

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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supporting EAP professionals

Improving EAP Surveys – Part I

By David Sharar and James Harting

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.

“But consider that if you as an EA professional do not offer documentation about the effectiveness of your EAP, then who will? The manner in which you implement an EAP survey will significantly influence your response rate and ultimately the credibility of your EAP.”

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 address these questions in this fundamental and yet neglected EAP topic.

Non-response Rates

First the disheartening news, non-response rates are increasing in *all* types of health and human service surveys – not just EAPs – and even *minimal* levels of response rates that are considered adequate (50%) are declining. Reasons cited for not responding to a survey included:

- Too busy;
- Survey was too long;
- Low interest or the questions weren’t relevant; and
- Survey “fatigue”. In other words, the individual receives too many surveys.

Few EAP providers succeed in avoiding this problem and a surprising number fail to even disclose response rates when reporting outcomes or levels of satisfaction. This actually backfires as attempts to “hide” this issue from clients only weaken credibility and value of the EAP.

What Makes for a Good Survey?

The strength of a survey is dependent on the full measurement of your sample, and low response reduces your sample size and introduces bias and uncertainty in your findings. Conversely, high response *reduces* selection bias and *enhances* credibility.

Low-response bias is introduced when there are likely differences

between responders and non-responders. For instance, the 10% of EAP users who respond to a survey with a high degree of satisfaction may not be typical members of the total group of EAP users. We cannot assume that the 90% of non-responders in this example were as highly satisfied as the 10% of responders.

Put another way, the 10% group had a special regard for EAP services that was atypical of the total

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EAP user population. Low response does not *always* indicate a high degree of bias, but the *effects* of low response need to be tested – procedures that most EAP providers are not in a position to implement.

But consider that if *you* as an EA professional do not offer documentation about the effectiveness of your EAP, then who will? The manner in which you implement an EAP survey will significantly influence your response rate and ultimately the credibility of your EAP.

What Do Your Customers Want?

Before starting a survey, the EAP needs to know, “*what your customers want*”. Engage internal or external EAP contacts as to what feedback will convince them of the effectiveness of, or satisfaction with, your EAP. Possible options might be: 1) Not

very interested in a survey, we’re already sold on the idea of an EAP; 2) Somewhat interested in feedback; 3) Very interested, we like research; and 4) Very interested – we want to know what employees and family members are saying about what you do.

Recognize the Necessary Resources

Surveying EAP clients’ takes time to plan, implement and review. Finances are needed to take into account areas such as man hours dedicated to the project, folding and stuffing surveys and postage (if applicable), online methods for sending them electronically (if applicable), entering and tabulating responses, generating reports, and more.

Form a Project Committee

The next step is to form a committee that will oversee the survey. Assign staff members and responsibilities into “position descriptions” so you can evaluate this project periodically. The committee should have the authority to decide areas such as:

- Type of surveys – client satisfaction or a standardized research tool;
- Regular mail and/or electronic mail, and/or phone calls?
- What the report will look like and how it will be presented to management;
- The start date and survey contents; and
- Setting the parameters of the survey (see the next section of this article for specifics).

Next, select a staff member to chair the committee and oversee the project. The committee will need to meet at least monthly to review the return rate and address any problems that are affecting it. This might involve: * too many clients

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Increasing Response Rates

- Mix up the delivery methods (e.g. email, phone, etc.);
- Make survey projects a specific staff responsibility;
- 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.);
- Consider issuing a reminder about the survey before sending it; and
- Develop “rapport” at intake and explain the reason for further contact.

– Dave Sharar and James Harting

saying NO, I do not want to participate; **too many incorrect regular or email addresses; and ***too many emails going to spam.

Possible solutions to resolve issues like these might include: 1) * provide scripts to staff to remind employees about the importance of the survey; 2) ** remind staff to be very mindful of obtaining the correct mail and email addresses; and 3) *** get on a certified

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whitelist such as ReturnPath.com to reduce the chances of emails going to a spam folder. (**Editor's note:** The first point will be addressed in greater detail in part II of this two-part article.)

Defining the Parameters

Defining the parameters of the survey 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 might include the following:

- 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?

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

NEXT MONTH: Determining the survey questions, testing the survey process before sending it, and more.

David A. Sharar, Ph.D., is the managing director of Chestnut Global Partners (www.chestnut-globalpartners.org). James J. Harting, LCSW, CEAP, is the president of Harting Associates, Inc., The Center for EAP Benchmark Surveys (www.daybreaksoftware.com). For a list of references used in this article, contact Dave at dsharar@chestnut.org. This article is based on Dave and James' 2013 World EAP Conference presentation, "Best Practices for Surveying EAP Clients: Validate the Case for Your EAP."



Editor's Notebook

I'm pleased to report that this month's cover story offers a follow-up from the 2013

World EAP Conference presentation by James Harting and Dave Sharar titled, "*Best Practices for Surveying EAP Clients: Validate the Case for Your EAP.*" Key points of the session were summarized in the December 2013 *EAR* and 1st quarter 2014 *Journal of Employee Assistance*.

Surveys *can be* a big help to an organization, depending on the effort put in on the front end. In the case of *EAR*, we've learned about some great story ideas from YOU! I also recall an example of a weekly newspaper reader survey that didn't work. Not putting enough thought into the wording, our main question, "*Would you like to see more of*" backfired on us. Of course, readers always checked "yes," who wouldn't want to see *more* of something? But that didn't help us prioritize what we were actually

going to offer "more" of!

Similarly, a survey about utilization and other aspects of your EAP has to be "done right" to be useful. But, you might say, "*I don't have the time to send out a survey.*" Bear in mind what Dave states: "But consider that if you as an EA professional do not offer documentation about the effectiveness of your EAP, then who will?"

Even a small EAP without a lot of internal resources can find the time to distribute satisfaction or outcomes surveys if they make it a priority. 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. Until next time.



Mike Jacquart, Editor
(715) 258-2448

mike.jacquart@impacttrainingcenter.net

Legal Lines

Proposed Rules Set Conditions

The proposed amendments to "excepted benefits regulation" (proposed rule) published in the Dec. 24, 2013 *Federal Register* would add certain employee assistance programs as excepted benefits for purposes of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), and make certain other changes to the excepted benefits definition.

The proposed rules address the requirements necessary for Employee Assistance Plans, to be treated as excepted benefits. To learn more, check out: www.eapassn.org/files/public/EAPsExceptedBenefits122413.pdf. ■

Additional sources: Buck Consultants, a Xerox company; and EAP NewsBrief, a service of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association.

Stopping the 'Brain Drain' – Part II

By Pam Holloway

Last month we learned about George, one of those extremely knowledgeable employees that every workplace seems to have. The problem is that George is retiring and taking his years of know-how with him. Unfortunately, this case is hardly unique. *With the growing number of Baby Boomers either retiring or drastically cutting back their hours, more and more Georges are going to be leaving their companies, perhaps in 2014.*

Some suggestions were presented in part I to help keep a "brain drain" from occurring. Additional recommendations are offered in the conclusion of this two-part article.

❖ **Find other Georges.** In order to identify the truly key people in the organization whose knowledge a corporate client can't afford to lose, it's necessary to start with business strategies, objectives and core competencies. What is it that the organization absolutely *must* do to be successful? In the case of George's company, an oil drilling firm, one of the key competencies is to resolve well problems quickly and efficiently. Every minute a well isn't pumping, the company is losing money.

The client must think about the key knowledge in *their* organization. It might be a relationship with a particularly important customer, knowledge about a key technological process, or someone with the ability to always pick the right person for the right job.

❖ **Recognize which knowledge is most important.** Not everyone in

an organization is a George. A client needn't classify *everything* that everybody knows. Rather, the objective is to recognize which knowledge is *most important* to the success of the organization, and who has this knowledge. Ask an upper-level manager to think of five such people in *their* organization. How would the organization run without access to their skills and knowledge?

This will vary tremendously. Staff members may need to be brought up to speed about computer software, a manual, or other training tool. In some cases, apprenticeships and mentoring might be appropriate. The point is, how the corporate client would function without these key people will depend on a number of factors that need to be taken into consideration.

❖ **Maintain positive relationships with Georges.** George is looking forward to retirement. He plans on spending lots of time with his grandchildren. But the door that closes behind him doesn't have to stay shut. George

will probably be interested in remaining involved in the company in some capacity.

He might be willing to work on an as-needed basis, so long as the corporate client is careful to structure the relationship in such a way that balances George's new priorities and recognizes the value of his expertise. Clients must make a concerted effort to maintain relationships with former employees. If they don't, these people may very well take their vital knowledge elsewhere. Can your client afford to let that happen?

Summary

So, let George walk out the door, but be sure he doesn't take everything he knows with him. Then, maintain a positive relationship with him. That way, when your corporate client needs him again, he'll be more likely to help out. ■

Pam Holloway is a business psychologist and co-founder of the training and consulting firm, About People, www.aboutpeople.com.

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Building Corporate Character – Part II

By Stan Craig

It seems as if not a day passes by without a new story about ethical breakdowns. From doping athletes in baseball and cycling being stripped of titles and victories to politicians who behave as if sexual harassment and financial self-dealing are privileges of office, the stories are never ending.

The good news is that EA professionals can help prevent ethical issues in both their own organizations and by assisting their corporate clients in making ethical behavior a priority in their firms. Below are a few ways to create a culture of ethical behavior. Additional suggestions were presented in part I of this two-part article.

❖ **Remind the entire organization that the right thing to do is always to do the right thing.** Pressure to create sales and meet rollout deadlines, or reach the goal and please the stockholders or owners should never result in compromised behavior. Values and ethics are the glue that holds

everything together. When they are broken, the sound carries far and wide and can trigger an avalanche of ethical lapses that can never be undone.

❖ **Mottos and mission statements make a difference when they are displayed throughout the workplace.** A mission, motto and stated values can be printed on wallet cards, posters, or wall plaques in offices and gathering places. Values matter, and seeing them implies that they are just as important as labor laws and evacuation guides, and perhaps more meaningful for employees.

❖ **Be quick to take action when ethics and values are violated.** If you want to denigrate a previous effort and integrity, ignore a violation when it occurs. Permitting violators to continue in their position when the facts of poor behavior are clear ends all credibility with employees. The word will circulate quickly and undermine any previous efforts to maintain ethical standards. If it is believed that some can get by with

anything while others are punished, that sends a powerful message that ethics do not exist.

❖ **Ethical training and discussions help put values to work.** When management expresses the values that the company or organization is to live by, employees are challenged to follow the example the company sets. This is one time when top-down leadership clearly works. Describing the right actions resulting from shared values builds trust.

Summary

Consider this: ethical values actually create value for a company or organization. Year after year some of the world's most admired companies, the best places to work and highest growth companies are those with clear corporate values demonstrated in the workplace. ■

Stan Craig, the founder of the ForeTalk Seminar, is an accomplished financial planner, executive coach and keynote speaker. For more information, visit www.ForeTalkSeminar.com.

Resources

📖 **5 Steps to Boost Employee Engagement**, \$99, PDF download, PBP Executive Reports, (800) 220-5000, www.pbpexecutivereports.com. The author teaches managers how to identify an engaged employee and describes the steps they can take to start developing a fully engaged workforce.

📖 **The Facts of Business Life: What Every Business Owner Knows That You Don't**, by Bill McBean, \$24.95, Wiley, www.factsofbusinesslife.com. The author identifies the five types of workplace bullies and what needs to be done about their behavior.

📖 The **Harvard Health Letter** is available from Harvard Health Publications, www.heart.harvard.edu/heart. A recent article describes how heart disease *triples* the risk of depression. "Treat depression, help the heart." ■

Employment Toolkit Updated

The Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Center for PTSD have recently created a new section on the Veterans Employment Toolkit (www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace) specifically designed to support EA professionals in their work with veterans.

This latest update provides information aimed at assisting EAP providers in how to better support veteran employees, gain military cultural competence, and address common readjustment as well as behavioral and mental health issues.

In addition, a new online course, “Supporting Veterans in the Workplace: A Course for Employee Assistance Program Providers”, is also available on this newly minted section. Highlights of the course include information about differences between military and civilian workplaces as well as common problems that veterans may experience in the workplace and how to provide the best support.

There is also information on how to help managers or supervisors support and assist veteran employees. Video vignettes,

simulating veterans and EAP providers, serve to illustrate course content. This is a 1-hour free course with CE credit available for psychologists, social workers, and counselors. A plethora of other resources are also provided. Visit the new EAP professionals section at www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/eap.asp. ■

Editor’s note: Story ideas for this column should be directed to mike.jacquart@impacttrainingcenter.net.

On the Job

Personal Resilience Offers Solid ROI

Why haven’t more organizations invested in company-wide solutions to improve personal resilience? Why do so few offer their employees resilience-planning tools – whether directly or through their *employee assistance program*?

Doing so seems like a no-brainer, particularly when the return on investment (ROI) is not only evident, but in the nation’s economic best interest.

The lack of personal resilience adversely impacts organizations every day. Things like home fires, divorce, elder- and child-care, urgent home repairs, accidents, bankruptcy and other personal issues cause lost productivity that costs the nation over \$268 billion annually.

Nearly 30% of employees come to work at least 5 days when they are too distracted to be effective. Roughly 28% of workers take time off for caregiving, and 25% took at least one hour/day to deal with personal issues.

If the entire U.S. workforce of 140 million people had a personal resilience plan to help them cope better and recover more quickly from a personal crisis, emergency or disaster, there would be a much higher probability that employees would be able to provide their employers at least an additional full day of focused work on the job each year.

Ann Cross and Ronald Bearse report in *Government Security News* that employers may wish to work with their EAP provider to:

- Provide understanding why individual and family preparedness is necessary;
- Guide the individual through the process of preparing an adequate plan;
- Make it simple to gather the information needed for themselves, family or employer; and
- Provide proper security of the individual’s personal data, and ensure access to it when necessary. ■

Additional source: EAP NewsBrief, a service of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association.

Editor’s note: For more information about personal resilience, contact Ann at ann@personalrecoveryconcepts.com or Ronald at rbearse@nnsqllc.com.

Reject with Respect

If a manager of one of your corporate clients needs to give someone bad news – that the employee is being fired and not just demoted or reprimanded – *Psychology Today* offers some tips for easing the pain.

❖ **Use the proper body language.** Maintaining eye contact and a relaxed stance usually conveys respect and helps calm the person's state of mind.

❖ **Be sympathetic.** Even if you're letting someone go, it's not necessary to be heartless about it either. Consider presenting another opportunity within the organization where the employee might be a better fit, or else offering a good letter of recommendation or job lead.

❖ **Be considerate and non-judgmental about the dismissal.** For instance, blaming

cognitive rather than emotional shortcomings for the firing (e.g., incompetence, rather than lack of warmth) will stoke anger; the reverse approach, meanwhile, is more likely to spark tears. Consider saying something like, "*Bob, your hard work here was greatly appreciated, but we need to go in a different direction with regard to your particular position.*" ■

On the Job

Trying to Manage People – Part II

By Tron Jordheim

The best managers try hard to motivate and guide their people to meet agreed-upon goals. Procedures, protocols and guidelines are put in place to help keep things fair and organized. Feedback, motivation and direction are given. But at the end of the day, good managers realize that there is no good way to manage people.

But since managing people is the key to any business success, they have to try anyway – *and as an EA professional you are in a perfect position to help.* The following are some ideas you may wish try with some of your corporate clients' managers. Additional suggestions were presented in part I of this two-part article.

❖ **Communicate** – Encourage managers to stop relying on email and memos; and have more personal conversations with employees. They should allow employees to be honest, and spend at least a little personal time with each person every month if possible. They need to be good listeners, as they will learn a lot about how to deal with people when they hear what their workers have to say.

❖ **Leave well enough alone** -- Sometimes managers feel that people can perform better and can produce more, but if employees have found a comfortable and satisfactory balance it is best not to disturb. They must resist the temptation to over-manage them.

Summary

Managers can do their companies a lot of good by trying to be a better boss every day. They need to work on best practices, get to know their employees, communicate personally, and above all leave well enough alone.

If they're trying too hard to manage people or if they're going too far in attempting to manage behavior, they will end up throwing their hands up in the air and declaring *there is no good way to manage people!* ■

Tron Jordheim is the CMO of StorageMart, one of the world's largest privately held self-storage companies with locations across the U.S. and Canada. With 40+ years of experience in sales, marketing and training, he continues to be sought after as a public speaker, sales trainer and consultant. For more information, visit www.tronjordheim.com.

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Tuesday is the Most Productive Day of the Week

Have a challenging project to tackle? Take it up on Tuesday, a new survey from Accountemps suggests. Thirty-nine percent of human resources (HR) managers interviewed rank Tuesday as the most productive day of the week. Thursday and Friday tied for the least productive day, with each receiving just 3% of the responses.

“Many workers spend Monday catching up from the previous week and planning the one ahead,” said Max Messmer, chairman of Accountemps and author of *Managing Your Career For Dummies*® (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.). “On Tuesday, employees may begin to have time to focus

on individual tasks and become more productive.”

Accountemps offers the following tips to increase productivity and make every day like Tuesday:

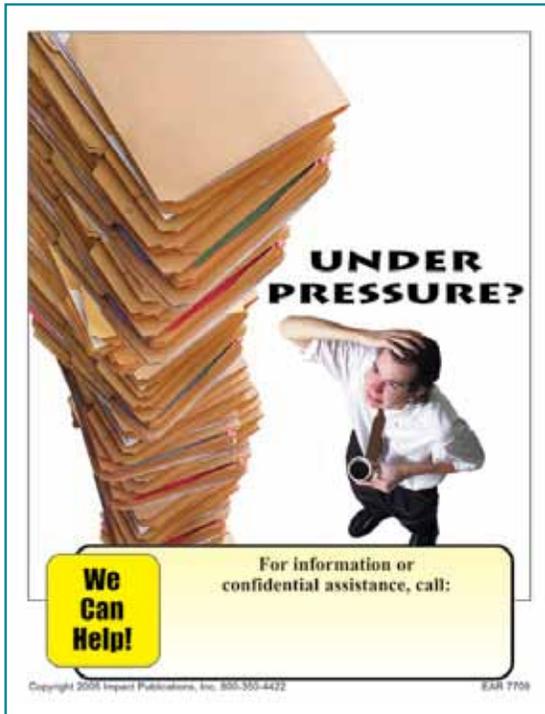
❖ **Axe the excess.** Start by creating a to-do list for the day. Then, cut it in half, focusing on your top priorities. Too often workers overestimate what they can accomplish and become frustrated by their lack of progress. A shorter, more realistic list that leaves room for unexpected projects and setbacks will help you become more productive.

❖ **Strive for quality, not quantity.** In theory, multitasking seems like a good way to increase productivity. But it often leads to oversights

and errors. Repeatedly switching from one project to another also slows you down. Do your best to focus on one item at a time.

❖ **Know your prime time.** Tackle critical or challenging assignments during the time of day when you’re most productive. Handle less-pressing tasks, like online research, when your energy level starts to wane.

❖ **Dodge the derailers.** When working on important assignments, increase productivity by turning off mobile devices and signing out of email and social media. That allows you to give full attention to the task at hand. Prevent interruptions by politely informing your colleagues you don’t want to be disturbed. ■



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