004 as cited\*) evaluated "studies" where the intervention "consisted of a single session only," which is not recommended in any model I'm aware of, and that "involved some form of emotional processing/ventilation," which is a rather ill-defined term. The "studies" themselves didn't define the term "debriefing," so it isn't clear what was being studied, and the "methodological quality" was "variable." In short, Rose and his co-authors drew conclusions from studies whose methodology is suspect about a practice that wasn't defined and that was used in a way that isn't recommended. Are we really to consider this credible and reliable, let alone a "well-controlled" study?

Similarly, the meta-analysis by van Emmerick et al. (2002) looked at "studies" of "single session debriefings" specifically using the term "CISD," a direct ref-

erence to the model espoused by the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation. Yet, as van Emmerick notes, "CISD was never designed to be a stand-alone intervention, but rather part of a broader, multicomponent CISM-type intervention that included training in being prepared for a crisis, follow-up, and referral. The efficacy of this type of intervention was not the subject of our meta-analysis ...". In fact, van Emmerick selected, among others, Bisson's horrible "study" where he went into a hospital to conduct single-session "debriefings" with burn victims who were still in pain and undergoing treatment. Try getting that study design through the Human Subjects Committee of any university!

The authors warn us not to practice what we're not trained adequately to do (a valid warning), try to debunk our "familiar training" via bad research, and recommend we leave crisis work to "specialty partners" who have "conversance and capabilities that fall increasingly out-

*continued on page 6*



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