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EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

supporting EAP professionals

Improving EAP Surveys – Part II

By David Sharar and James Harting

In Part I of this two-part article, we explained how most EAP providers offer some sort of survey to supply feedback to their corporate clients. These typically include surveys pertaining to overall "satisfaction", clinical outcomes, workplace outcomes, or some combination.

Results are typically indicated by "response rates," which refers to the proportion of the number of surveys returned out of the total number sent out. But response rates are often not very high. Why is that? What can be done to improve best practices for surveying EAP clients? We will continue to address these questions in part II of this fundamental and yet neglected EAP topic.

Setting the Parameters

We concluded last month's article by stating that it's important to define the parameters of the survey, because doing so makes it clear who the specific audience is that you are trying to reach. Simply stating "your clients" is not truly reflective of what the project might be setting out to demonstrate. This process will also determine the total number of clients you intend to survey. Examples of parameters you will need to consider were listed last month. As a refresher, here they are again:

❖ Should you only send the survey to clients 18 and older?

❖ Should you include family members?

❖ *When* should you send the survey to clients who said "yes" to a follow up? At intake (i.e. when the case is opened)? At the first session with the client?

❖ Should you re-send surveys if the client does not respond within a given period of time? And if so, what should that be? 14 days after no response? 21 days?

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It has been noted by the Center for EAP Benchmark Surveys that re-sending surveys increases the return rate by as much as 5%.

Establishing the Questions

What questions should the survey contain? If you are using a research-based tool, the questions are already standardized. Still, you may want to review how many questions or categories you want. Survey experts tell us that you should keep the survey as short as possible: five to 10 questions and perhaps one comment section is an often-used guideline.

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If you utilize emails with a link to an online survey, craft an effective email subject line and begin the message with an engaging question. Maintain a personal tone, and do not use the word "free," as this word increases the chances of it going into a spam folder.

Capture the respondents' attention and tell them how much you value their opinions. Research shows that small incentives such as coupons are not as effective as letting respondents know that their feedback will impact their organization's decisions. Offer multiple methods to access the survey. Use hyperlinks, add the ability to copy and paste URLs, and include a URL with a paper survey.

Setting a Start Date

Now that we've finished defining the process, the next step is to set a specific date to begin. Which staff will send the paper survey, electronic survey, and/or make follow-up phone calls?

The first step with clients to be surveyed is to *ask permission* to send the survey. It is vital to stress confidentiality. State clearly to respondents that your privacy policy will ensure that their responses and comments will *not* be shared with the EAP in a way in which they can identify a specific person. Moreover, note that data will become part of an aggregate report and *not* tied to a specific individual.

Provide scripts to staff to remind employees about the importance of the survey. You may wish to include a motivational message.

Testing the Survey

Before launching the surveys, test and preview all aspects of the process. If the survey is going out to an internal organization, test several "layers" within the organization. If your software has features related to sending out emails and/or creating letters, by all means use them.

Next determine the best time to send your survey. Large survey companies have reported that the best time to send an email is typically on Tuesdays and Wednesdays between 2 and 3 p.m. Re-send a follow-up survey to clients who have not responded within 2-4 weeks. As indicated, re-sending surveys can increase the response rate by 5%.

What about having a third party send it out? There is a theory that contracting with a third party to send, receive and report on results can increase the: honesty of comments, return rate, and perception of confidentiality. However, we have not found any research that documents these claims.

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Entering Survey Data

The data received from the surveys will need reliable data entry. Pay close attention to the staff time required to enter responses from paper and electronic surveys. Survey Monkey can be a useful tool. Be aware of any other factors that may increase cost.

Last month we discussed the importance of forming a survey committee. This panel will need to review the data each month. After 12-18 months, they will need to determine if requesting permission from your individual clients needs to be stopped and to set a date for the end of the survey period and the generation of the report.

Summary

To reiterate, it's vital to point out the importance of putting in the work involved in a survey upfront. If the EAP sending the survey works really hard on the *front* end, it will get good locator information *later*. (See the "Increasing Response Rates" sidebar.)

A side benefit to good response rates is that it can lead to more follow up in other areas of EAP. The methodology described in this two-part article might seem like a lot for a survey, but the benefits your EAP will gain will be worth it. ■

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Editor's Notebook

Surveys *can* be a big help to an organization, especially those dependent on utilization like EAPs. Some of you are undoubtedly sending surveys, while smaller EAPs might say, *"I don't have the time to send out a survey."*

Dave Sharar, co-author of this month's cover story, would disagree. "They can use a sample method – such as every third client – or only survey your most important clients. There *are* ways to lessen the workload and still have a good methodology," Dave says.

Many thanks to Dave and James for the useful insights they presented in the March and April cover stories.

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Confused by the Affordable Care Act (better known as Obamacare)? Who isn't? The key, however, isn't so much gaining an in-depth knowledge about the controversial health care reform, as it is understanding *enough* to make important business decisions pertaining to it. This month's *Brown Bagger* presents information that will help a corporate client get "unstuck."

Finally, are you following our free blog at http://impactpublishing.wordpress.com? It features short, practical tips for busy EA professionals… in many cases timely info that would be too dated to be useful for a monthly publication like *EAR*. It's free so why not check it out? Until next time.

Mike Jacquart

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Increasing Response Rates

- Mix up the delivery methods (e.g. email, phone, etc.);
- Make survey projects a specific staff responsibility;
- Develop "scripts" for staff to use;
- To reduce chances of emails going to spam, get on a certified whitelist;
- Obtain consent and reassure that the survey is confidential;
- Give an approximate date for follow-up at intake;
- Obtain good "locator" info at intake (e.g. what is the best way to reach the person, work phone, cell, etc.);
- Develop "rapport" at intake and explain the reason for further contact;
- Consider issuing a reminder about the survey before actually sending it;
- Remember that short, appealing, colorful surveys work best;
- If possible, include "endorsements" from business leaders or sponsors; and
- Consider using incentives for completing and returning the survey, but bear in mind that they need to be carefully thought out with a service like EAP. ■

– Dave Sharar and James Harting

Many Employees Come to Work Sick

"In sickness and in health" is a vow typically made in a wedding ceremony, but many workers also live by these words in their jobs, a new OfficeTeam survey shows.

Seven in 10 (70%) professionals admitted they frequently go to work when they're feeling sick. Managers are aware of the issue: Sixty-five percent said that ailing employees head into the office at least somewhat frequently.

"Managers should encourage their teams to stay home when they are sick. Let staff know that there's nothing heroic about spreading colds and flu," said Robert Hosking, executive director of OfficeTeam.

OfficeTeam offers five tips to help maintain a well workplace:

❖ **Address the issue head-on**. Remind staff to avoid spreading illness throughout the office by staying home when they are sick.

❖ **Model the behavior**. If you're a manager, resist the urge to come in sick yourself. If you do, employees will assume the same is expected of them.

❖ **Give "homework."** Offer those suffering from minor ailments the ability to work from home, if possible. They may be less likely to come in and infect others if they don't have to use sick days.

❖ **Keep it clean**. Encourage staff to clean up common areas, like break rooms, and make hand sanitizer available to avoid the spread of germs.

❖ **Have a back-up plan**. Identify team members who can take over responsibilities for sick employees to avoid backlogs. If necessary, hire temporary professionals to keep projects on track. ■

In the News

EAPA Announces CEAP Course Schedule

Planning on earning your CEAP credential this year? The Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) recently announced the 2014 schedule for Elevating Ethical Awareness, a course required of all CEAP candidates, and the Online CEAP Exam Prep Course.

EAPA's courses are facilitated by experienced professionals who have a keen interest in supporting the EA profession and the CEAP credential. To view the course schedule and to register go to: http://www.eapassn.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=968. ■

Resources

A new guide developed by *The National Business Group on Health*℠ and the *National Comprehensive Cancer Network*® offers employers an interactive toolkit to help address the growing impact of cancer in the workplace. ***An Employer's Guide to Cancer Treatment and Prevention*** is available at www.businessgrouphealth.org/cancer/resources.cfm.

Performance Reviews: Best – and Worst –Ways to Do Them, $99, PDF download, PBP Executive Reports, (800) 220-5000, www.pbpexecutivereports.com. When they are done well, employee performance reviews serve to motivate, improve morale, reduce turnover, and help prevent lawsuits. This report shows how. ■

More & More Employees are Working Remotely

While some companies have sought to curtail telecommuting in recent years, a growing number of creative professionals are working outside the office, a new survey by The Creative Group suggests.

One-third of advertising and marketing executives polled said the percentage of creative staff working remotely today is higher than three years ago; only **4%** said it is lower. Gaining access to talent outside of their geographic location and improving morale and retention rates were cited as the greatest benefits of offering remote working options to employees.

"Still, working off-site isn't without challenges," said Diane Domeyer, executive director of The Creative Group. "When employees are collaborating from diverse locations, everyone needs to step up their communications game."

The Creative Group offers five questions for employers to consider when establishing a remote working program:

1. **Is the business ready?** New companies or those in a state of transition may want to limit remote work arrangements. The same goes for firms already experiencing internal communication struggles.
2. **What creative jobs are best suited for remote working arrangements?** Certain tasks, such as graphic design or copywriting, lend themselves more easily to telecommuting than others, like those that require face-to-face contact or ongoing access to equipment and materials.
3. **How frequently should creative staff work off-site?** In-person interactions build camaraderie and boost creative output. Consider limiting remote work to one or two days a week. Encourage staff that lives far away to make occasional office visits.
4. **How will you stay in touch?** Collaborative tools like Skype and instant messaging can keep distant colleagues connected. A centralized calendar noting where employees will be working also helps ensure projects flow smoothly.
5. **Have I taken all necessary steps?** Before instituting any new work policy, be sure to check with a human resources representative or legal counsel. ■

Wellness Programs Deliver Mixed Results

A new Rand Corp. study examining a large employee wellness program, which included separate chronic disease management and healthy lifestyle initiatives, found that efforts to help employees manage chronic illnesses saved $3.78 in health care costs for every $1 invested in the effort.

However, wellness efforts that encourage healthy living lifestyle changes did *not* show a positive ROI on health care costs, but analysis showed that lifestyle management *can* reduce absenteeism.

As a result, if an employer wants to improve employee health or productivity, an evidence-based lifestyle management program can achieve this goal. But employers who are seeking a healthy ROI on their programs should target employees who already have chronic diseases.

"While workplace wellness programs have the potential to reduce health risks and cut health care spending, employers and policymakers should not take for granted that the lifestyle-management components of the programs can reduce costs or lead to savings overall," said Soeren Mattke, the study's senior author.

Moreover, ROI shouldn't be viewed as the sole measure of a wellness program's success. "One of the best ways to encourage engagement of employees is to make them realize that the employer is interested in and cares about the health and welfare of both the employee and the employee's family," wrote Hay Group consultants John Hennesy and Larry Hicks in the *Journal of Compensation and Benefits*. ■

Additional sources: Society for Human Resource Management (www.shrm.org) and EAP NewsBrief, a service of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (www.eapassn.org).

Supporting Our Veterans

Approach Offers Promise for Treating PTSD

A combination of exposure therapy and gene stimulation may be the best way to alter fear-provoking memories that are the persistent core of post-traumatic stress and anxiety disorders, a new study suggests.

Using fear-conditioned mice, researchers found they could essentially wipe out a fear response to distant memory by stimulating expression of genes that open a window of opportunity for learning in the brain's hippocampus, a region crucial for memory processing and consolidation.

The mice didn't just "forget" their conditioned fear in this dual approach. Neurons associated with memory were physically altered and appeared healthier and more active, according to the study published in the online journal *Cell*.

Therapy centered on deliberate recall of traumatic memory has been relatively successful at opening a window for patients to overcome the crippling effects of fear. However, this type of therapy has been less successful for older or more "remote" memory.

Laden with intense emotion, those memories can become a lifelong battle for some 29% of patients – such as *returning military veterans* – according to a recent study.

Previous research has shown that neurons in the hippocampus can undergo significant changes after short-term memories are induced, but not after recall of distant memories. That so-called neuroplasticity is mediated by genes, and those genes can be primed by an enzyme that affects the way DNA is packaged and sorted.

It is unclear as yet whether epigenetic therapies such as this can be applied to humans without causing harm. ■

Additional sources: Los Angeles Times, EAP NewsBrief, a service of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association.
Editor's note*: Story ideas for this column should be directed to mike.jacquart@impactrainingcenter.net.*

Quick Ideas

Great Managers Emphasize Differences

We are all *individuals* who act differently and perform certain job responsibilities differently. So why do so many managers insist that employees do everything the same way?

Noted author and motivational speaker Marcus Buckingham answers, "Do what great managers do: instead of trying to change your employees, identify their unique abilities (and even their eccentricities) – then help them use those qualities to excel in their own way."

You'll need these three tactics:

❖ **Continuously tweak roles to capitalize on individual strengths**.

❖ **Pull the triggers that activate employees' strengths**. Offer incentives such as time spent with you, opportunities to work independently, and recognition in forms each employee values most.

❖ **Tailor coaching to unique learning styles**. Give "analyzers" the information they need before starting a task. Start "doers" off with simple tasks then gradually raise the bar. Let "watchers" ride shotgun with your most experienced performers.

For more information, check out: www.tmbc.com/about-marcus. **Editor's note**: See article on page 7 in this newsletter for more information on different learning styles. ■

Understanding Different Communication Styles – Part I

By Ted Gorski

In today's corporate world, business leaders must have excellent communication skills. Many are being asked to do more with fewer resources while also dealing with the stresses of a corporation that is downsizing and/or tightening budgets. To remain effective, leaders need near perfect communication skills regardless of their own communication style.

Understanding the style of the person they are communicating with – be it employee, customer or someone else – could make the difference between barely getting one's message across and getting it across *well*.

Conversely, it is also very helpful for employees to understand the communication style of their boss. In either case, ask yourself which style is prominent among the key people YOU come into contact with in the workplace.

Four communication styles are presented in this two-part article; two appear below, the remainder will be offered next month.

The Analyzer

These individuals are meticulous, detail-oriented, introverted and task-oriented. They could be considered perfectionists and they are suspicious of others. They may answer a question with a question. Their biggest fear is criticism of work and they ask the "why" questions.

Key strengths of the Analyzer include being detailed-oriented, superb problem solvers and providing the team with a reality check. Weaknesses include having tunnel vision on projects and looking for the perfect solution.

To effectively communicate with the Analyzer:

- Be organized.
- Be logical. Support your position using facts.
- Make sure that each point is understood before proceeding to the next one.
- Do not use the phrase, *"Let me give you some constructive advice."*
- DO use words such as process, data and procedure.
- Recognize that Analyzers are motivated by quality and data.

The Aggressor-Asserter

These individuals are very competitive, goal-oriented, demanding, task-oriented and fast-paced. To these people, time is money and money is time. You know where you stand since they are blunt and direct in their communication. Their biggest fear is losing control and they ask the "what" questions.

The Aggressor-Asserter has key strengths that include providing momentum, offering focus and making quick decisions. Their "on top of it" approach to projects can keep the rest of the team on target or even get it done early. However, this must be balanced as their weaknesses include overstepping their assignments, taking over tasks that have been assigned to others (and not necessarily because they can do them better, they just want to get them done).

To effectively connect with the Aggressor-Asserter:

- Be brief, direct and concise.
- Provide options.
- Use a fast, quick pace.
- Focus on results and return-on-investment.
- Avoid providing lots of details.
- Be truthful. ■

Ted Gorski is a Professional Certified Coach (PCC) and President of Get Your Edge, LLC. He is the co-winner of the 2013 Executive Coach of the Year through the International Coach Federation of New England chapter. For more information, visit www.GetYourEdge.com

DSM-5 Controversy Continues

Dr. Thomas R. Insel, director of the National Institutes of Mental Health, severely criticized the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) for defining mental disorders based on symptoms rather than underlying biological causes.

In response, Dr. David Kupfer, the chairman of the task force that revised the DSM, said the manual, issued last year, did the best it could with the scientific evidence available and added that any shortage of such evidence was “a failure of our neuroscience and biology.”

What the DSM *is*, is a practical way of describing psychiatric syndromes, clusters of symptoms that patients experience and that often predict a course of illness and responses to various treatments.

For example, people who are persistently sad, hopeless and suicidal, and who have trouble eating and sleeping, generally respond well to various antidepressants and different types of psychotherapy. Yet even though they present identical symptoms, these patients almost certainly suffer from a biologically heterogeneous group of disorders; because, among other things, some of them respond to an antidepressant that enhances serotonin while others require a drug that increases dopamine.

Dr. Insel wants researchers to move away from studying syndromes based on symptoms to “research domain criteria,” which are new ways of classifying mental disorders based on neurobiological measures and dimensions of behavior, like a tendency toward anxiety or disorganized thinking.

Whether this will be a more promising path of exploration is debatable. For example, studying people who share a particular trait like anxiety or emotional instability may offer insight into the neural circuitry of emotional regulation, yet reveal nothing useful about the circuitry of depression.

Still, with all its limitations, the DSM gives clinicians a common language to describe and treat mental disorders. Until the underlying biology of those disorders can be unlocked, that is probably the best that can be expected. ■