

Helping Employees in a Crisis

By Lena Weiner

A little TLC and some extra cash can make a world of difference to workers in midst of a crisis. Here's how one organization goes above and beyond for its employees.

Gloria, a Scripps employee, knew she was dying. But as an unmarried only child without children of her own, she had no living family members left. With no one else to call for help, Gloria called her HR department.

Helen Neppes, director of work-life services at Scripps Health, at first thought helping Gloria might mean an advance on her life insurance or offering money from the organization's employee assistance fund to help out with expenses, but Gloria's needs went beyond the financial.

While many hospitals offer an EAP or similar program, few offer

employees the level of crisis assistance that Scripps' work-life program does, says Neppes. The program does not replace Scripps' EAP, but works alongside it and provides more personalized care for employees — especially those in a crisis.

Neppes, previously an HR director at Scripps, says her position was created in 2010 when the CEO recognized the need for a department that would support employees in a way that's more meaningful and sustentative than most EAPs.

All Scripps employees and affiliated physicians, including part-time workers, are eligible for crisis support. Since 2010, Neppes has provided crisis help for more than 300 employees and their families. It employs more than 13,000 workers, plus an additional 2,600 affiliated physicians.

A crisis might be precipitated by a death in the family, severe illness,



or serious injury. But sometimes, the assistance Neppes provides is as simple as helping new parents find the right child care. She says it makes a huge difference in the lives of the families she serves.

The complete article is available at <http://healthleadersmedia.com/content/HR-325431/Scripps-Goes-Beyond-EAP-to-Help-Employees-in-Crisis###>. ■

Lena Weiner is an Associate Editor at HealthLeaders Media.

Quick Ideas

Volunteering Linked to Better Health

Three-quarters of volunteers say volunteering has made them feel physically healthier and lowered their levels of stress, according to a study released by United Health Group and the Optum Institute.

The study also illustrates that employers benefit from employees who volunteer in terms of better employee health and in professional skills development that employees use in the workplace.

Among those who've volunteered in the past 12 months, 78%

say it has lowered their stress. Moreover, volunteers are more likely than other adults to report that they felt calm and peaceful most of the time, and that they had a lot of energy during that same time frame.

In addition to physical and mental health benefits, employees who volunteer say doing so has helped them learn valuable business skills. Sixty-four percent of employees who currently volunteer said that volunteering with work col-

leagues has strengthened their relationships.

"We know the lone wolf isn't the kind of person that makes it in today's world," says Kate Rubin, vice president of social responsibility with United Health Group. "Working on a volunteering [project] helps build stronger relationships with colleagues and helps build that collaboration muscle." ■

Additional source: *Employee Benefit News*.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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Neglecting the Foundation of EAP Re-examining Supervisor Training

By Susan McDonald-Conroy, LMFT, CEAP

In our rush to create value and offer a multitude of trainings and services we often neglect the foundation of EAP. The very first trainings expected of any EAP are basic Employee Orientation and Supervisor Training. The fact that we offer these trainings so regularly may paradoxically allow habitual indifference to the very face of our programs. In other words, they become so rote that we no longer pay attention to them.

But the fact is, these core trainings are the first look employees and leaders receive of our EAP. Do we really want that initial impression to be a stale Slideshow or dated video? Why do we cling to dated trainings so long before we make a change?

Background

Several years ago I inelegantly lifted dated, heavy equipment up a flight of stairs in a flop-sweat. As I set up to deliver this supervisory training in a state-of-the-art conference room I thought, "I'm never doing this again, never ever again." VCRs were in the process of extinction and the technology of one of our contracted companies had outpaced us, forcing this exercise in humility and our inevitable move to join the 21st century.

"The goal is to create core trainings in an interesting way that people can remember, and that can be delivered with 21st-century technology. ... Start by reviewing EAPA Core Technology, gathering content from your current training, from the EAP industry, and your unique environment."

As a small hybrid, we knew we needed to update our EAP trainings, and if we had been able to find a fit for our EAP we would have purchased it. While EAP means something very specific to those in our field, programs vary vastly in sessions and services offered.

Although it is fairly easy to customize purchased training by augmenting specifics via verbal, written or website information, it is sometimes impossible to remove mention of services you do not offer, especially when they are digitally embedded.

Transitioning to a new PowerPoint Slideshow is easy and a snap to maintain. They

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A Quick Reference Guide

Quick Reference Guide

What do supervisors remember after the training is over? Not a lot. Adult learning principles tell us that adults are only willing to learn what they think is important. (**Editor's note:** Adult learning principles are discussed in this month's *Brown Bagger* insert.)

Before they are engaged in a given situation, it is less pertinent, but at some point, it will be.

A step-by-step, simple reference is best, something supervisors take back to the office or access on your website can be critical later. After all, you want to make sure they apply the training you worked so hard to create.

The following 4-step quick reference is designed to illustrate possible organization of content, but it is not meant to be extensive or all-inclusive.

Step 1: Noticing an Issue

– You're in the best position to identify troubled employees and refer if appropriate. Look for an emerging *pattern*, such as increased errors, safety concerns, absenteeism, and mood swings.

Step 2: Should you refer?

– Before addressing the actions of an employee, step back and look at the context. Is the issue organizational or individual? Once you determine referral is appropriate, encourage the employee to take advantage of this free benefit.

➤ Intervene individually and consider EAP referral if:

✓ The issue applies to all areas of the individual's work, you can rule out unclear communication, training, others in the workgroup are not experiencing the same performance issues.

➤ Intervene organizationally, and offer EAP support if:

✓ The issue involves a group, is a reaction to other events, or seems to be the result of lack of specific training or instruction.

Step 3: Prepare for referral

– Assess your own emotions before your discussion with the employee. Is there conflict, avoidance, lack of understanding? Have you previously addressed the issue and documented it? Are you fearful of the reactions of the employee or yourself? Be proactive and avoid more serious problems, don't diagnose, concentrate on performance, stay on task and don't include old, unrelated complaints.

Step 4: During your conversation

– Meet in private, show concern, be clear and stick to the facts. Don't diagnose, suggest EAP support, normalize, plan follow-up, and stress confidentiality. Respect privacy, acknowledge employee's value, follow up whether they use EAP or not, acknowledge changes if noted, and continue support.

– Susan McDonald-Conroy

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On the Job

De-stressing the Workplace: Part II

By Audrey McLaughlin

Employers can help to manage and even reduce employee stress, which serves to boost employees' well-being. Part one of this article described two ideas for getting started. The remainder are addressed in the conclusion of this article.

❖ Promote a healthy lifestyle.

When job stress takes over, employees often give up good habits to just get the job done. They may trade in a healthy lunch for fast food, trade water for soda, and sleep for caffeine.

Employers can help curb their employees' self-care deprivation by ensuring there are healthy options available routinely—especially when big projects and deadlines are looming.

This can include fresh, healthy fruits and vegetables in the break room, protein snacks, and vending machines where fresh, cold sandwiches are available. All of these items serve to improve the chances that employees will make healthier choices. To actively promote healthy living, you simply need a refrigerator on site to get started.

❖ Encourage social interaction.

Isolation can be a major stressor. When employees feel they are part of a team, they demonstrate improved communication and can even achieve more with less direction. This all begins with employers encouraging social interaction.

A few simple ideas: celebrate birthdays monthly, have get-to-know-you drills during meetings, arrange company outings or happy hours, or host pot-lucks to encourage mingling during lunch breaks.

Avoid creating these social engagements and then making them mandatory. The best way to encourage involvement is to choose outings and team building activities that fit with your company's culture. You could even double-dip the good feelings and provide some charity work with your team-building activity.

If you are stumped about what would engage your team, simply ask them to fill out anonymous surveys to find out what they would enjoy doing with co-workers or what charities have a special place in their hearts. Implement social interaction at your next meeting by asking everyone to start by sharing a little-known fact about themselves.

❖ Promote education.

As an EA professional you can take the opportunity to educate the workplace about stress, how to recognize it, and the signs that it's taking its toll on the body and mind.

A few additional ideas include a mindfulness expert to teach meditation, a yoga instructor, a nutritionist, a stress-management expert and a time management expert—the possibilities are endless.

Summary

Every employer has room to provide some flexibility, socialization

or education for their employees. Aside from the tangible physical and mental benefits that are enjoyed by the employee, employers have the opportunity to do some good and ultimately realize benefits to their bottom line. ■

Audrey "Christie" McLaughlin is a registered nurse who writes for Quill.com about health and medical issues. For more about Audrey, visit physicianspractice.com. Additional source: www.business.com.

Resources

■ The *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration* released a free resource to help consumers (and EA professionals) better understand mental health and substance use disorder benefits. The pamphlet, titled "*Parity of Mental Health and Substance Use Benefits with Other Benefits*" examines the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act and the standards it created. Check out <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Parity-of-Mental-Health-and-Substance-Use-Benefits-with-Other-Benefits-SMA16-4937>.

■ *TED Talks*, by Chris Anderson, \$18.88 hardcover, www.amazon.com. The curator of TED has written an extremely insightful book on public speaking, but it's more than that. It's a brilliant, profound look at how to communicate. ■

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ACT Coach is Useful New Tool

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) is an evidence-based psychotherapy used to treat a number of conditions including depression, anxiety, and chronic pain, as well as other disorders and life problems.

ACT uses mindfulness-based approaches and values-guided activity to help clients engage in meaningful and vital lives. ACT Coach is a mobile phone app created by the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense to support those

participating in ACT or to support those interested in using the therapy to improve well-being.

The features of ACT Coach include:

- Detailed walkthroughs for 6 mindfulness exercises to practice ACT core concepts.
- Tools to help identify personal values and take concrete actions to live one's life by those values.
- Logs for keeping track of useful coping strategies and willingness to practice.

- Educational materials about the principles and practices of ACT.

ACT Coach is available for mobile Apple devices (iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch) and a version of the app is being built for Android. Download from iTunes at: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/act-coach/id804247934?mt=8>.

For more details about the app (including handouts for providers and patients and an app overview), visit <http://www.myvaapps.com/#/act/>. ■

Legal Lines

Can you be Fired for Swearing on the Job?

Engaging in profanity at work or with co-workers online is certainly controversial, especially when the profanity is directed at managers or harms the company's reputation. But tolerance for swearing varies from workplace to workplace. The question at the heart of many such cases is whether an employee's swearing (or alleged swearing) is truly the reason for a firing or other disciplinary action.

Workers are permitted to discuss wages, hours and working conditions under Section 7 of the National Labor Relations Act. The law, which has been in effect since 1935, applies to private

sector employees, and not just unionized ones. It also applies to social media posts and not just spoken words inside the actual workplace.

Sometimes workers get mad about the way they are treated, and sometimes that causes them to swear. If they are fired for swearing, "What's the past practice for this kind of misbehavior?" states Christine O'Brien, a business law professor at Boston College. If all the employees swear like sailors, then a dismissal over cursing may not be defensible. Sometimes there is evidence that employers even try to provoke workers into swearing so they can fire them,

Professor O'Brien said. Whether the profanity occurred in front of customers may also be relevant, she noted.

When does swearing related to workplace conditions cross the line? It depends on the situation. "Employee conduct that includes swearing may be vulgar, profane and offensive and still remain protected," Professor O'Brien writes in her paper. On the other hand, the conduct may be so "egregious, dishonest, threatening, violent or insubordinate" that it exceeds the protection of labor law. ■

Additional source: *New York Times*.

Neglecting... cont'd from Page 1

are extraordinary for content flexibility, and you can easily tinker with the content between trainings. The disadvantage is a drawer full of ad hoc variations leaving EAP staff ill-prepared and your training is never quite complete.

The goal is to create core trainings in an interesting way that people can remember, and that can be delivered with 21st-century technology. If you are re-evaluating or creating your own core supervisor training, there are some basic organizing principles that may save you some time and remove a little uncertainty from the process.

Prepare

Start by reviewing EAPA Core Technology, gathering content from your current training, from the EAP industry, and your unique environment. Whittle the content down to a palatable amount of information given people's attention spans, and deliver the content to your organization(s) keeping cost, technology, and adult learning principles in mind.

Establish Cost

Before setting a budget you need to clarify your goals and determine what resources are available. If your goal is to increase credibility or build your brand, you will probably need a professional level of quality to achieve your goals. Be realistic and do not expect a professional product at a semi-pro rate. EAPs with limited budgets may choose a less expensive vehicle, yet if properly planned, they can provide real impact. The following figures represent what you *might* expect to pay when seeking outside assistance:



Editor's Notebook

As long-time readers of this newsletter are aware, we have

always strived to present articles and information that are practical, useful, and on a wide variety of topics – workplace bullying, online group counseling, marijuana in the workplace, and others.

But perhaps we overlook some areas that *EAR* readers are even more likely to run into on the job. Case in point this issue's cover story on what Susan McDonald-Conroy says is the need for EA professionals to review and update basic supervisor training. "The fact that we offer these trainings so regularly may paradoxically allow habitual indifference to the very face of our programs," Susan states. "In other words, they

become so rote that we no longer pay attention to them."

She adds that, "Since these core trainings are the first look employees and managers typically receive of an EAP, do you really want your initial impression to be a stale Slideshow or dated video?" But what should change? How? Step by step, Susan presents advice on how to get started in updating your training, establish cost, determine content, and she even offers a useful reference guide that supervisors can refer to later.

EAR hopes this is one of the most useful topics ever. Until next time.

Mike Jacquart

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❖ Creating a video is likely to necessitate partnering with a marketing team with video production capabilities. The price may vary widely depending on specifics, but it generally costs \$1,500-\$3,500 per completed minute.

❖ To create a PowerPoint or Slideshow with voiceover, you may expect to pay \$1,500-\$2,000 if produced by an outside firm.

❖ If you are hosting a live or recorded webinar, you may utilize sites such as GotoWebinar to manage invites and subscriptions, based on the number of attendees, ranging from \$80-\$400 per month.

Determine Content

For your training to be considered valid, you need to start with a solid foundation and EAP Core Technology should underlie the

content you create. Keep it simple. Start with the expected content and introduce a *few* things you cannot afford to leave out.

Add just enough information to make it interesting and informative to supervisors without stretching too far. Think of it as your foundation. You can build upon it later by offering more advanced trainings in supervisor communication, emotional intelligence, resiliency, engagement, and managing difficult employees. The following are some suggestions of expected content:

Expected Content

- What is an EAP?
- Importance of early problem identification
- Signs/changes/trends, with examples

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- > Preparation for performance-focused, constructive confrontation
- > Objective observation and documentation
- > Reference to organizational policies
- > Voluntary vs. mandatory referrals
- > Role of release of information
- > Productive referral components:
 - Privacy/concern/respect
 - Don't diagnose or judge, focus on performance
 - Normalize seeking support
 - Follow-up
 - Consequences
 - Confidentiality
 - EAP management consultation
 - Critical incident support

EAP counselors are regularly challenged when working with an individual identified as a problem employee, only to realize that departmental dynamics are at play, or communication and training may be insufficient.

Just as counselors learn to practice a new skill in a session, so must we offer supervisors the opportunity to see a referral conversation in action; whether that is on video, a demonstration, or in-person role play. A picture is worth a thousand words.

Organizational and Delivery Considerations

How can each mode of delivery meet the needs of the organization(s) you serve? Several years ago, I delivered a marathon of orientations over two days, reaching just about every employee on three shifts, shifting our PowerPoint presentation between conference rooms, break rooms and sometimes projecting on cement block walls. Some presentations went great, some were spotty, and there were times when equipment didn't work at all.

In retrospect, the company's request was an excellent opportunity for guidance and consultation. It was expensive for them to shut down production. Sometimes, offering a training that can be emailed to employee's homes or workstations, streamed online, or delivered in person can offer flexibility for you and your company audiences.

A digital product will give you the ability to present your training in a variety of ways, meeting the needs of just about any individual or group, whether scheduled or on-demand.

If your goal is to deliver trainings in a multitude of locations or you are spread out geographically with limited trainers, you may want to choose an online option, whether it is a hosted streaming video, an automated Slideshow, webinar formats, or a digital file that you can post and play on your website as well as burn to DVDs for in-person hard copies.

When delivering in-person training, you are smart to have several means of accessing your training. We have all walked

into a room set up by others with failed technology, so bring a few of the following: laptop, jump drive, CD/DVD, streaming Internet, and speakers if needed.

To offer both remote and in-person training, you can utilize your basic online training and augment it with additional information, practice, case studies and discussion, resulting in personalized, robust in-person training.

Summary

In creating supervisor training, you don't need to reinvent the wheel, just do it right. List must-have content, prioritize the items, and build from there. Good luck. ■

Susan McDonald-Conroy, LMFT, CEAP, works as Program Manager for the Employee Assistance Center at Mayo Clinic Health System in La Crosse, WI. She may be reached at mcdonaldconroy.susan@mayo.edu. To view this training visit EAPcoreresources.com.

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Are Drug Tests Really Worth it?

By Joe Pinsker of "The Atlantic"

Last year, U.S. workers peed into one drug testing company's cups about 9.1 million times. And last year, as in other recent years, analysis of about 350,000 of those cups indicated drug use. Most often, the drug of choice was marijuana, followed by amphetamines and painkillers.

The data are a little patchy, but the best estimate is that about 40% of U.S. workers are currently subjected to drug tests during the hiring process. In theory it seems like a good idea: A sober, addiction-free workforce is probably a more productive workforce and, in the cases of operating forklifts or driving 18-wheelers, a safer workforce too.

But in many situations, drug tests aren't capable of revealing impairment on the job, and the cost of finding a single offending employee is high. Besides, as the country takes a more and more permissive stance toward marijuana, and as the painkillers doctors prescribe are abused more and more often, there are gray areas that arise. What role should drug testing play in workplaces?

Michael Frone writes in his book, *Alcohol and Illicit Drug Use in the Workforce and Workplace*, there isn't any proof that drug tests reduce drug use. In fact, a stronger deterrent effect might be that casual drug users choose not to work for companies that will test them. (Those employers might be missing out: More than half of Americans said they have tried marijuana, which is a big pool of talent to ignore.)

"It's become sort of a game," Lewis Maltby, the president of the National Workrights Institute, told

The Washington Post. "Employers know that it doesn't mean anything. Anyone who smokes pot will just stop for a few days. It's an empty ritual that nobody wants to be the first to give up."

There's also the concern of spending not-insignificant amounts of money to pinpoint a very small portion of the working population.

Moreover, it isn't always clear what an employer should do after detecting the presence of a drug. Five years ago, *The New York Times* reported on the story of a woman who was fired from her job after testing positive for a painkiller that her doctor prescribed. Other workers have been terminated under similar circumstances, even when the medication in question was meant to treat job-related injuries.

According to Frone, there are three main reasons why drug testing remains so common. One is that

companies still mistakenly believe in its effectiveness. Another is that some insurance companies might give discounts to employers who test. But the third is more political, as companies use it to project a clean-cut, anti-drug image.

Frone's view is that it should be kept in place for jobs in which safety is the concern—forklift operators, truck drivers—but phased out elsewhere. "There are many potential ... causes of poor productivity, such as family problems or emotional problems or dysfunctional personalities, that collectively have a stronger impact on employee outcomes than drug use per se," says Frone.

He's in favor of a constructive, communicative approach, in which job performance is monitored and therapy referrals are doled out, when necessary, after conversations between a worker and his or her employer. ■

Quick Ideas

EAPs save Companies Money!

The next time a potential corporate client is skeptical about the value of EAP services, consider telling the business leader that EAPs led to:

- ❖ A \$7,750 savings per employee at Warner Corp., because of lower recruitment and training costs, lower workers' compensation costs, and fewer on-the-job accidents;
- ❖ A 75% reduction in inpatient substance abuse treatment costs after an EAP was implemented at Gillette;
- ❖ A McDonnell Douglas report, which estimated that its EAP saved the company \$5.1 million due to fewer days missed from work, lower turnover, and fewer employee medical claims. ■

Source: SAMHSA (www.samhsa.gov)