

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT



supporting EAP professionals

Changing the Game *Using Game Mechanics to Engage Employees*

By Eric Zimmerman, RedBrick Health

Getting your corporate clients' employees engaged in programs and activities that promote health and well-being, in order to control rising healthcare costs is an ongoing challenge. EAPs often struggle to break through and achieve their full potential due to lack of engagement. Campaign-driven promotion of programs can deliver a one-time spike in activity, but they often fail to deliver sustained employee engagement.

When it comes to motivating health behavior change, traditional approaches have relied on future risk-oriented messages to impact exercise, eating habits, and other current behaviors. (In other words, exercise and eat well now to avoid health problems later.) These messages often compete with near-term payoffs for the employee.

Like it or not, behavioral economists and neurologists alike find that humans are wired to discount long-term benefits as opposed to short-term pleasures. The personal cost of quitting cigarettes this week outweighs the 20-year reduced risk of various life-shortening diseases. The immediate gratification of the high-fat food wins out over the longer-term benefit of healthier choices. The discomfort in reaching out for



help with a personal or family issue or scheduling a preventive check gets trumped by the tyranny of today's urgent tasks combined with a perpetual ability to deny or postpone.

Gamification: A New Approach

Game mechanics can counteract this tendency by substituting near-term reinforcement tied to an action with longer-term gains. While it's true that games occupy an increasing part of many peoples' free time – witness the growth of Farmville, Angry Birds and fantasy sports – *gamification* is not the same thing as gaming. Gamification approaches common tasks in a new way by taking a page out of the playbook of game designers. It applies familiar techniques, called *game mechanics*, to shape target behaviors through websites, programs, apps and behavior modification initiatives. Stores' loyalty

programs and airline frequent flyer programs both use game mechanics to shape shopping behavior.

The gamification of employee health and wellness represents a fresh, powerful toolbox to catalyze engagement and promote desired behaviors among employees. When gamification is used to promote a particular healthy behavior, the positive long-term benefit and short-term investment is offset with a *near-term benefit*.

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Assigning points to activities, advancing through levels, using badges as status-markers, and integrating surprise and delight are ways to make an employee's personal investment in future good health gratifying in the here-and-now. These elements tap into the universal human desires for skill mastery, achievement, autonomy, and social acceptance. They reinforce small successes in ways that have a profound impact on self-confidence and self-efficacy, creating positive associations that last.

By wrapping game mechanics around a desired habit, you can create an experience that drives sustained behavior change more effectively than didactic or knowledge-based approaches.

Incorporating the social dimension takes gamification a step further by allowing employees to work collectively, competitively, or both at the same time. By applying social influence and nudges, not only will the individual be motivated by the built-in game mechanics, but by peer pressure as well.

Game Mechanics at a Glance

❖ Reward the near-term.

Game mechanics can reinforce small successes to create an experience that drives sustained behavior change.

❖ **Simplicity is key.** Focus your user on one task at a time, with minimal barriers to participation.

❖ We are social beings.

People innately want to cooperate, as much, if not more than they want to compete. Let them. ■

— Eric Zimmerman

Testing the Theory

We recently had a chance to test the theory that health is (socially) contagious when we rolled out a large-scale healthy social game using our platform within the state of Minnesota. In all, 22,000 people engaged and invited their friends, family members and colleagues to do likewise. Over 400 companies participated, as did community organizations and other affiliated groups. We found something magical about team sizes of 8 to 12 in terms of engagement and impact – which is interestingly what online game designers find to be an ideal team size as well. In all, participants logged over 23 million minutes of activity and lost over 75,000 pounds.

A survey of participants in another large-scale corporate health challenge we supported found that more than 60% were *first-time* engagers – they'd never before participated in an employer-sponsored health improvement activity.

Accessibility and Simplicity

For gamification to succeed, there are two critical components program designers must address – accessibility and simplicity. Fortunately, modern web and mobile technologies can help. With smartphone technology spreading faster than any medium in history, employees can receive instantaneous feedback and gratification every time they engage and succeed with small habit changes. Likewise, recording and tracking has become simplified with trackers updating activity in real-time, in some cases automatically as the devices we carry in our pockets or wear on our clothing measure our steps, location, and activity.

Summary

Games – once viewed as trivial or frivolous – are proving to be

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powerful drivers of engagement and change. The truth is we learn through play. Growing evidence suggests that gamified health behavior change approaches are out-competing traditional clinical and behavioral approaches and at a fraction of the cost.

Fostering social cooperation and healthy competition can make health improvement programs more engaging for employees and ultimately more successful for your EAP and

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your corporate clients. We are social beings fundamentally – it's in our DNA. From the moment we're born, physical development, mental expansion, and cognitive advancements are directly tied to engaging in play and competition. Introducing game mechanics into employee engagement by using initiatives aimed at improving health and well-being, can re-invigorate the initiative and lead to better results.

Gamification can trigger desired behaviors, and reinforce and shape habits, turning trial actions into sustained behaviors. It can augment – and in some cases even replace – extrinsic motivators like financial incentives by powerfully tapping into our intrinsic motivators – the things that really move us. When it comes to employee engagement, it's changing the game. ■

Eric Zimmerman is Chief Marketing Officer for RedBrick Health; a Minneapolis-based health engagement technology company that helps employers re-invigorate their health and wellness programs. Learn more at www.redbrickhealth.com, or visit its blog at www.healthinnovationblog.com.



Editor's Notebook

I recently learned about the terms *gamification* and *game mechanics* – which are central to this month's cover story – from Eric Zimmerman with RedBrick Health. As Eric explains, traditional approaches to workplace wellness have often relied on future risk-oriented messages to impact exercise, eating habits, and other current behaviors. (In other words, exercise and eat well now to avoid health problems later.)

However, as most of us know all too well, the immediate gratification of high-fat food, for instance, often wins out over the longer-term benefit of healthier choices.

Game mechanics, as Eric explains, can counteract this tendency by substituting near-term reinforcement tied to an action with longer-term gains. For EAPs who've had difficulty incorporating wellness initiatives into the

workplace, it's a novel approach worth exploring.

This month's *Brown Bagger* examines wellness and work/life efforts in a broader scope. However, *measuring* wellness results is often difficult – and this is an area in which Eric claims his organization's approach surpasses typical wellness plans.

But whatever the specifics, the high cost of health care means that proactive wellness efforts can be expected to increase in workplaces – and the more options for EAP to consider (like RedBrick's approach) the better, don't you think?

Hope your summer is off to a good start. Until next time.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Jacquot". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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Marketing Matters

Selling Based on Value, not Price

By Nathan Jamail

Regardless of industry, product and economy, a company does not need professional sales people to sell *price*. For that, all they need is a website or catalog and a method for processing payments.

❖ *Selling value* is more than making statements like, "We offer great customer service," or "Our people make the difference." This is no different than a person going

on a job interview and telling the interviewer that they should hire them because they are a self-starter, team player, motivated and loyal. All of these answers are generic and do not differentiate you from the next person.

❖ *Value is determined by the prospect.* "What value do you add?" is a trick question because it can only be answered after the sales professional understands what the prospect or client defines what they believe is value. To

determine what the customer perceives as value, a sales professional must ask the prospective customer purposeful questions and ask a lot of them. The more the sales professional learns and understands, the more likely they will be able to establish their value to the prospect. Although many sales people know this, very few truly implement it. Too many sales people flood a prospect with information on what they have to offer

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Dealing with Unconscious Bias – Part II

By Howard J. Ross

Raise your hand if you are biased.

If you were slow to raise your hand, you are not alone. Many of us are reluctant to admit we harbor some bias. We have been taught that to be biased means that we are bad. Or worse, that we are bigots and discriminators. But bias is a normal part of human behavior.

Bias resides inside all of us, whether we like it or not. All of us need practice to reveal our thinking and understand not only what we think, but also how we think. Several “conscious” steps to help you deal with unconscious bias were presented last month. The remaining steps are offered below in the conclusion of this two-part article.

❖ **Stimulate your curiosity about others.** When you interact with a person who is part of a group with which you have had little interaction, be aware that you

may be especially susceptible to stereotyping, which can lead to false or negative assumptions about that person. Make a conscious effort to learn more about this individual as well as his/her group, recognizing that interaction with one person does not predict or explain his or her group norms.

❖ **Expand your constellation of input.** Get input from people representing other groups or points of view during your decision-making process. One of the best ways to bring concealed beliefs and how they affect behavior into clear view is to request peer feedback regarding potential preference patterns. Most of us are nervous to do this because we are inherently afraid of what we might hear. But are we better off with people thinking it and not telling us?

❖ **If you mess it up, clean it up!** Don’t be afraid to go to somebody and apologize if you feel like they have been treated unfairly,

excluded because of who they are, or not recognized for what they contribute. Make the situation right and then evaluate the system that led to the decision and explore ways you can improve the process for the future.

Summary

When we accept that we have normal biases, it becomes much easier to observe how they may be impacting our decisions or reactions. Accepting personal biases makes them less, not more likely to impact others.

We are all human and so is bias. Engaging in the steps presented in this two-part article is the first big step on a journey toward creating organizations where all people have their best shot at being successful. ■

Howard J. Ross is one of the nation’s leading diversity training consultants and a nationally recognized expert on diversity, leadership, and organizational change. For more information, visit www.reinventingdiversity.com.



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Recognition That Misses the Mark

A little recognition at work can go a long way, a recent survey from OfficeTeam finds. Nearly half (49%) of professionals interviewed said they would be somewhat or very likely to leave their current position if they didn't feel appreciated by their manager.

"Professionals want to know their contributions make a difference and will be rewarded, especially Gen Y workers," said Robert Hosking, executive director of OfficeTeam. "Because individuals like to be acknowledged in different ways, managers should find out what their workers value most and customize recognition accordingly."

Although people enjoy different types of appreciation, some tokens of gratitude universally miss the mark. Following



are five of the most common recognition mistakes:

❖ **Not getting facts straight.**

Nothing's more embarrassing than incorrectly acknowledging a person's name or individual accomplishment.

❖ **Offering token gestures.** The form of recognition should fit the degree of achievement. Giving someone a stapler for his or her five-year anniversary, for example, sends the message the milestone is insignificant.

❖ **Being vague.** Telling employees they did a "good job" is a generic form of kudos. Tie acknowledgment back to specific actions so people know exactly what they did right.

❖ **Going overboard.** Recognition doesn't need to be extravagant to be effective. Small everyday things, such as saying "thank you" or giving credit for good ideas can be powerful.

❖ **Overlooking contributors.** Although some workers naturally gravitate toward the limelight, don't forget to also celebrate unsung heroes who help behind the scenes. ■

Source: OfficeTeam (www.officeteam.com).

Selling Based on Value...cont'd from Page 3

without knowing whether or not what they are saying will bring true value to a client or prospect. It cannot be stressed enough – *ask questions first before explaining the value you bring!*

Here are four steps to make sure you're able to sell on true value and not price:

❖ **Write down questions and take them with you.** This does not make a sales person less of a professional or less of an expert. In fact this will show a client or prospect how important it is to fully

understand their needs and desires.

❖ **Help the prospective client understand what makes you and your company successful.** A partnership is a two way street. This means a sales professional shares with the prospective client what makes them successful – without making it difficult or inconvenient for a prospective client – but by showing the whys and value for *both sides*.

❖ **Practice sales calls before going on them.** Practice ahead of time, as opposed to simply talking

about the appointment afterwards and calling that practice.

❖ **A vendor alone cannot provide success – it can only be provided by a true partner.** Sales professionals need to prepare and practice so the next time the prospective client says, "I want the cheapest price," they are confident and ready to explain the *value* of their product or service. ■

Nathan Jamail, best-selling author of "The Playbook Series" is also a motivational speaker, entrepreneur and corporate coach. For more information, visit www.nathanjamail.com

The Frugal Doctor is 'In' – Part II

By Gary Foreman

Last month, I described the parallels between symptoms of potential medical problems, and symptoms of possible concerns in our financial lives. We examined several symptoms last time – as well as some prescriptions for treating them. We'll review the rest in the conclusion of this two-part article.

Symptom #3: *Not being able to put money away for your retirement.* You really won't notice it, unless you spend some time studying your 401k and IRA statements. Even though friends and family think you're doing fine, time has a way of sneaking up on us. And, when it does, you'll be happy to have some income besides Social Security. Failure to save now could mean a difficult retirement.

Prescription #3: *Save at least a few dollars out of every paycheck.* You may find that if the first check you write is to your retirement account, that you won't be any tighter at the end of the month than you were before.

Symptom #4: *Changes in your job security.* No one has been laid



off. You're still drawing a paycheck every week, and credit card companies are sending you invitations to apply for their card. So how bad can it be?

It might be worse than you think. If company sales are just holding steady or decreasing you could be in trouble. Or if technology is gradually replacing your profession, it's time to take action. Don't wait until you're told to clean out your desk.

Prescription #4: *Prepare for a job loss before it happens.* Consider taking a job at another company – or if opportunities in your profession are limited begin taking night classes to learn new marketable skills.

Symptom #5: *Not having an emergency fund.* Only you know

that you don't have any money saved for unexpected expenses. Just as long as you don't have an emergency, everything looks fine.

But when that unexpected bill comes due (and sooner or later a car, appliance or your home *will* need repair or replacement) you'll be forced to borrow money. This means you'll also be paying interest along with the emergency expense. This makes it even harder to save for the next unplanned expense.

Prescription #5: *Plan for the unplanned expense.* After all, these expenses really aren't that unexpected. You know that autos and appliances will break down, you just don't know when. Include money in your monthly budget to allow for these sorts of things. Put it in a savings account so that it will be available when that "unexpected" bill comes in.

Summary

If you're experiencing any of these symptoms you might want to take a financial physical. Who knows? Perhaps you can avoid a long-term financial disability later! ■

Gary Foreman is a former purchasing manager who currently edits The Dollar Stretcher website at www.stretcher.com.

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.pbpxecutivereports.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.

🔗 **The Employers Resource Association**. EA professionals sometimes lament that they don't know more about Human Resources (HR) professionals. This site offers links including: information about the ERA, legal news, and more. Log on to www.hrxperts.org. ■

Link Found Between Cancer & PTSD

According to a recent study, a cancer diagnosis can leave lasting psychological scars much like those of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Researchers at the Duke Cancer Institute found that, more than a decade after being told they had the disease, nearly four out of 10 cancer survivors said they were still plagued by symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Symptoms of PTSD include “being extra jumpy, having disturbing thoughts about the cancer and its treatment, or feeling emotionally numb toward friends and family.”

One in 10 patients also said they avoided thinking about their cancer, and one in 20 said they steered clear of situations or activities that reminded them of the disease — such as visiting a doctor — a situation that could potentially become a medical problem.

The study on post-traumatic stress, published in the *Journal of*

Clinical Oncology, was based on a survey of 566 patients with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. The research showed that the PTSD-like symptoms could linger for years after a diagnosis and that depression after a cancer diagnosis was very common.

Author, researcher and forgiveness expert Dr. Michael Barry, who has spent years conducting clinical cancer research, says that cancer affects every part of the human condition — body, mind and spirit.

“The likelihood of traumatic stress lingering long after a cancer diagnosis is very possible,” Barry said. “Hearing the words, ‘You have cancer’ can leave lasting scars, resulting in long-term fear, anxiety, a general uneasiness about the future and even bitterness and unforgiveness. However, these negative feelings can actually hinder our healing and recovery. Stress can be a poison to our bodies,

taking down the immune system that keeps us protected from cancers and other diseases. When we allow stress, anger and overall negativity to enter the equation, our body’s ability to defend itself is dramatically reduced.”

Barry adds that, *the immune system and forgiveness are very much connected*. Negative or stressful feelings can actually prevent physical healing within the body. He discovered that unforgiveness can impact every organ.

The National Institutes of Health states that psychological stress can facilitate the growth and spread of cancer, hence the need to ensure that people do not ignore their emotions and/or psychological well-being — including unforgiveness. ■

For more information, check out www.releasenow.org. Source: news@hamiltonstrategies.com.

Recovery Registry Offers Anonymity

Through the National Quit and Recovery Registry, individuals can anonymously provide information about what they are recovering from, how they got into recovery, how they are maintaining recovery, etc.

(The website does request email addresses for potential follow up to inquire about their interest and

willingness to take part in future studies.)

Once enough participants provided basic information, the intent was to then sample from the registry to recruit people to take part in more in-depth studies about recovery trajectories, etc.

“Most of the research that has been done up to now has focused

on immediate intervention that would allow a person to stop taking drugs,” said Dr. Nora Volkow, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse. “Much less is known about recovery.”

The project was announced late last year. Here is a link to the registry: <https://quitandrecovery.org>. ■

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Six Lines a Boss Should Never Cross

Most employees have experienced an uncomfortable situation at work; that's the reality of interpersonal relationships in a professional setting. However, while no work situation is perfect in every respect, a workplace should be more positive than negative, and never a place where employees feel distressed or ill at ease the majority of the time.

This can be particularly difficult if employees have a boss who frequently crosses the line of professional behavior, according to the employment experts at Allison & Taylor Reference Checking. A boss is crossing the line if he/she:

1. Makes references to an employee's salary in front of other staff. This is private and confidential information, not public. Other employees don't need to know what you're being paid, and it's true regardless of the type of comment that's made. Broadcasting your earnings undermines your position with the rest of the staff. They'll either think you're willing to work for peanuts, ruining their chances of earning more, or that you're overpaid, leading to resentment.

2. Reprimands the employee in front of co-workers. This is a form of bullying, and it's never acceptable. While an employee may have made a mistake or

error that deserves discussion, a good employer will handle this professionally – and in private. A good boss should never denigrate one's skills, either.

3. Has unreasonable expectations.

This one can be tricky... at times every employee has probably felt that he or she been dealt an impossible task. But employees who are *consistently* receiving unreasonable demands, need to speak up. It could be a communication issue; perhaps something as simple as unclear directions are bogging you down. Or it could be a case of micromanagement (in which case, the employee was hired because the boss felt he/she was qualified to do the job, and it's fine to remind the boss to let the worker do it). Just be sure to address it in a courteous and non-confrontational manner.

4. Shares too many personal details. A good boss shouldn't share problems or inappropriate personal details. If an employee finds the conversation often veers in this direction, he/she should lead the way by being very brief in responses and then change the subject back to business.

5. Makes inappropriate references. Any comment that



makes one squirm is one that shouldn't have been made in the office. This includes water cooler jokes, emails, or comments about an employee's physical appearance. This includes any type of implication that the boss is interested in a relationship of a personal nature; even if it's something the employee is not entirely opposed to. Workplace romances are NEVER a good idea, and it's beyond unprofessional to even make the suggestion. All of these things are a sexual harassment lawsuit waiting to happen.

6. Implies that sex, race, age or religion is a factor in work performance. None of these things have anything to do with an employee's ability to do the job that he/she was hired for. This suggestion is not only unfair – it's discriminatory. Any such implication should be addressed immediately. ■

Source: Allison Taylor (www.allisontaylor.com).