

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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supporting EAP professionals

A New Direction in Wellness *Serious Illness Increasing in Workplace*

By RaeAnn Thomas

Employee health and well-being is increasingly capturing the attention of EAP counselors. EA professionals are assisting in proactive health initiatives to educate employees about developing healthy habits, managing stress effectively, and even developing personal wellness plans.

This direction has the EA profession looking toward the future to more efficient workplaces. This is a positive shift in focus for many EAPs, and it is entirely appropriate for EA professionals to participate in these initiatives.

However, a wellness program still can't replace the need to respond to and manage the impact of illness in the workplace. EA professionals, for instance, must consider that a single diagnosis of serious illness will affect more people than just the patient. Treatment of illness in the workplace can affect co-workers, productivity, and other aspects of the organization and work team.

Serious Illness is Increasing

Serious illness is increasing in the workplace, and advancing medical technology makes it possible for employees to access complex medical care while continuing



to work. The American workforce is aging, and Baby Boomers are working longer than ever to continue to earn a livable income and maintain health care coverage. But EAP doesn't deal with medical illness – at least not directly, right? The truth is, we *will* likely become more involved than ever as serious illnesses, including cancer, heart attacks, and strokes affects more and more employees and their immediate families. *This makes it a serious workplace issue.*

Valued Employees

Medical care has progressed from the days when a diagnosis of cancer meant the individual either

leaving the workplace or returning only after a full recovery. Today, many employees who are diagnosed with cancer must continue to work through their treatment. Financial concerns, including the need for a steady income and health care coverage necessitate working even in the midst of strenuous and debilitating “outpatient” treatment.

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While legal protections such as the *Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)* can offer a sense of security, it does *not* provide the resources employees need to maintain financial responsibilities without a steady paycheck. So they work.

With the compassion of a caring supervisor, employees may be able to work flexible hours around their treatments. Still, illness and treatments diminish physical stamina, concentration, and focus.

The stress of juggling an illness, treatments, and work may also bring added stress to an employee, compromising his/her ability to fully engage in the work that is expected of him/her. Feeling physically fatigued and taking multiple medications to manage the side effects of the treatment or illness, the employee often can't be fully present.

Compassionate Leaders

Managers and supervisors are usually the first to grapple with the reality of an employee's illness in the workplace. Can the employee be assigned "light duty" work? Can work hours be flexed around medical appointments and treatments? Can the team continue to be productive in spite of intermittent short-term (or sometimes long-term) absences as the employee's medical condition changes? This is a difficult position to be in. The employee's right to privacy and medical confidentiality must be respected. Often, managers do not know the full extent of the employee's challenges, and yet many strive to demonstrate flexibility and patience. Meanwhile, managers are also trying to accomplish the same volume and quality of work as before the employee became ill. In essence, they feel caught between doing the "right thing" for the employee and the "right thing" for the department and organization.

Supportive Co-workers

It is one thing to ask others to pick up the slack caused by a team member's illness for a brief period. But it is quite another when treatment and recovery last a significant amount of time. The motivation of co-workers may evolve from a common spirit of pitching in for the good of the team and support of their co-worker, to feelings of frustration or resentment that *their* needs or limitations are not acknowledged. We are asking these employees to step up and contribute even more toward the success of their team, when they are probably already stressed in *their own* lives.

Silent Caregivers

Sometimes an illness is not that of the employee, but rather a close family member. The employee takes on the role of caregiver for this significant person, while trying to remain fully effective at work. These situations may occur without the employer or work team's knowledge.

Meanwhile, the employee caregiver is managing day-to-day job responsibilities while *also* juggling a hectic schedule of treatments and support of their ailing loved one. Frequent medical appointments, phone calls, and consultations with medical staff, can leave employees as dazed and fatigued as if *they* were suffering from an illness.

With a lack of information, these caregivers often are not aware of, or do not access, resources available to assist them. As these employees become over extended, they may have difficulty remaining committed and engaged in their work. Fatigue and emotional problems may develop, further affecting work performance.

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What is an EAP to Do?

Such individuals are at work physically, but they're not really present mentally. This is a phenomenon called "presenteeism," a topic that will be discussed at length in this month's *Brown Bagger*. The following are some recommendations:

❖ **Education** – EA professionals can provide education to

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employees and managers about presenteeism. We can offer information about ways to maintain healthy boundaries between work and home, resources that are available to help employees who are ill, or have ailing family members, and financial resources that may assist employees in feeling more comfortable taking leave when that is the most appropriate option.

❖ **Facilitation** – As experts in facilitating communication, EAP practitioners can help managers and employees consider choices and devise plans to manage workloads through the duration of an illness. As a management consultant, we can support supervisors and managers in communicating to the affected employee and co-workers about the short-term changes and expectations that will occur as a result of the individual's need for flexibility, including a contingency place to cope with any unusual circumstances. The EAP can also assist the manager in sharing information so it does not breach the employee's right to confidentiality.

❖ **Clinical support** – Clinical support is at the heart of the service provided by EAP. Effective strategies for stress management and coping with change are critical for work teams charged with accomplishing tasks with less manpower. Such methods may focus on employees' *individual* needs for support and resources, as well as support for *co-workers* who may experience varying levels of commitment and camaraderie during this time.

Summary

On the one hand, employee assistance professionals are



Editor's Notebook

It's great to hear that employee assistance professionals are among those leading employee wellness efforts in the workplace. I firmly believe, as do many others, that *proactive* measures regarding our health are a true win-win: these initiatives help employees, they help employers' bottom lines, and, if taken more seriously nationwide, they can help curb our country's out-of-control health care costs.

But the fact also remains that we still live in an aging society. As author RaeAnn Thomas points out in this month's cover story, addressing *serious illness* in the workplace will *also* remain a workplace (and EAP) concern. This month's lead article – and the corresponding *Brown Bagger* – also compiled by RaeAnn, address serious illness in general, and the myriad of issues that can result in presenteeism.

A broad approach to both articles was appropriate. However, the impetus for this month's articles

actually stemmed from talking with RaeAnn about the dreaded six-letter word (c-a-n-c-e-r) that, whether directly or indirectly, is affecting more and more of us than ever. Like many other people today my sister, Suzanne, had little choice but to continue to work while undergoing radiation treatments for breast cancer.

How supportive and flexible are *your* corporate clients in allowing *their* ill workers to take time off when they have to? Are co-workers supportive in the beginning, but resent added workloads later on?

With a lack of information, many sick employees do not access resources available to assist them – *such as the EAP*. Thanks, RaeAnn, for reminding readers how much EA professionals can help, when serious illness does strike. Until next time.

Mike Jacquart

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optimistically working for a future with healthier employees and workplaces. However, as our society ages we must *also* reaffirm our commitment and efforts to support the employees, work teams, and managers when serious health illnesses arise that impact the well-being of the organizations we serve. ■

RaeAnn Thomas, a long-time contributor to EAR, is the Executive Director of Associated Employee Assistance Services (www.aeas-eap.com). She may be contacted at raeann.thomas@ministryhealth.org.



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Social Media Success – Part II

By Genae Girard

In order to keep customers engaged, you must create an emotional bond in order to keep their attention. The average customer is exposed to hundreds of messages everyday on their computer, on their phones and on TV. They have become artificially attention deficit disordered, and that doesn't help your advertising brand. In order to be successful in the social media market, *you must engage the customer.*

Cathy, a small business owner described in part one of this article, can do this by turning to the creative spirit of the company and think outside the box by using a number of strategies. Two of these strategies were described last month, the remainder will be explained in the conclusion of this article.

❖ **Add humor to get the customers laughing.** If an employee

turns the mixer on high accidentally and splatters cake batter all over the place, snap a picture and post it across your social media network. If you are an accountant, you may post the top 10 funniest tax excuses. If you are an author, have some friends act out a funny scene in your book.

❖ **Examine your competition.** Look for the top 10 competitors that you have in social media. Keep an eye on what they are posting and how many followers they have. Then develop your content in a more interesting and out of the box way from what they are doing. Do it faster, more clever and better.

❖ **Look for other companies that are a good fit to team up with.** Make an agreement to swap content on each other sites so that you can take advantage of co-marketing. This could be another manufacturer or service that complements

your business. Take advantage of the communities that have already been built and cross-pollinate them through your posts.

❖ **Approach younger employees in your company that may be on the pulse of social media.** Put them in charge of reporting to you once a week about what the buzz is in the social media realm. Have them come up with different ideas, promotions or creative posts of interest and test them out in the market.

Summary

Standing out in the marketplace is becoming even more important as competition is always knocking at the social media door. Do it better, and you will catch your customers sticking around to see what is next? ■

Genae Girard is a speaker, author, and entrepreneur. She is the founder of www.BeyondtheBoobieTrap.com, an online social media tribe of over 23,000 breast cancer survivors.

Resources

📖 *Your Best Just Got*

Better: Work Smarter, Think Bigger, Make More, by Jason Womack, \$24.95, Wiley, <http://womackcompany.com>.

This book is packed with strategies, tools, and processes to help readers improve their performance at work. But more than that, it provides insights into why we tend to do what we've always done — and how we can break out of the patterns that hold us back. ■

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Social Media Use Increasing

Facebook may be where you catch up with pals, but a new survey by The Creative Group confirms it's increasingly a place for business. Nearly half (46%) of executives interviewed said they currently use Facebook for professional purposes. In addition, 56% of respondents expect to take advantage of this social network for business in the next three years.

"Chances are, nearly everyone you know – from your dentist to your colleague – is a part of at least one online community," said Donna Farrugia, executive director of The Creative Group. "Whether it's Facebook, Twitter or Google+, people are finding social networks useful for expanding their professional contact base, mining information that can help them in their careers, and showcasing their strengths and industry expertise."

The Creative Group offers five ideas for maximizing social networks:

1. Divide and conquer. Not everyone in a social network needs to know about Friday dinner plans or musings on the latest blockbuster movie. Segment friend lists so professional contacts aren't inundated with updates they don't need to see. Also check privacy settings to control who has access to what information.

2. Be a guru. Share nuggets of useful information with business contacts, and offer advice when they ask for recommendations or ideas.

3. Give and you shall receive. Be generous with contacts by offering to make introductions or share useful information.

4. Use photo features. Even if you maintain a personal website or digital portfolio, you can provide your online contacts with a snapshot of your latest professional project or even your entire body of work. Creating albums on Flickr or Facebook, or using Twitpic or similar photo-sharing tools, is an easy way to visually show potential clients or employers career accomplishments and showcase new skills.

5. Resist the urge to rant. Never say anything disparaging about a current or former company, co-workers, clients or other business contacts. You never know who might see comments and forward them on. ■

Source: The Creative Group. The full survey results are available at <http://creativegroup.mediaroom.com/facebookuse>.

Communication & Leadership are Crucial

Chief financial officers (CFOs) cite communication and leadership as top areas for improvement for their work teams, a recent Accountemps survey suggests. **Thirty-one percent** of CFOs interviewed named communication as the area where employees need to improve the most – while 26% of executives cited gaining stronger leadership abilities as the top priority for their department's staff.

"No matter how skilled someone is in a particular job, if he or

she is a poor communicator, advancement opportunities are limited," said Max Messmer, chairman of Accountemps, which conducted the survey. "The ability to effectively convey a point verbally and in writing can be a key predictor of leadership potential."

Accountemps offers seven steps to help professionals polish their communication skills:

❖ **Sweat the small stuff.** Whether you're drafting a report or email, always proofread. Even

minor typos and grammatical errors send an unfavorable impression. Vague or unclear instructions can lead to costly misunderstandings and unnecessary correspondence.

❖ **Hear them out.** Communicating well is as much about listening as it is about talking. Focus on what is being said rather than trying to formulate a response in your head while the other person is still speaking.

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Get More Leads from Your Next Trade Show

By Shelley Plemons

Trade shows can be an overwhelming experience. Flashy booths, pushy salespeople and more giveaways than you can fathom create distraction. Booth sponsors have a hard time keeping the attention of attendees. As a sales and marketing expert, I have attended dozens of trade shows and learned multiple ways to make them lead-generating events. Getting your money's worth out of trade shows requires focusing your efforts on planning, executing, and following up.



Planning

Begin the planning process by determining what your level of participation will be. Renting a booth is a good option, but presenting will really get you noticed. Choose a topic that resonates with your target audience and people will reach out to learn more about you and your expertise. This is a great way to collect information and generate leads.

You will want to begin your promotional efforts months before the event. Trade shows generally offer contact information of attendees for a price. The cost is well worth it. Select five key prospects and setup dinners or meetings during the trade show. Take an opportunity to send the rest of

attendees a postcard and introduce yourself. This will increase your chances of them actually stopping by your booth.

Promotional items help with name recognition, but stay away from coffee cups and pens – be original. Consider a unique promotional item that relates to your company or product. Giveaways draw people to your booth. Consider offering copies of a book about your industry, a free one-hour consultation, restaurant gift cards, T-shirts, etc. Find out if the show will let sponsors pay for overhead announcements, if so, announce each drawing 15 minutes before it takes place. This tactic will increase your booth's popularity.

Getting people to your booth is half the battle – you also need a way to collect their information. Many shows offer customer relationship management tools or badge scanner rentals. This is a great way to gather information in a quick and orderly manner.

Executing

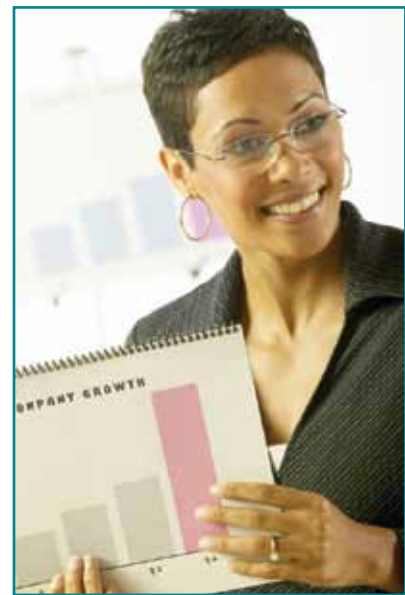
Successful execution takes manpower. You'll need at least three people. Make one person responsible for finding your VIPs and bringing them to the booth. Have two people at the booth at all times. Be sure to develop a signal so that if someone is monopolizing your time your team member can gracefully interject, and schedule an appointment for a future date.

Make sure your booth setup is inviting. Remove the tables in front, and set up comfortable chairs

so that you can bring people in and chat, but remember this is not the time to go into a long sales pitch. Your goals are to get connections, set appointments, and follow up.

Following Up

After the show call and email your key prospects within 72 hours and then wait a couple of weeks before contacting them again. Be sure to send a personalized email to the other people you met. Finally, ask team members and review what worked and what didn't so that you can make the next show even better.



Shelley Plemons has more than 25 years' experience in the behavioral health industry. Her website is www.strategicsalessolutions.com

Editor's note: This article is the sixth in a series that will discuss business solutions for EAPs. If you have a topic you would like covered, send an email to shelley@strategicsalessolutions.com or call (817) 946-5334.

Most Employees Don't Want Their Boss's Job

Recent research from OfficeTeam indicates that few workers today are angling for “a corner office.” More than three-quarters (76%) of employees polled said they have no interest in their manager’s position. In addition, nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents believe they couldn’t do a better job than their boss.

The survey also revealed that more workers between the ages of 18 and 34 wanted their manager’s position (35%) than those in other age groups.

“Many aspects of management involve making difficult, sometimes unpopular decisions, and not everyone is comfortable in this role,” said Robert Hosking, executive director of OfficeTeam. “Being

a strong individual contributor does not necessarily equate to being an effective leader. The most successful bosses excel at motivating others to achieve great results.”

OfficeTeam identifies seven traits that strong leaders possess:

❖ **Integrity.** The best managers foster trust among employees by placing ethics first.

❖ **Sound judgment.** Top supervisors can be counted on to make tough decisions based on logic and rationale.

❖ **Diplomacy.** Handling challenging situations with tact and discretion is a must. Effective managers don’t take all the credit for results – they consistently acknowledge individual and team contributions.

❖ **Adaptability.** It’s essential that leaders be able to think on their feet. They should be innovative while also encouraging team members to develop creative solutions.

❖ **Strong communication.** To motivate and guide employees, influential managers freely share their vision with others.

❖ **Good listening skills.** Successful bosses realize they don’t have all the answers and seek input from colleagues.

❖ **Influence.** Great managers build strong networks within the organization to gain support for their ideas. ■

Source: OfficeTeam (www.officeteam.com).

Communication & Leadership are Crucial

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❖ **Watch your nonverbal cues.** Poor body language – crossed arms, fidgety fingers or a tense expression – can be distracting. And nothing sends the message that you’re disinterested more than looking out the window, checking your smartphone or glancing at your watch while someone’s talking.

❖ **Focus on the audience.** Know what will appeal to them, and frame your discussion in that context. Keep information relevant

and concise, using key points to support your message.

❖ **Consider the context.** No single method of communication is most effective in every situation. If the message does not require a lengthy explanation, then an email or memo is probably fine. However, if the message is more complex or could easily be misunderstood, a telephone or in-person conversation is likely best.

❖ **Ask for help.** Choose a mentor whose communication skills

you admire, and emulate his or her style. Request feedback so you can continually improve.

❖ **Practice.** Take a public speaking course and rehearse presentations in front of the mirror or with a friend. Volunteer to draft memos or other communications that will help you hone your writing skills. ■

Source: Accountemps (www.accountemps.com). The full survey results are available at http://accountemps.rhi.mediaroom.com/improvement_areas.

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EAP is Key in Curbing Health Care Costs – Part I

Employee health costs have now become the third-largest expenditure for U.S. businesses today, constituting a whopping 8% of total compensation. The best way for CEOs to deal with higher-cost risks, such as depression, is to promote wider utilization of EAPs that can provide early intervention to employees.



“Employee health costs have now become the third-largest expenditure for U.S. businesses today, constituting a whopping 8% of total compensation.”

Yet most chief executive officers are curiously passive, failing to employ even the most basic management tools and market incentives to deal with the problem. Employees and employers alike – but first and foremost the boss – need to be held accountable for reducing the cost burden that is damaging so many companies’ bottom lines.

There are seven things that CEOs can do. Several of them appear here – the remainder will be examined in part II of this two-part article.

❖ **Give incentives to insurance brokers.** Most employers buy their health insurance through brokers

who make more money when the plan costs more. Not exactly a smart way to get market forces working in your favor. Better to pay brokers on a fee-for-service basis. Better still to offer them a bonus tied to the amount by which they can reduce a plan’s costs, not a plan’s benefits.

❖ **Give incentives to managers.** CEOs know that if you want to achieve a key business objective, you need to provide incentives to managers to help you succeed. Yet rare is the boss who offers bonuses to human resources and benefits managers who reduce claims costs for the company. It’s long past the time for CEOs to get incentives working in the right direction inside their companies.

A major source of rising workplace-health costs is the declining fitness of employees. As a new Gallup poll reports, an astonishing six of every seven full-time employees in the U.S. (or 86%) is overweight or suffers from a chronic health condition. This is a terrible waste of human capital and an enormous burden on the bottom line, costing employers more than

\$153 billion a year in absenteeism alone – four times the per-capita, lost-productivity cost in the U.K.

We already know that wellness programs can reduce employer expenses. A study in 2010 by Harvard health economist Katherine Baicker found that medical costs fall by \$3.27 for every dollar spent on wellness programs, and absenteeism costs fall by \$2.73 for every dollar spent.

❖ **Give incentives to employees.** A new breed of accountability-based wellness programs can deliver even bigger savings. In these types of initiatives, participants willing to be held responsible for their health-related lifestyles pay a reduced contribution toward their premium – often half that paid by non-participants. Those with identified health risks must work with a coach to make lifestyle changes to keep receiving the lower premium. A recent study of accountability-based programs at four mid-size employers found that the total paid claims of program participants dropped to \$2,269 compared with \$6,187 for non-participants. ■

NEXT MONTH: Additional recommendations are explored.

Sources: Bloomberg View; Darrell Moon, CEO of Orriant, a wellness-program provider serving companies nationwide. The opinions expressed are his own; and Employee Assistance Professionals Association (www.eapassn.org).