

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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supporting EAP professionals

Why EA Professionals Should Care about Caregiving Issues

By Kathy Brandt, MS & Gwynn Sullivan, RN, MSN

Caregiving and end-of-life issues are becoming increasingly costly to American businesses. Firms in the U.S. lose \$17.1 billion to \$33.6 billion per year in productivity for full-time employees with caregiving responsibilities (MetLife/NAC, 2006). The annual cost of grief in the workplace is estimated at \$75.1 billion (Grief Recovery Institute).

The financial costs related to the issue of caregiving, which includes serious illness and grief, have a significant impact on the workplace. As the Baby Boom generation ages, employers will be affected in a number of ways:

❖ The aging of the American population will place an increasing number of families in the position of providing financial, medical, physical, and other support to an older adult.

❖ Decreasing family sizes mean that fewer adults will be available to provide assistance when it is needed.

❖ Because of delayed child-bearing, families may need to provide elder care and child care responsibilities simultaneously. (This is known as the “sandwich” generation.)

❖ The demand for workplace eldercare programs and family-friendly employers is likely to increase (FCA, 2003).

The Role of the Employee Assistance Professional

Research has shown that supportive work-life programs, benefits, and policies positively affect an employer’s bottom line by increasing workforce loyalty, morale, and productivity. According to a FamilyCare America report, “A number of surveys demonstrate that employers who make ‘softer benefits’ available reap the rewards of employee

loyalty and productivity.” At DuPont, employees who took advantage of work-life programs were 45% more likely to “go the extra mile” and reported fewer instances of burnout. Other studies, by companies like Johnson & Johnson and IBM, showed that such programs play a key role in

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influencing a worker's decision to stay with the company. (Family Care 2002)

Employee assistance professionals are in a unique situation to provide employers with a valuable benefit – helping them to support their employees while cutting employer costs. Raising awareness of these issues to employers is significant – many employers are not aware of how many of their employees are affected by end-of-life issues or their costs. Increasing awareness of end-of-life needs in the workplace will assist the employer to become more sensitive and supportive to employees who are facing these issues.

“Raising awareness of these issues to employers is significant – many employers are not aware of how many of their employees are affected by end-of-life issues or their costs.”

EAPs can provide the following supportive services to employees, thereby increasing employee productivity and employee commitment to the employer:

- Offer resources and support to employees who double as family caregivers, helping them to maintain a healthy balance between work and life;
- Increase employer awareness of caregiving issues and present ways in which employers can help;
- Provide support to supervisors so they can continue to

maintain a well-functioning workplace;

- Offer support and resources to co-workers who are working with a seriously ill co-worker or after a work colleague has died; and
- Offer experts and materials to help employers and employees better understand the process of grieving.

Challenge for Workers

As the population ages, the number of caregivers in the workplace, and the effects that their increased responsibilities have on the workplace will grow:

- 44 million Americans, or approximately 16% of the population, currently provide unpaid care to an adult relative or friend.
- An estimated 15.9 million caregivers work full-time.
- Twenty-nine percent of employed caregivers report needing help to balance their work and family responsibilities (NAC 2004).

Providing hands-on or long-distance caregiving while working can be emotionally and logistically demanding for full-time workers. Supervisors of employee caregivers may notice changes in performance, attendance, or emotional presence in their employees.

However, with the right tools, well-prepared supervisors can reduce stress by providing emotional support, resources, and flexibility to help employees balance home and work responsibilities. *The EAP is the provider that can offer these tools to employers!*

Absenteeism is the most frequently reported elder care issue in the workplace (SHRM, 2003). An estimated average of 50 hours each year (or nearly one hour per week)

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is lost due to partial absenteeism of caregivers, such as leaving early or coming in late.

Recommendations for EAPs

❖ *Assess how many people in the company or other organization are taking care of a family member or close friend who is seriously ill – and help determine the challenges they face.* An employee survey is the simplest way to find out how

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many employees are dealing with caregiving issues. This information can help EA professionals, supervisors and co-workers be prepared and support colleagues in need. One such survey is available at: [mailto: http://www.nhpc.org/files/public/membership/employee_assessment.doc](mailto:http://www.nhpc.org/files/public/membership/employee_assessment.doc).

❖ *Learn about benefits and support programs that organizations could implement to support family caregivers and reduce turnover.* For example, does the organization have a Leave of Absence policy that specifically outlines options for family caregivers? An example of a policy can be found at http://www.caringinfo.org/files/public/live/Sample_Policy-LOA.pdf. Suggest that the employer consider offering alternative work options such as job sharing, telecommuting, flextime, and other schedule rearrangement to help minimize stress and fatigue.

❖ *Identify resources that can help employees maintain a healthy balance between work and life.* Learn which organizations in the community offer services and support for caregivers. Provide information and educational materials that can help employee caregivers deal with caregiving-related decisions and locate high-quality services.

❖ *Create a supportive working environment.* Talk with employees about the issues of working caregivers and learn about their individual situations. Encourage peer support groups and provide referrals for counseling if needed.

❖ *Promote resources to employees on a regular basis.* Most employees have no idea of the scope and types of benefits available to them. Frequent



Editor's Notebook

The phone rings: It's your sister, Ann, who tells you, "Mom is in the hospital. I don't know a lot yet, but the doctor says it's her gall bladder. He says it's serious."

How well would YOU get back on track that workday after receiving a call like that? Now, imagine not just receiving a disturbing message like that, but being the person who's taking the time out of his/her busy day to drive Mom to the hospital.

You have an idea how tough it is to be an employee caregiver: those of us who are trying to juggle the many demands of not only working full time, but working "overtime" to care for elderly parents.

Many thanks to Kathy Brandt and Gwynn Sullivan for enlightening us about the impact of caregiving on the workplace. Since November is National Caregiving Month, we hope that you are able to take advantage of this opportunity

to educate corporate clients about this important topic.

Not only that, but tell your local media about this issue, too. You'll be informing them about an emerging problem that more and more of us are going to be dealing with (if you're not already), and you'll gain exposure for your EAP as well. It's a win-win.

This type of caregiving, often referred to as elder care, is a difficult issue that demands the attention of helping professionals (like you), employees, employers (and even media) alike.

As always, in addition to this month's cover story, we hope you find plenty of other useful reading in this issue of *EAR*. Until next time.

Mike Jacquart

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communication to both employees and supervisors is the best way to make sure the resources you make available are utilized. Consider promoting resources in conjunction with National Caregiving Month (November) and disease/condition-specific health conditions observation dates: <http://www.nhpc.org/i4a/pages/Index.cfm?pageID=5147>.

Resources for the EA Professional

The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) has developed a website with free resources for the EA professional on caregiving and other topics. The site

includes free training materials, information and phone support. The majority of these resources are offered at no cost throughout the U.S. by contacting 1-800-658-8898 or www.caringinfo.org/employer. ■

Kathy Brandt, MS is the Senior Vice President of Innovation at the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. She leads NHPCO's educational programming, access initiatives, consumer awareness efforts, as well as state leadership initiatives. Gwynn B. Sullivan RN, MSN serves as Director of Access for the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO), where she is responsible for developing community outreach, access and engagement programs and resources for hospice provider members located across the U.S.

Defending Against Workplace Complainers – Part II

By Trevor Blake

Part one of this two-part article discussed how chronic exposure to negative messages from complainers will reinforce negative thinking and behavior. Two ways to defend yourself against workplace complaints – both yours and others’ – were offered. The remaining tips are presented in the conclusion of this article.

❖ **Smother a negative thought with a positive image.** If a negative thought pops into your mind, immediately input a different image. This is the process of “neurogenesis” – creating new pathways in your brain that lead to positive behaviors. If your inbox is filled with urgent to-dos and you think to yourself, “I’m already exhausted,” immediately conjure up a pleasant image, say, an after-work run in the park with your dog.

❖ **Don’t try to convert others.** When trapped in a toxic group of complainers at a meeting or around the water cooler, simply choose silence. Let their words bounce off you and not penetrate your mind while you think of something pleasant. If you try to stop them, you may end up alienating yourself and becoming a target.

❖ **Distance yourself when possible.** When co-workers start criticizing someone or something and you can escape – excuse yourself and take a break somewhere quiet

– perhaps outside in the fresh air. Think of something pleasant before returning. You have to take this seriously, because negative people can and will pull you into the quicksand.

❖ **Create a private retreat.** Mentally retreat to a private, special place in your imagination. Visualize a peaceful setting in your mind – perhaps a sailboat on a lake. When you’re stuck with a co-worker who is spewing scathing complaints against someone, you can appear as if you’re listening while you distract your mind with a visit to your peaceful place.

❖ **Transfer responsibility.** On those occasions when you’re pressed against a wall while someone rants and raves about all the injustices in their life, throw the responsibility back at them by saying, “So what do you intend to do

about it?” In most cases, complainers don’t want a solution nor do they want sympathy. They simply want to vent, and this tactic will stop them in their tracks.

❖ **Forgive your lapses.** Everyone complains sometimes. Your favorite team loses. Your computer crashes. Deadlines pile up. It’s human to vent once in a while. Be kind to yourself after a lapse into victimhood – and then start anew. The less frequently you complain, the more time will pass between lapses into negativity. This is how rewiring the brain works. ■

Trevor Blake is a highly successful entrepreneur and author of Three Simple Steps: A Map to Success in Business and Life. For more information, visit <http://trevorblake.com>.

Editor’s note: This article originally appeared on the Impact blog. To subscribe (for free), visit <http://impactpublishing.wordpress.com>.

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Mismanaging Workplace Conflicts

Handling workplace tensions should be a priority for frontline managers, but many employees believe that their bosses are not up to the job, according to a survey of 2,700 employees released in August by Healthy Companies Intl. in Arlington, VA.

Nearly half – 41% – of employees responding to the survey think the person to whom they report does not deal well with workplace conflicts. In fact, of 20 managerial behaviors that the survey asked respondents to rate how much they trusted their immediate supervisor to master, handling workplace conflicts ranked last in the survey.

Some managers are in denial because they wrongly think workplace conflicts are a negative reflection on them, according to Stephen Parker, president of Healthy Companies Intl. However, he says that managing workplace conflict is a core management responsibility, and delaying or avoiding only makes matters worse.

Judah Kurtz, leadership and team development manager at BPI group in Chicago, says that HR leaders should also train their managers to think proactively to minimize conflict. “Managers should create a culture of ongoing communication, so that tensions

do not build up,” Kurtz says.

However, Seymour Adler, a partner with Aon Hewitt in New York City and an organizational psychologist, says that HR leaders should let their frontline managers know that conflict can sometimes be a “good thing.” As such, managers should be trained to distinguish between constructive and destructive conflict, in large part by focusing more on the actual issues and less on the emotions of the employees involved, he says. ■

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Clinical Perspective

Union EAP Studies Firefighter Suicide

After a rash of active – and retired – firefighter suicides, the Chicago Fire Department’s union EAP began an exhaustive study, to compare itself to the national average and break down the walls of silence about this often-taboo topic. (The department suffered seven active- and retired – suicides in an 18-month period.)

According to, “Chicago Union EAP Embarks on Firefighter Suicide Study” (*Fire Chief* magazine), the Chicago Firefighters Union Local 2 EAP gathered data on deceased members from 1990 through 2010. Researchers examined 1,787 deaths of active and retired members who worked on the CFD and were members of the

union. They identified 41 suicides, all committed by males. While the ages ranged from 27 to 86, the average age was 55. Averaging the 41 suicides over this period gives an annual suicide incidence of two.

Nationally, the recorded numbers of suicides have varied from approximately 29,000 in 1990 to more than 36,000 in 2009, the most recent year of published national statistics on suicide. U.S. incidence rates for this period ranged between 10 and 12 suicides per 100,000 people each year. The CFD experienced 12 years with significantly higher rates than the general populations.

While the core of the EAP remains the same, the department has made several changes based on

the survey results. First, to increase the exposure of the EAP and put a face to the names, EAP members visited every firehouse on all three shifts – approximately 300 visits. It took them over a year to accomplish this. The police EAP did a similar thing by attending roll calls throughout their department.

Second, the staff and chief officers were educated about the issue, including that fact that 90 percent of suicidal patients have a diagnosable mental health or substance abuse disorder. Now suicide is addressed during alcohol and drug assessments. ■

The complete article can be found at: <http://firechief.com/suicide/chicago-union-eap-embarks-firefighter-suicide-study>.

How to Calculate Interest Expense

Editor's note: Could financial fairs be a growing workplace trend in today's uncertain economic climate – and a potential niche for EAPs in helping coordinate them for employers? If so, you'll want to invite experts like Gary Foreman to "your" fair.

By Gary Foreman

I received a letter from Autumn in Michigan, who had this to say: "I saw a chart in a bill-paying organizer that listed what you would pay each day on a \$100 loan with varying interest rates, which included ½%, 1% and so on. I goofed and didn't buy it, and now I can't find anything like it online. Do you have something like this you could show your readers? I think something like this could help determine how much someone is paying on interest, which I know is a lot."

Autumn has discovered something that most consumers haven't learned: *A great deal of your hard-earned money each month goes simply to paying interest on the money you've borrowed.* Rather than put together a chart for Autumn, let's show her how to make her own:

The formula for calculating interest expense isn't as hard as you might think. Let's break it down as follows:

❖ **The precise formula is:** the amount of money borrowed *times* the interest rate *times* the length of time that the money is borrowed for.



❖ **The amount of money borrowed should be fairly easy to determine.** Whether it's a mortgage, car loan or credit card balance, the statement should list the balance (i.e. the amount owed). If it doesn't, call the lender and ask them for a current balance. Remember, this is not the amount that you borrowed originally – it's how much you still owe *today*.

❖ **The interest rate tends to confuse people because it's stated as a percentage** – and with percentages come decimal places. An easy way to think of interest rates is to look at the percent sign (%) and see two zeroes or two decimal places. So, 11% would be .11 and 5% would be .05. In the real world, most interest rates aren't that even. Your home mortgage might be 5-3/8% or .05375 or a car loan at 11.75% or .1175.

❖ **If you still find this confusing, try this trick:** Think of 100% as the whole amount. So 100% would translate to 1.00, which is just what you'd expect it to be.

About that Loan

Next, let's consider the *length of time the money is borrowed for* – or *how long the time frame is between scheduled payments*. Let's use monthly since that's the most common. Almost all interest rates are quoted for a one-year period. If you're making a monthly statement/payment, that'll need to be factored in. One month is 1/12th of a year or .0833.

Let's fill out our formula. Suppose that you're borrowing \$100 at 14.5% for one month. Filling in the formula you'd get: \$100 *times* .145 *times* .0833 – or \$1.21 in interest due for the month. By using this formula, Autumn can calculate any box in any chart she may use.

Examine Monthly Statements

Another way to get a feel for how much interest is costing you is to look at your monthly statements. Many will tell you exactly how much the interest added to your debt since the last statement. If a statement doesn't clearly say that, just call the lender and ask. They can tell you to the penny how much interest you're paying.

Summary

Now, Autumn can make her own chart. Better yet, she knows what each loan is costing her and can total them to find out how much extra money she'd have each month if it wasn't for her debts. For many people, that's a great motivator for getting them paid off. ■

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

Shorter Maternity Leaves can Still Work

What's the latest trend in the workplace? More and more new mothers are taking shorter maternity leaves. Why? Because they're worried about losing their jobs!

In the U.S., any business that has more than 50 workers must allow 12 weeks of unpaid leave, and when the employee comes back, they must be given the same job or one just like it with equal pay and benefits.

But taking an extended leave is becoming harder to justify in a difficult economy. An increasing number of women make more money than their husbands, so the loss of their income has a bigger impact. Also, many two-income families are now

one-income families, so a lot of new moms don't have the luxury of staying home without a paycheck.

If you anticipate employees of any of your corporate clients taking time off to have a baby, what can you, as an EA professional, do?

- ❖ First, the employee should let her boss know about the pregnancy ASAP, so everyone can gear up for her absence.

- ❖ You should be aware of the company's maternity policy, and the employee should ask any specific questions that she might have. For instance, how many weeks can the department realistically do

without the employee? And how will they cope with her absence?

- ❖ Finally, when the employee tells her boss about the baby, she should be enthusiastic about her future with the company and not feel guilty about asking for the leave she deserves. And even if she can't take off as much time as she'd like, a backup plan should be ready. For example, if 12 weeks of maternity leave is out of the question, she should suggest a compromise. Say, she'll take 4 weeks off and work part time, or even telecommute for 8 weeks to make sure that everything is running smoothly. ■

Source: John Tesh: Intelligence for Your Life (www.tesh.com).

Clinical Perspective

Facebook Pictures Influence Attractiveness

More and more employers also are using Facebook as a way to examine potential employees before hiring. Now, researchers at the University of Missouri have found that comments left by users on Facebook profile pictures strongly affect the level of perceived attractiveness of the profile owner: physically, socially, and professionally.

MU researchers found that Facebook users whose profile photos include social cues, additional information about the user, and other positive comments, are viewed much more socially and

physically attractive than users who have fewer social cues and negative comments on their profile photos.

For instance, a photo with a social cue of an athlete would be a picture of that person playing sports, or a musician with a photo of that person playing an instrument. People with such photos were perceived to be more attractive than those with plain headshots.

"These findings show how important it is to present yourself strategically on Facebook," said doctoral student Seoyeon Hong, who conducted the research along with associate professor Kevin Wise.

"If you want to be perceived positively by people who view your profile page, including friends and potential employers, it is important to include profile pictures with positive social cues. No matter what the profile owner does to tailor their Facebook page, comments left on their page should be monitored as well. Positive comments are very helpful, but negative remarks can be very damaging, even if they are silly or sarcastic." ■

The study was published in the journal Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking.

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Smokers Need Not Apply

In the very near future, it's possible that smokers wanting to work for the city of Fort Worth, Texas, need not apply. That's because local politicians are seriously considering making



Fort Worth the first smoke-free city in the world and refusing to hire anybody who smokes!

Why? Mayor Betsy Price has made it her mission to go smoke-free, and not just to protect workers and the public from secondhand smoke. Because budgets are tight, the move could save the city, and taxpayers, millions of dollars in medical expenses and lost productivity because of sick days.

As proof, she points to Baylor Healthcare System in Dallas. They stopped hiring smokers on January 1st and began offering programs to help current employees and their spouses stop smoking. Already, every dollar they spend on wellness saves the company nearly \$3.

But Vince Chasteen, president of the city's employee association, doesn't like it. He believes that refusing to hire smokers infringes on people's rights to live their lives the way they want to. Bottom line: People should have the option to smoke — even if it means they have to pay more for their health care insurance than nonsmokers.

But employment attorneys say that refusing to hire smokers isn't illegal. That's because smokers aren't a protected civil rights group, like women, minorities, or the disabled. And if companies believe they'll save money, and protect the health of their workers by not hiring smokers, they can. ■

Clinical Perspective

Working the Graveyard Shift can Kill!

According to a study in the *British Medical Journal*, people who work the graveyard shift — or alternating night-and-day schedules — are almost 25% more likely to have a heart attack or stroke than those who work more regular day shifts.

No one's sure exactly why the graveyard shift is so dangerous, but theories include:

- ❖ Graveyard shift workers have a harder time doing things the rest of us take for granted, like running errands and finding child care. So, stress may be a factor.

- ❖ It's also more difficult for people who work unusual hours to

schedule things like doctor's appointments. In fact, a Harvard study found that working nights can lower your resting metabolic rate by as much as 8%. This means that shift workers are more likely to gain weight.

Of course, some people have to work nights. If the employees of any of your corporate clients are among them, encourage these workers to do everything possible to protect their heart. Quitting smoking is a no-brainer. In addition, they should keep their sleeping and eating habits as regular as possible (admittedly, this is harder for shift workers). They should also watch their diet, avoid trans fats, and exercise every day. ■

Additional source: John Tesh: Intelligence for Your Life (www.tesh.com).

Editor's note: This article originally appeared on the Impact blog. To subscribe (for free), visit <http://impactpublishing.wordpress.com>.

