

Hangovers Carry High Price Tag



The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that excessive drinking costs the U.S. economy more than \$220 billion annually — or about \$1.90 a drink. Some 72% of the costs stem from lost workplace productivity.

“There are also many social and economic burdens resulting from the effects of alcohol on individuals, families, work-places, and society as a whole,” according to a review of academic literature by the Toronto-based Centre for Addition and Mental Health.

Currently, there is no effective hangover cure available, according to Joris Verster, a professor and author of numerous scientific papers exploring possible hangover cures. “The only way to prevent hangovers is to consume alcohol in moderation.”

The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, part of the US National Institutes of Health, shares that view. “The NIH is not putting money into treating hangovers. What we’re trying to do is prevent people from

drinking so much they get a hang-over,” said George Koob, head of the NIAA.

Still, professionals in the booze industry recommend drinking lots of water, at bedtime but also while imbibing, following a one glass of water per each glass of wine rule to avoid hangovers.

Verster, however, says drinking lots of water isn’t a simple answer. “Alcohol hangover is not simply dehydration,” he said. “This is why drinking water does not help to ease a hangover. It may reduce dry mouth and thirst or headache, but the feeling of general misery that characterizes the hangover persists. It is more likely that the immune system is involved in provoking alcohol hangovers.” ■

Additional source: BBC.

Smoking Hurts Alcohol Treatment

Smoking can make it harder to recover from alcoholism, putting people who have both addictions in a potentially harder position, the *University Herald* reported recently.

Study clients who smoked stayed in alcohol treatment programs for a shorter length of time than those who don’t smoke and also have less effective treatment outcomes than non-tobacco users. Researchers at the University of Buffalo Research Institute studied 21,000 adult patients from 253

outpatient substance abuse facilities in New York.

Alcohol users are much likely to smoke, while only about 20% of all people in the United States smoke. For women, the numbers were even higher. Only 15% of women smoke, but 67% of women in alcohol treatment programs reported smoking, according to Kimberly Walitzer, deputy director and senior research scientist.

“Previous research indicates that if people can quit smoking when entering alcohol treatment, they

may have better alcohol outcomes,” Walitzer said. “However, simultaneous cessation is a task that is very challenging to accomplish.” ■



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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supporting EAP professionals

Project Unveils Top Ten Behavioral Apps

Third in a Series on Technology & EAP

By Kathleen Greer

Last spring, KGA undertook a project to identify the current “Best 10 Behavioral Health Apps for 2014.” The purpose of the project was two-fold: 1) to equip EAP counselors with a variety of high-quality apps that could serve as an adjunct to counseling sessions and referrals for therapy; and 2) To draw attention to quality apps in the marketplace.

Why Project was Necessary

With the U.S. workforce now made up of 36% Millennials and 16% GenXers, these “digital natives” see apps as a viable mechanism for self-help. According to the analytics company Flurry, “Overall app use in 2013 posted 115% year-over-year growth,” with each app category increasing.

As times are changing, some of the most essential ways to communicate and benefit clients are through technology, such as mobile applications. Employee and family member access to health information is rapidly changing:

- 19% of adult smartphone users have a health app;
- 72% of U.S. adults have looked online for health information in the past year; and
- Eight out of 10 health inquiries start at web search engines.

Starting a Proactive Health Campaign

As a “high-touch” employee assistance program, KGA wanted to reach out to covered lives through a proactive health promotion program.

We also wanted to be sure that counselors were recommending quality downloads. With the help of the entire staff, KGA set out to evaluate 250 current behavioral health apps by applying the following criteria.

- Topics (i.e. anxiety, depression, stress, and sleep/relaxation);

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- Clinical effectiveness;
- History of updates and any necessary “bug fixes”;
- Price;
- Customer ratings;
- Customer reviews;
- Popularity (amount of downloads); and
- Availability (Android, Apple, or both).

Narrowing the List

The list was shortened to 35 apps that clients could use in addition to the counseling they may have already been receiving. The reviews helped to narrow the search, as they provided testimonials on the efficacy of the apps, especially for severe stress, anxiety, and sleep deprivation.

The KGA counseling staff tried these apps on their own and then gave their feedback and ratings. As the counselors are the ones providing assistance to employees every day, their extensive knowledge of conditions and methods of support and improvement was crucial to finding the most constructive apps for behavioral health.

The apps were each tested by trusted staff to confirm their reliability, simplicity, and efficiency, as well as the overall aesthetics. Counselors were asked to comment on what type of client might benefit from the particular app they tested.

Marketing the Project

The next challenge was to introduce the health app promotion to our EAP customers; both HR and benefits contacts and the employees and family members. The marketing program included the following activities:

- A letter was sent out to clients to introduce the project.
- A wallet card was produced for health fairs that identified the apps.

- PowerPoint slides were created for various presentations.
- Videos were produced that introduced and highlighted the functionality of the apps.
- A social media campaign was launched on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.
- Each app developer was contacted as the apps were launched.

Results

Facebook likes for KGA tripled in the first three weeks of the promotion and the apps were introduced around the country at several conferences such as the National Behavioral Consortium, EAPA, and New England Employee Benefits Council (NEEBC).

As of February 2015, roughly 10% of KGA’s client organizations forwarded the e-newsletter about the Top Ten Apps directly to their workforce, resulting in 11,646 opens. More often, clients placed a link to the newsletter on their intranet. One health care system employing 4,039 employees widely distributed the promotion, resulting in 5,298 opens.

The Top 10 Behavioral Health Apps were...

❖ **Optimism** – Track your mood, behavior, triggers, and coping strategies to find out what works best for you over time and how to remain positive through difficult situations. Try out this *emotional well-being* app on iOS (version 4.3 or newer) for **free**.

❖ **MindShift** – This **free mental wellness** app is available for both iOS (version 5.0 or newer) and Android. It gives users the opportunity to learn about anxiety,

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panic and how they can control it. The inspirational quotes may help someone who is trying to think more positively.

❖ **SnoreLab** – This app keeps a record of snoring, as well as any lapses of breathing, which could even indicate sleep apnea. For an employee who contacts the EAP because of insomnia, this *sleep management* app can be used

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The Most Desired Skills of the Future: Part II

By Nathan Jamail

While younger generations preparing to enter the workforce should keep up with technology to remain relevant in today’s economy, they should also continue to practice and focus on perfecting their soft skills.

In the first part of this series, we examined how to be a coach to your players. This time, we will identify *what* you want to coach; and then we’ll take a look at how to implement a practice program that requires the leader to participate.

What to Coach

A very important factor in coaching is understanding *what* to coach. Leaders need to stop focusing on just product and industry knowledge and begin to focus on perfecting the soft skills like communication, personal interaction, body language, voice inflection and the transfer of positive energy. Envision what you consider great customer service and bad customer service, or what separates a top performer and a bottom performer. The most adept leaders have harnessed face-to-face communication. In baseball’s World Series, the greatest players are still practicing the fundamentals, such as throwing and catching the ball. In business we must do the same, and practice

repeatedly throughout the duration of a career. This includes the big and small parts (which really equal the big parts).

Implement a Practice Program

When one thinks of a practice program, they may instantly feel overwhelmed and attempt to outsource it. This is a big mistake as leaders of an organization *need* to be a part of their practice program—and it is not nearly as overwhelming as one might think once it is kicked off. Team engagement and immediate success and results will snowball this into full blown commitment on everyone’s part, making it even easier and more effective. The hardest part? Getting it started and staying committed.

A first and simple step is to implement weekly practice sessions that the leader mandates and runs. Focusing on practicing time-honored skills is almost as hard as acquiring any new skill. It will feel awkward, redundant, uncomfortable and hard at times, but just like parents tell their kids, *“If you want to be the best and win, then you have to practice.”*

While social media and a litany of gadgetry have streamlined our ability to connect and interact, there will never be a substitute for stout communication skills. ■

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EAPA CEO Attends White House Event

Until late last year, substance abuse and recovery had never been the focus of a meeting at the White House. With the passage of the Affordable Care Act and the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, these topics now have a significantly higher profile in both the public and private sectors.

Accordingly, for the second time in the last four months, substance abuse and recovery were highlighted at a special White House meeting. The meeting, “Substance Use Disorders Today: Access, Recovery, and the ACA,” brought together the nation’s leading experts in the fields of substance use disorders and mental health treatment.

As with the first meeting, Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) CEO, Dr. John Maynard, was invited to participate and to represent EAPA at the meeting. Discussion included exploring the impact of Parity and the ACA on expanding coverage and access to behavioral health and addiction recovery services. ■

Source: *Employee Assistance Professionals Association* (www.eapassn.org).



New Resource Helps Military Parents

Many veterans and service members face unique challenges when it comes to parenting. Moves, deployment, and reintegration may affect a parent's ability to manage parenting challenges while maintaining strong relationships with their children.

As a result, the Departments of Defense (DoD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) developed an online interactive self-paced course dedicated to helping veterans and ser-

vice members bond with their children and handle parenting responsibilities.

Parenting for Service Members and Veterans guides parents to interact with their children in new ways and reinforces good habits they already have. Each module addresses a different challenge parents may face including reintegrating into the family after deployment and helping children with difficult emotions and behaviors.

The course enhances a parent's existing knowledge and experience, and can be used as often as needed. The information can benefit any family and is not intended just for those experiencing parenting difficulties. The course is anonymous and no registration is required. Check out: www.VeteranTraining.VA.gov/apps/VeteranParenting or <http://www.veteranparenting.org/>. ■

On the Job

Organizations Not Prepared for Retiring Boomers

It appears that a lot of organizations are not paying heed to warnings about the effect that retiring Baby Boomers will have on their businesses in the near future.

A recent survey of HR professionals conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) reported that roughly one-third of respondents said they thought the potential loss of talent during the next one to two years would be a problem or crisis for their industry and organization within the next six to 10 years.

The survey was part of a three-year national Aging Workforce

Initiative conducted by SHRM, the SHRM Foundation and funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. One-half of survey respondents said they track the percentage of their workers eligible to retire within the next one to two years, and noted that 10% of employees would be eligible within two years.

Other key findings from the survey included:

❖ Two-fifths of respondents indicated the increasing age of their workforce still has not prompted changes in retention, recruiting, or general management policy practices.

❖ Two-thirds reported that their organization employed older workers who retired from *other organizations or careers* before joining their organization.

❖ Sixty-one percent of the nearly 2,000 randomly selected HR professionals indicated their organization had attempted to capitalize on and incorporate the experience of older workers in recruitment and retention strategies.

❖ The top advantages of older workers were more work experience (cited by 77% of respondents), being more mature/professional (71%) and having a stronger work ethic (70%). ■

Apps... cont'd from Page 2

during the counseling session. It can be found for iOS (version 6.0 or newer) for \$1.99.

❖ **What's My M3** – This *free mental wellness* app (iOS version 7.0 or newer and Android) allows the user to administer a self-test of symptoms of disorders such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and OCD. It is ideal for someone who is reluctant to ask for help, but responds to self-assessments.

❖ **Tactical Breather** – Relax at a moment's notice with simple breathing exercises led by a soothing male or female voice. This *mental wellness* app is available for both iOS (version 4.3 or newer) and Android for **free**. This app takes the stress out of teaching relaxation because it provides instant access to a variety of exercises.

❖ **My Fitness Pal** – Track your weight through this easy-to-use and supportive *weight management* app found on both iOS (version 6.0 or newer) and Android for **free**. My Fitness Pal helps to motivate an individual who is having difficulty building fitness into their daily routine by suggesting simple, behavioral techniques such as a "squat challenge" or healthy recipe.

❖ **Quit Smoking with Andrew Johnson** – This *mental wellness* app, for both iOS (version 7.0 or newer) and Android for \$2.99, is for anyone committed to kicking this bad habit to the curb in 2015. For individuals struggling with nicotine addiction, this app augments counseling.

❖ **Mind Tools** – Build over 100 personal and business skills in your free time through an assortment of topics, including team management and stress management.



Editor's Notebook

In this series on technology and EAP, we've examined video counseling, social networking, and this month we will address *behavioral health apps*. Which of these platforms is YOUR EAP using? One? More than one? Something else? None?

Certainly, it is up to the individual EAP to pursue the platform(s) that is the best fit for their specific services and customers. Mobile apps are one strong possibility. As Kathleen Greer, author of this month's cover story states, "With the U.S. workforce now made up of 36% Millennials and 16% GenXers, these 'digital natives' see apps as a viable mechanism for self-help."

However, referrals to *existing* apps – such as the ones Kathleen discusses in her article – may be

sufficient for many EAPs. As Seth Moeller explains in a sidebar, just because an EAP *can develop* an app, doesn't necessarily mean that it *should!* Seth asks EAP practitioners to ask themselves some important questions first before "diving in."

The crux of the issue is this: While the EAP needs to strategize which aspect(s) of technology would offer the most "bang for the buck" it seems clear they must either embark on new technology, or, for the already tech-savvy, improve upon the services they *already* offer. The alternative is appearing irrelevant to Millennials and GenXers.

Mike Jacquart

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This *management* app is available for both iOS (version 5.1 or newer) and Android for **free**. For an employee who has been referred to the EAP because of specific work challenges, Mind Tools offers convenient, specific development activities.

❖ **Get Some Headspace** – This *free mental wellness* app offers ten sessions of 10-minute meditation that concentrates on breathing and focusing strategies given through calming audios. This app is ideal for a client who doesn't have the time or money to join a 10-week class, but wants to begin a meditation program.

❖ **Recovery Record: Eating Disorder Management** – Track and control an *eating disorder* by

logging all of your meals, snacks, thoughts, and feelings throughout the day. As an adjunct to eating disorder treatment, Recovery Record can take the place of journaling and worksheets. Download for either iOS (version 4.3 or newer) or Android for **free**.

Summary

The apps were well received by clients as a creative approach to health promotion. One HR client said, "This is a fabulous way to reach our younger population," while another stated, "There are so many apps, I never knew where to start." ■

Kathleen Greer is founder and chairman of the Framingham, Mass.-based KGA, Inc., which provides EAP services to over 100 organizations. Kathy can be reached at greer@kgreer.com.

Developing an App: Proceed with Caution

By Seth Moeller

The question is not so much how might an EAP go about building an app, but should they develop one?

We understand the pressure to jump into the world of apps through the questions we receive from our clients and benefit consultants. We also see EAP providers that have recently offered apps. However, when we take a step back and evaluate the apps being introduced, we are not convinced that simply having an app adds value for clients, or for KGA. Having an app may be all the rage, but EAP practitioners considering whether to develop an app need to consider the following questions:

❖ *Will the app offer new or differentiated content?* Almost without exception, we see EAPs offering a limited selection of what a user can find on the existing member website.

❖ *Will the point of access to the EAP be improved or changed?* Will access be increased? Often new apps are only putting an existing phone number in a new place.

❖ *Will the app change the communication channel between the EAP and the employee population?* If so, where will this leave the employer? To date, we do not see this being offered, nor do we view employers as ready to have a vendor partner with an open channel to their employees.

❖ *How will the app change or improve the employee's situation?* With the exception of some good behavioral/mental health apps that do help users address real issues; the EAP apps we see do not provide or facilitate solutions for the employee seeking support. They still need a person-to-person conversation with a skilled and experienced counselor.

Conversely, an EAP app might add real value if it did things such as:

❖ *Allow the end user to customize how and when he/she contacts the EAP.* There are so many channels of communication available today that helping an employee choose and manage preferred channels may add value by lowering the perceived barriers to using the service.

❖ *Distill new content releases and upcoming events* (i.e. podcasts, webinars, onsite events, etc.). The content would focus on “what’s new” and targeted messages from the EAP (i.e. content aligning with a national observation such as Mental Health Month, etc.)

❖ *Compensate for outdated member websites that are not mobile enabled.* It’s possible an app would allow better mobile access to content in this case. This would assume that a content-focused app would be of value. ■

Seth Moeller is the President of KGA, Inc., in Framingham, Mass.

The ‘Old Smart’ isn’t Enough

By Edward Hess

You might consider yourself a great intellectual, but book smarts won’t be all that relevant as companies increase their use of robots and smart machines. What will matter is being an adaptive learner. The following are the 21st century learning skills you will need to be successful in a tech-driven world.

❖ **Get comfortable with “not knowing.”** In a technology-enabled world, how much you know today will be irrelevant, because smart machines and the Internet will always know more than you. What will be more important is knowing how to learn — in other words, the smartest people will be focused on continuously learning. Develop your critical thinking and innovative thinking skills.

❖ **Embrace open-mindedness.** It takes courage to enter the unknown and learn something new for the first time. To make that process easier, people will have to learn to separate their ideas from their self-worth. Changing a previously held belief doesn’t mean you are a bad or stupid person. It simply means you’ve learned to adapt your thinking based on new information.

❖ **Be an “inner-directed” learner.** In a tech-driven world, those who are able to be the most successful and fulfilled will be those who are driven by curiosity and a love of learning. You’ll need to see learning as its own reward.

❖ **Don’t be afraid to make mistakes.** As long as you aren’t making the same mistakes over

and over again, mistakes can be good. The key is making sure you’re learning from them. And the faster and better you are at turning mistakes into learning, the less likely it is that some smart machine will replace you.

❖ **Be willing to try.** People who are confident in their own ability to meet a challenge or take on the unknown (within reason) are more likely to try new things. This confidence is called “self-efficacy.” People can build self-efficacy by putting themselves in challenging situations that they have the ability to handle. As their confidence grows, they’ll be more willing to take on even more challenging tasks.

❖ **Develop your emotional intelligence.** Emotional intelligence is the ability to be aware of and manage one’s emotions. But if you can’t manage your own emotions, read those of others, or connect with the people around you on more than a superficial level, then you won’t be a successful collaborator — and

collaboration and teamwork is critical in today’s workplace.

❖ **Seek out constructive feedback.** Rather than getting the kind of specific, constructive feedback that can help us improve our skills, most of us receive guarded or politically correct feedback that is fairly useless in practice. Thoughtful and constructive feedback will only become more valuable as our workplaces become dominated by technology. Of course, all of this ties back to building self-efficacy and becoming more emotional intelligent.

Summary

We’re entering a world in which companies can no longer rely on traditional competitive advantages like location, capital, and lack of choices for customers. They’ll need to rely on their ability to learn and innovate in order to compete. ■

Edward Hess is a business professor at the University of Virginia and author of “Learn or Die: Using Science to Build a Leading-Edge Learning Organization.”

Resources

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