

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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supporting EAP professionals

Transgender Support in the Workplace – Part I

By Carolyn Ruck

How should employee assistance professionals respond when an employee requests workplace support while fulfilling the final steps of a gender transition process?

In the past decade many organizations have gained a greater understanding of how diversity impacts workplace culture and the financial bottom line. Yet, when employers call for guidance with transgender workplace issues, their apprehension resonates at a fairly high level.

When facing gender transition in the workplace, employers call the EAP because they recognize a critical need for information and

collaboration. Most often, it's the lack of clarity that proves problematic for the transitioning employee, and risky for organizational well-being at all levels.

Lack of awareness, vague policies and the absence of diversity programs and management training can be stressful and costly for an employer. An employee's gender change disclosure, if not handled well, can lead to any combination of complaints, interpersonal conflicts, rumors, or claims of a hostile work environment, harassment or discrimination.

Conversely, EAP guidance can *enlighten* and *ease* the organizational adjustment process. An

experienced consultant can offer understanding and information about the unique personal issues faced by the transitioning employee. EA professionals can coordinate discussions and educational options for top leaders, managers and staff as well as offer

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human resource guidance about organizational issues that will likely arise when Jim transforms into Joanne, or vice versa.

Definition

In the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV)*, used by mental health professionals to diagnose psychological disorders, transsexual is listed under Gender Identity Disorder or (GID). It is not the type of issue than can be “cured” or reversed with psychological treatment.

Psychotherapy is an essential part of helping the person adjust effectively. Individuals with GID experience persistent discomfort with the discrepancy between his/her assigned birth sex and their internal gender identity.

Employment Law Realities

Today under federal law, *it is still legal to terminate someone for being gay or transgender.*

However, when it comes to transgender and sexual orientation protections, many state or local employment laws trump federal statutes.

Resources

 ***Your Best Just Got Better: Work Smarter, Think Bigger, Make More***, by Jason Womack, \$24.95, Wiley. The author provides brilliant 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.

 ***Attracting Top Talent When You Can't Pay the Big Bucks***, \$99, PDF download, PBP Executive Reports, (800) 220-5000, www.pbpexecutivereports.com. This article presents techniques to bring in the applicants you want regardless of the competition. It also suggests three ways to build a solid retention program to save on recruiting costs.

In the past few years several states, counties and cities have implemented specific workplace non-discrimination laws on the basis of gender identity. Fifteen states have specific laws prohibiting discrimination based on gender identity or gender expression.

In the absence of a comparable state law, more than 30 cities have laws prohibiting workplace discrimination on the basis of gender identity.

On the federal level, lawmakers in both chambers of the 112th Congress re-introduced a bill, which would bring full workplace protections to nearly our nation's entire workforce. If passed, gay and transgender workers would have similar protections that were afforded to other minority groups with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

A variety of studies estimate that less than .5% of the US population identifies itself as transsexual. As you can imagine, willingness to disclose this level of personal information makes any estimate suspect. But while the numbers are small, there is a steady legal trend toward employment protections for these individuals.

A Process That Requires Organizational Attention and Planning

Historically, many transsexuals would change jobs rather than staying on a job facing discrimination, harassment or termination due to being non-gender conforming.

However, recent trends suggest that individuals who identify as transsexual are increasingly willing to risk “coming out” at work. When a transsexual, usually after years of internal angst, decides to undergo complete gender transition, the results are impossible to conceal at work.

Consider how this level of disclosure compares with other

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employees' who choose when and how to reveal personal information at work, including sexual orientation. Transsexuals who plan to remain with their employer while transitioning don't have that option. A transsexual employee is obligated to “come out” to his/her employer in order to comply with treatment requirements to live full-time in his/her new gender role for at least one year before irreversible surgery.

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Employers become involved in the gender transition out of necessity.

Many workplaces have been emerging from an unspoken “don’t ask don’t tell” culture towards inclusiveness and respect for differences. Misinformation and misperception about transsexuals can cloud effective organizational responses.

Facts to be Aware Of

FACT: Transsexuals experience a significant amount of discrimination because of their gender identity or expression. Some are also targets of homophobia and hate crimes whether they are same-sex oriented or not.

FACT: A gender transition is a long process with workplace disclosures generally occurring at later stages. Per medical standards of care, a transsexual must have a minimum of one year of gender transition counseling and will progressively appear as their target gender to friends, family, in public and eventually at work.

FACT: Gender identification is NOT the same thing as sexual orientation. Just like anyone else, transsexuals can be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or asexual. Gender identity is who a person *is*. It is *not* descriptive of the individual’s sex life.

FACT: When a male-to-female transsexual presents as a woman, she should be regarded as a woman, just as a female-to-male transsexual should be regarded as a man.

FACT: Genital surgery is one way to align physically on the outside with what has always been felt/experienced on the inside. The process also includes psychotherapy, living as the other gender, taking hormones, re-socialization and other adjustments.

FACT: Gender and sexuality exist on a spectrum of physiological



Editor’s Notebook

Bias and prejudice is the topic of this month’s *Brown Bagger* insert – and, indirectly at least – you could say it’s the subject matter of this month’s cover article as well.

Can any of us honestly say that we haven’t harbored some type of negative bias toward someone at some point in our lives? I recall meeting my sister’s boyfriend – a bearded, motorcycle-riding guy – some years back. Since I’ve never ridden a bike, and since Steve had long hair to boot, I conjured up images of a tough guy wielding a knife and pool stick, waiting to pick a fight with anyone who’d dare lip off to him. (I’m not proud of this, but it’s true.)

I found out that not only ISN’T Steve violent, he’s also one of the most charitable guys I’ve ever met who’s participated in scores of road rallies for various causes. I’m involved in the Lions organization, but I have to truthfully say I think Steve does more for his fellow man than I do.

My point is that so many of our biases and stereotypes stem from misinformation, and from lack of exposure to various types of people and points of view.

This month, Carolyn Ruck examines a unique topic – that of transgender support in the workplace. As Carolyn points out, “Misinformation and misperception about transsexuals can cloud effective organizational responses.” Conversely, EAP guidance can *enlighten* and *ease* the organizational adjustment process.

While the number of transsexuals is small, there is a steady legal trend toward employment protections for these individuals. This means it behooves EA professionals to learn more about this issue – as Carolyn will explain further next month.

Until next time. I hope you’re having a great summer!

Mike Jacquart

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and psychological characteristics. Research indicates that throughout history there have been people whose internal gender identity was different from their birth gender. ■

NEXT MONTH: Best practice guidelines, and looking ahead.

Carolyn Ruck is a licensed mental health counselor, and consultation team manager at Empathia, Inc. She has provided transgender-at-work consultation for dozens of employers over the past decade. Carolyn has worked therapeutically with Male to Female and Female to Male transsexuals in a variety of settings.

Quick Ideas

Tips to Improve Your Life!

- Make goals realistic and achievable.
- Don’t be afraid to make changes in your life.
- Stop using material possessions to make you feel better.
- Start crossing off things on your bucket list.
- Learn to live in the present.

Source: Alexander Green, author of The Secret Shelter Island: Money and What Matters.

Gender Myth Challenged

Results from a research study of employees around the world reveal that, when it comes to work and family, men and women are more alike than different. This finding conflicts with a widely held assumption that male identity is rooted in work, whereas women place a higher priority on personal/family life.

Findings of the *Global Study on Men and Work-Life Integration*, conducted by WFD Consulting and the Alliance for Work/Life Professionals, include:

- ❖ In terms of work identification and personal/family identity, there is little difference among generations or between men and women. Instead, the tangible difference can be found between emerging and developed countries, with work identification registering much higher in emerging markets than in developed ones.

- ❖ Finding time for family is especially challenging for men, and both men and women seek more personal time for exercise and hobbies.

- ❖ Business leaders around the world have bought into the business case for work-life effectiveness and have programs and policies in place. However, these programs are often ineffective because managers still cling to the notion that the “ideal worker” is an employee with few personal commitments. ■

Source: *ExchangeEveryDay*, a free service of “Exchange” magazine. View this article online at ChildCareExchange.com.

Getting Maximum Return

The key to long-term growth and productivity isn’t pink slips; it’s a workforce that’s familiar with the company and in sync with business goals. So, how can the EA professional help foster a growth-oriented workplace, the kind that will survive and even thrive in today’s topsy-turvy economy? The following are a few insights and tips:

- ❖ **Forget monetary incentives, and focus on relationships instead.** Even if your corporate client can afford bonuses and other perks, they do not tend to increase employee loyalty. Only through better work relationships can people change and grow – and growth is the key to business survival.

- ❖ **Provide honest, caring feedback.** The business leaders of your corporate clients must constantly tell employees how they’re doing.

Honest feedback can be painful, but it’s the backbone of a growing organization. Conversely, infrequent praise can make star performers feel taken for granted, driving them to look elsewhere for employment.

- ❖ **Form an accountability group.** Many people receiving or giving feedback don’t want others to see their weaknesses, or to make someone uncomfortable. However, put someone in the proper setting and things can change. In accountability groups, feedback is turned into action, and group members are held accountable for implementing plans. Such groups can be amazingly effective in helping people overcome problems. Again, an EA professional can help. ■

Source: *Morrie Shechtman*, chairman of the consulting company, *Fifth Wave Leadership* (<http://fifthwaveleadership.com>).

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Firm Awarded for Work in Suicide Prevention

Magellan Health Services of Arizona, a subsidiary of Magellan Health Services, Inc, was recently honored for its work in suicide prevention.

Magellan received the Award of Excellence in Service Innovation for its Programmatic Suicide Deterrent System. The award was presented at the National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare's Mental Health and Addictions Conference in Chicago.

In fiscal year 2007, the suicide death rate for those with serious mental illness enrolled in the behavioral healthcare system in Maricopa County was reported as

175 per 100,000. Since fiscal year 2009, this rate has averaged 113 per 100,000 for those with serious mental illness — a reduction of 42% — in the area Magellan serves (Maricopa County, Ariz. and parts of Pinal County, Ariz.).

The program used a train-the-trainer model and to date more than 2,400 people have received Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST). The training has equipped participants with the skills and knowledge to identify and intervene with those at risk of attempting suicide and has given participants self-confidence in managing through these tense situations.

In addition, for the approximately 1,300 people who are in Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) programs, inpatient hospital rates have declined 51%. This decrease can be attributed in part to trained behavioral health professionals that now have significantly increased confidence in engaging individuals at risk in direct conversations about suicide instead of referring them to law enforcement and crisis interventionists, who may be more likely to hospitalize.

For more information about the Programmatic Suicide Deterrent System, visit www.MagellanofAZ.com/suicide. ■

Workplace Survey

Fewer Firms Paying for Continuing Education

As businesses reinstate some of the employee perks lost during the recession, one doesn't appear to have made a comeback: paying for continuing education.

Only 26% of chief financial officers (CFOs) interviewed for a Robert Half survey said their companies offer staff full or partial reimbursement for the education units required to maintain professional certifications. This is down significantly from six years ago

when nearly half (46%) of executives said they cover these costs.

"As the job market strengthens, it becomes more important for companies to offer benefits that help employees advance their careers," said Max Messmer, chairman and CEO of Robert Half International and author of *Human Resources Kit For Dummies®*, 2nd edition (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.). "A robust professional development program is an attractive incentive for talent recruit-

ment and retention."

Messmer also noted that supporting ongoing learning can help businesses develop a more skilled workforce. "Employees aren't the only beneficiaries of continuing education," he said. "Companies benefit from developing a workforce that is equipped to meet evolving business needs." ■

Source: Robert Half International (www.roberthalf.com).

Financial Instability Affects Kids, Too

Amid the foreclosures, chronic unemployment and other fallout of the recent recession, a less obvious but equally worrying phenomenon has emerged: *the troubled minds of children*.

“Parents are struggling with their own issues and that spills over to their kids,” said Drew McWilliams, a clinician and chief operating officer at Morrison Child and Family Services in Portland, Ore.

Since the financial collapse of 2008, McWilliams said his clinic has seen an increasing number of children suffering from anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Of the 6,000 children that the center treats through in- and out-patient programs, McWilliams said many are trying to cope with the stress that results from persistent financial security.

Most parents don’t think children are affected by financial burdens. In a 2010 survey, the American Psychological Association found that 69% of parents said their stress had little or no impact on their kids, while 91% of *children* said they saw the effects in their parents’ behavior, which included yelling and arguing. The young respondents who noticed their parents’ tension reported feeling sad, worried, and frustrated.

Stress & the Developing Brain

The developing brain is more vulnerable to chronic stress than most parents may realize. New and emerging research hints at how a constant barrage of stress hormones can change the way the brain develops, causing behavioral and psychological disorders and putting children at risk for mental illness (such as major depression and PTSD) later in life.



Stress, neglect, and abuse are thought to trigger signals that cause certain chemical markers to attach to a gene. The DNA remains unchanged, but almost like a light switch, the markers can turn a gene on or off. In particular, scientists have studied what happens when markers attach to a gene that regulates stress hormones.

While the brain’s malleability may be worrisome, it also means positive changes can occur with the right interventions.

“Kids who face adversity have highs and lows, strengths and weaknesses,” said Christopher Sarampote, a program officer at the National Institute of Mental Health, who focuses on trauma and anxiety disorders. “Parents can really be strong agents of change.”

It may not always feel that way to the millions of parents who have struggled since the recession. In addition to the middle-class families that have experienced unemployment, the number of children living in high-poverty areas increased by 25% to nearly 8 million in the last decade, according to a recent report. Last month, the child advocacy group, *First Focus*, reported that the foreclosure crisis has affected 8 million children, 2.3 million of whom have lost their homes.

What can be Done?

Susan Lowery O’Connell, an early childhood psychologist in Ohio, runs a program that teaches parents about child and brain development and how to model self-control and resilience in their children. She understands why it’s difficult for some adults to make the connection between their financial struggles and the mental health of their kids.

“When you don’t have a roof over your head, you’re not really worried about emotional literacy,” she said. “However, if that happens during your children’s development, it’s really making a mark.”

Children dealing with high-stress situations won’t just “get over” stress, she said. Instead, they have to decrease their stress response by performing a cognitive task, like attaching a word to how they feel or focusing their attention elsewhere. These are skills that don’t come intuitively, but must be taught by attentive parents and teachers.

Parents and children may improve in tandem, but this is difficult to achieve during times of economic hardship, according to Dr. Liliana Lengua, director of the Center of Child and Family Well-Being at the University of Washington. “What’s humbling is that there are really major life events in these families’ lives,” she said. “This is the fabric of life, how strong families are, how resilient families are.” ■

Additional sources: Rebecca Ruiz, 2011-2012 Rosalyn Carter Mental Health Journalism Fellow, Huffington Post, Employee Assistance Professionals Association. Editor’s note: This article also appeared on the Impact blog. To subscribe (for free), visit <http://impactpublishing.wordpress.com>.

Stress May be More Damaging for Women

New research shows that coping with mental pressures and anxiety may be more taxing on the heart health of women.

The study, presented at a recent annual Experimental Biology meeting, showed men and women given the same stressful math problem all had an increase in blood pressure and heart rate while solving it. Normally, when heart rate and blood pressure rise, blood flow to the heart muscle increases so it can compensate. *However, findings showed while the men's heart increased blood flow, the women's heart did not.*

"Stress reduction is important for everyone. This study suggests women especially need to monitor their stress to avoid heart problems," says Jeffrey Rothfeld M.D.,

F.A.C.C., a cardiologist at Bradenton Cardiology Center.

Studies of heart attack patients found that 15% - 30% of those admitted to a medical center had suffered from severe emotional stress.

Being able to identify stressors in life and releasing the tension they cause is critical in learning to cope with everyday pressure. After identifying the cause of stress, the next step is to learn coping techniques. They include:

❖ **Eat and drink sensibly:** Abusing alcohol and food may seem to reduce stress, but it actually adds to it.

❖ **Stop smoking:** Aside from the obvious health risks of cigarettes, nicotine acts as a stimulant and brings on more stress symptoms.

❖ **Exercise regularly:** Choose non-competitive activities and set reasonable goals. Aerobic exercise has been shown to release endorphins (natural substances that help you feel better and maintain a positive attitude).

❖ **Relax every day:** Choose from a variety of different techniques, such as meditation, to unwind.

❖ **Get enough rest:** Even with proper diet and exercise, you can't fight stress effectively without rest. You need time to recover so the time you spend asleep is long enough to relax your mind as well as your body. ■

Bradenton Cardiology Center is a full service heart center. For more information, visit www.BradentonCardiology.com.

Marketing Matters

Raise Awareness of Your EAP

By Thomas McNulty

School shootings. Bombings. Terrorists. Child abductions. To say we live in an anxious society is an understatement. However, as employee assistance professionals, it creates an opportunity to demonstrate the value of behavioral consultative work.

I advise my clients and peers to

always be aware of how our environment will be shaped by daily events. While there are core competencies that every EA professional must have, the ability to adapt to meet new workforce needs is more critical than ever before.

What does this mean for EAPs? You must be visible and constantly raise the profile of the role of EAPs in the workplace. With

everything going on in the world, we should be hearing from EAPs more than we are! But the fact remains that most EA professionals need to become better marketers. The following are some suggestions:

❖ **Learn how you can become**

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Social Media Addiction a Growing Problem

Are any of your clients social media addicts? Is inclusion in the DSM-IV next?

Social media now seems to be part of everyday life.

But how much is too much? Social media addiction is a problem not often tweeted about.

“We’ve seen that people will actually have increased heart rates and they’ll have pleasure response from checking their accounts and seeing that they have a new message,” explained Brad Bordini, a psychotherapist with Bellin Behavioral Health in Green Bay.

Bordini has treated patients for addiction to social media and said the ripple effect could be devastating.

“People are starting to lose the ability to interact at times on a human basis,” he explained. “We’re seeing a significant rise in



social anxiety with people. They’re becoming more shut in.”

According to a recent study from the University of Chicago, *texting and checking Facebook and twitter ranks just behind sex and sleep on a list of urges that are almost impossible to resist, even more addictive than alcohol and tobacco.*

“They become almost upset when they don’t receive immediate feedback when they post something new,” added Bordini.

Many people log on to connect with friends, play games, or just to kill time. But when it starts to get in the way of your daily routine, Bordini said it may be time to unplug.

“We need to focus on what is appropriate, what’s not appropriate and setting boundaries for the self,” he said, “as far as how we’re going to let ourselves indulge in these different forms of media.”

Social media sites are now more accessible than ever, with smart phone and tablet apps, which doctors think could be contributing to some addictions. ■

Additional source: WFRV/Channel 5, Green Bay, WI.

Raise Awareness...cont'd from Page 7

an expert on a workplace issue(s). Media love having area professionals they can contact to localize stories on important workplace, behavioral, and related topics. Meet with local media and let them know you are available for an interview, comment, or quote when your area of expertise hits the press. The free exposure will raise awareness of both the EAP profession and your individual EAP. It’s a win-win!

❖ **Get on a local speaking circuit.** Don’t get pigeonholed into

only hanging out with EAP colleagues. Utilize Chamber of Commerce, civic groups (think Lions, Rotary, etc.) and others to raise awareness of an issue. You can capture a great deal of attention by being seen as a reliable source of credible information.

❖ **Network everywhere and with everyone.** People frequently think of networking only at events such as Chamber of Commerce and professional association gatherings. But some of the most productive business contacts come

from chance encounters – at the grocery store, at ball games, doctor’s offices, etc. Be alert to these possibilities, and be ready to explain the services that you offer.

Summary

Get out there, and let folks know who you are and what you do. The EAP profession is too important for people to not be aware of us!

Thomas McNulty is the president of Success Stories, Inc. Additional source: www.selfgrowth.com.