

Journal of **Employee Assistance**

The magazine of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association

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Managing Multiple Generations in the Workplace

Also Inside:
How Not to Respond to a Critical Incident
European Purchasers' Attitudes toward EAPs
Returning Employees to Work from Disability Leave



Employee Assistance
Professionals Association

Journal of Employee Assistance

The magazine of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association

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"A few days later, I went to work and found I just couldn't do it anymore. I couldn't answer the phone, couldn't read my e-mails, and couldn't meet with my clients. I was utterly and completely depleted."

Pam Wyss
"First Person"

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Four Generations, One Workforce

by Maria Lund, LEAP

A popular children's story tells of several blind men who are asked to determine what an elephant looks like by feeling the elephant's body. One blind man touches a leg and says the elephant is like a pillar; one feels the tail and says the elephant is like a rope; one rubs the ear and says the elephant is like a hand fan. After the others have finished touching the elephant and offering their opinions, they argue about who is right. A wise man explains that all of them are correct.

This story illustrates the principle of living in harmony with people who have different belief systems and demonstrates that the same thing can be viewed in different ways. In many respects, it is an apt metaphor for the challenges of managing multiple generations in the workplace.

For employers and their human resources personnel, the challenges include engaging workers with different interests and needs in the same work environment, finding efficient and effective ways to communicate with employees who have different communication preferences and skills, and motivating and rewarding employees of all levels and ages. These challenges essentially comprise all of the aspects of knowledge and talent management.

For employees, the primary challenge is simply to work alongside those with different values and work habits without feeling judgmental or frustrated. If that challenge can be overcome, real learning and growth can occur.

The presence of multiple generations in the workplace also creates several opportunities, such as enhancing the power of collaboration by taking advantage of many minds and perspec-

tives. Other opportunities include stratifying work tasks so each person can focus on what he or she does best, enhancing services and products for customers, and developing the capability to shift and flow with market turns.

Multiple generations in the workplace also create opportunities for EAPs to help human resources personnel, managers, and employees be at their best. Employee assistance professionals can provide organizational consultation, management training, and employee consultation, thereby allowing human resources staff and managers to devote time to developing and executing plans to maximize the effectiveness of the workforce.

This issue of the *Journal* discusses concrete ways that EA professionals can help meet these challenges and make the most of the opportunities. One article describes how coaching can transcend generational barriers to help facilitate trust, dialogue, and mutual respect among workers to leverage their strengths and create positive results. Another article explains how to help employees and their managers develop ideas for increasing motivation and, thus, improving performance. A third article discusses how employers and managers can best accommodate the growing number of young adults who received school-based accommodations for their learning disabilities and are now entering the workforce.

In addition to these theme articles, the *Journal* also contains a feature on how one large employer uses its EAP to coach employees who are returning to work from disability leave. This issue also contains three articles that discuss EA developments in Europe, including



Maria Lund

using EAPs in Greece to assist working women and in Ireland to conduct fitness-for-duty examinations.

Finally, I would like to share with you the editorial calendar for the remainder of 2008. The quarterly themes are as follows:

- Q2: EAPs and the Electronic Society
- Q3: The Integration of Physical and Mental Health
- Q4: Fee Systems for EAPs

If you have any particular topics you would like to see addressed as part of these themes, please don't hesitate to let me know.

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A Call to Action

In the 4th quarter 2006 issue of the Journal, Dale Masi and David Sharar discussed three "crises" within the employee assistance industry—the relationship (or lack thereof) between EAP prices and performance, the "free" EAP, and procurement problems. To address these crises, Masi and Sharar proposed developing a foundation to support research into performance measurement:

The field's professional associations, EAPA and EASNA (the Employee Assistance Society of North America), should form a performance measurement council in close collaboration with a stakeholder group such as SHRM (the Society for Human Resource Management) and create a core measurement set and common

data tools. A foundation could be formed to organize and support the work of this council. A modest commitment of funds and a reasonable degree of collaboration would enable this type of project to revolutionize the field.

Partly in response to this article, Carl Tisone drafted a "Call to Action," the full text of which can be found on www.eapfoundation.org. Following are excerpts from his declaration:

[P]roductivity is not a one-way street for employers; it is the life-blood of every vibrant, growing, and job-producing organization. In fact, our most fundamental assumption in the EA field is that our work benefits both employer and employee; our survival over the

past 40 years reflects this assumption, despite the lack of hard-core, reliable research data.

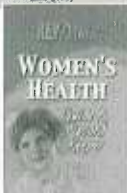
I believe, however, that the time is ripe for a more coordinated effort between the provider community and the non-aligned professionals and academics in the field to lay the foundation for the next 40 years of our industry. In fact, it is a "Foundation" that I wish to propose.

We need to restore and re-invigorate the EA profession. Or maybe we need to re-invent it. Perhaps we need to recognize that we never really were a "profession," at least not in the same way that doctors, lawyers, psychologists, and social workers are.

But as behavioral healthcare professionals who address vital issues impacting both the "world of health" and the "world of work," we have a wealth of expertise to offer. Our unique focus

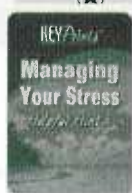
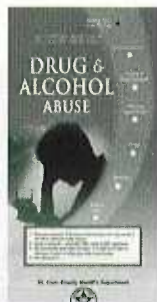
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on the niche in which employee and employer interests intersect has not been addressed by the professions of psychology, medicine, and social work, except in a marginal fashion. Only a very few academics, such as Paul Roman, Dale Masi, Paul Maiden, and a handful of others, have embraced and attempted to promulgate [employee assistance]. My hat is off to these friends and colleagues, but what we really need is hundreds if not thousands more like them publishing cost-effectiveness and efficacy studies in the *Harvard Business Review* and other major health and business publications.

It is time for "professionals" and "providers" alike to pull together to revive our profession and raise it to a level where we can truly optimize our effectiveness. This will require focus, commitment, and a refusal to engage in turf wars.

I call especially on the professional EAP associations, along with both not-for-profit and private sector providers, to support the creation of an independent

EA research body. Its purpose would be to bring professional legitimacy to our field through the funding and conduct of high-level, academically rigorous research on the efficacy of EA [programming] and its many components.

I in no way mean to discount the many efforts that have been undertaken in the past. Nonetheless, I believe it is time to elevate the field to a new level of practice with the establishment of a highly respected, self-perpetuating independent body that shines a beacon of professionalism upon our EAP endeavors, whether as "professionals" or "providers."

As suggested in the Sharar/Masi article, I propose to create a not-for-profit foundation, unaligned with any EAP provider or professional interest group, to develop funding for rigorous independent academic research into the efficacy of employee assistance policies, strategies, and intervention tactics. I envision an organization that is inclusive in its participation requirements but strictly independent in its mission to seek empirical proofs of EAP efficacy.

Although the organizational structure is quite fluid at this stage, the foundation would most likely comprise an advisory board, a funding component, a decision-making council, and possibly a publication arm.

I am not proposing anything revolutionary here, and there are many others who have voiced similar sentiments. What I hope to stimulate, however, is the momentum required to overcome the inertia caused by the overwhelming daily demands of our work. The formation of this EAP foundation may not be as urgent as our desire to win the next competitive bid, but I would contend that, in the long run, it is actually more important.

It is time for the EAP field to overcome the "tyranny of the urgent," moving from our perceived image as a "field" to that of a true "profession." We will need to pull together as never before in order to achieve success.

Carl R. Tisone
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www.eapfoundation.org

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EAPA Mission Statement

To promote the highest standards of practice and the continuing development of employee assistance professionals and programs.

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