

# EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

Volume 14, No. 4  
April 2011

supporting EAP professionals

## EAP Practice With Native American Employees

By Rodney C. Haring

Employee assistance professionals work in diverse settings and are exposed to employees, families, and communities in a wealth of circumstances, ranging from children of employees, to spouses, and to elder caregivers. EA professionals take pride in being able to use their assessment, short-term problem solving, and referral skills as various issues relate to different cultures. One unique culture is that of the Native American employee, family, and community.

This article has been adapted from a previous publication (Haring, 2009) and focuses on some key areas for EA professionals to consider when working with this ethnic group.

However, EA professionals recognize that they can never be *entirely* knowledgeable about any given topic, or in this case, minority group. The employee is the *true* expert on his or her life and its relationship to the workplace. Becoming knowledgeable about various cultures and its peoples is an ongoing process – but this article is designed to help.

### Historical Trauma

Historical trauma may be defined as a “traumatic or stressful



era in history that alters the perceptions or behaviors of a population, culture or society.” Among Native Americans, the most widely recognized historical trauma stems from their boarding school experiences.

In the early 20th century, boarding schools were established to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream culture. Native American children were removed from their homes, communities, and families, and sent to institutions far away. The goal of the boarding schools was to “remove the Indian” from their culture and replace it with the customs of mainstream society. Youth were not allowed to speak Native American languages or practice their traditional ways.

*continued on Page 2*

### FEATURED INSIDE

- ▶ A Brief View into Asperger Syndrome
- ▶ Manage Ethnic Tension in the Workplace - Part I
- ▶ Repaying Charged-Off Debts
- ▶ Helping Executives Maximize Their Time
- ▶ Resources
- ▶ Parity Law Causing Some to Cut Benefits
- ▶ We Remain Engaged as We Age

### INSERTS

- ▶ *Brown Bagger*: Cultural Competence
- ▶ Payroll Stuffers
- ▶ LifestyleTIPS®

Moreover, they were forced to speak English, convert to Christianity, cut their hair, and wear the clothing of White society. Choosing not to follow these rules often resulted in severe abuse, or even death.

In large part because of this historical trauma, Native American employees may be hesitant to accept EAP practice by non-Native EA professionals. This hesitation may not be due to the EA professional's assessment or methodology. Rather, reluctance to participate in the EAP process may be due to different influences, experiences, and perceptions passed down through generations.

Boarding schools and other forms of historical trauma resulted in a generation of caregivers that may have taught conflicting parenting and teaching styles. These learned styles of parenting may have reflected the abusive relationships that were projected onto them in their battle for cultural survival.

As such, inappropriate social learning through modeling of their boarding school years might have produced an authoritarian style of parenting, which possibly transcended into practices of physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse.

In contemporary EAP practice, the residual effects of boarding schools and related trauma may form a barrier that prevents trust between an EA professional, and the Native American employee and his/her family.

Such employees may see the EAP practitioner as an extension of the dominant society's government or that of a boarding school past. EA professionals must be aware of these possible concerns, assess for them, and take them into consideration when practicing with Native clients.

## Environment

The key to working with Native American employees, and their families and communities involves being knowledgeable about environmental differences. There are more than 550 federally recognized tribes in the U.S. alone. Each tribe has its own unique environmental context, and EA professionals must be aware of these differences.

For instance, an EA professional in the East working with the Cayuga Nation faces entirely different environmental contexts and cues than an individual in the North working with the Inuit of Alaska.

Urban versus reservation-based Native populations is another key environmental difference. There are also differences from urban, to *suburban*, to reservation settings. Work-life relationships differ from county to county, state to state, tribe to tribe, and country to country. An awareness of potential differences – or similarities – is essential.

It is also important to understand the often transient nature of the Native employee. For example, a Seneca client might have a mother who lives on the reservation and an Onondaga father who lives and works in the city – whereas the father's family resides on a neighboring Onondaga reservation. The employee may spend summers with his mother's family, visit his father in the city, and work in Onondaga Country with his relatives.

Such a transient lifestyle is fairly common for Natives, and it is not a sign of disrespect to EAP session dedication. From a Native perspective, this is a way of communal being and family togetherness.

Nonetheless, a work-life lifestyle like this can make EAP scheduling and consistency difficult. In some

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

Editor - Mike Jacquart  
Publisher - Scott Kolpien  
Designer - Clay Miller  
Circulation - Matt Deets

COPYRIGHT © Impact Publications, Inc. 2011. *Employee Assistance Report* (ISSN 1097-6221) is published monthly by Impact Publications, Inc., E502 State 54, Waupaca, WI 54981-9502, Phone: 715-258-2448, Fax: 715-258-9048, e-mail: info@impacttrainingcenter.net. POSTMASTER: Send address corrections to *Employee Assistance Report*, E502 State Road 54, Waupaca, WI 54981-9502. No part of this newsletter may be reproduced in any form or by any means without written permission from the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review which must credit *Employee Assistance Report* as the source, and include the publisher's phone number, address, and subscription rate. Yearly subscription rate is \$229.00. Material accepted for publication is subject to such revision as is necessary in our discretion to meet the requirements of the publication. The information presented in *EAR* is from many sources for which there can be no warranty or responsibility as to accuracy, originality or completeness. The publication is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering product endorsements or providing instructions as a substitute for appropriate training by qualified sources. Therefore, *EAR* and Impact Publications, Inc. will not assume responsibility for any actions arising from any information published in *EAR*. We invite constructive criticism and welcome any report of inferior information so that corrective action may be taken.

cases, it may be beneficial for EA professionals to have referral resources available in the employee's communities, and to be prepared to work with family members over a large regional landscape – possibly even across borders.

### Confidentiality

Confidentiality is crucial to EAP practice, but it is paramount in small communities. This is

*continued on Page 3*

especially true for work within reservations and EAP contractual services areas that include tribal corporations, such as casinos, gaming facilities, and Native urban centers. These entities are often composed of smaller communities or family networks. These communities may not be found on any map – and yet, they have distinct names on the reservation.

In addition, many people on the reservation are related, whether it's by blood, marriage, or through social networks. Many buy gas at the same station or belong to the same recreational leagues. As such, confidentiality is key.

EA professionals who do not promote strict confidentiality beyond that of EAPA or other EAP organizational standards run the risk of failure. Confidentiality in these close-knit communities is not only a strong ethical practice – it also serves as the *reputation* of the EAP profession, and it's reflective of the organization that provides EAP services.

### Communication Styles

The communication styles of Native employees may also be quite different from that of non-Native employees. Communication styles should not be generalized from one tribal region to another, but there are several common elements.

One is the art of silence. Native employees often use silence as a way to feel out the EA professional, the EAP organization, or the process of EAP itself. While the EAP practitioner is assessing the employee, the employee is quietly taking mental snapshots on the EA professional, the EAP setting, and how EAP relates to his/her work, home,



### Editor's Notebook

Cultural competence is the key theme of this month's cover article and *Brown Bagger* insert.

This is an important topic because misunderstandings stemming from cultural misgivings can create barriers that may inadvertently prevent racial and other ethnic groups from utilizing EAPs.

Such is all-too-often the case with Native Americans, according to Rodney Haring, in an issue he examines this month. The intent is to present useful insights for EAP practitioners that work with this specific population.

Recognizing that some EA professionals work with different ethnic groups than Native Americans, the *Brown Bagger* presents recommendations for other EA professionals.

I thank Rodney Haring for his time and expertise in writing this month's cover article – and thanks also go out to Dave Sharar in making me aware of him. (This article can trace its roots to the goldmine of information I gleaned at last fall's World EAP conference in Tampa. More articles are planned.)

*Mike Jacquart*

Mike Jacquart, Editor  
(715) 258-2448  
mike.jacquart@impacttrainingcenter.net

life, and community. This is not a form of disrespect. Rather, it is a means of communication and form of non-verbal assessment.

Humor is another important style of communication for Native Americans. In working with Native employees and family members, humor can be an important tool for breaking the ice. It can also serve as a defense mechanism against workplace concerns. Humor is part of the healing process for many Native employees, and it may serve many roles.

### Shaping the EA Professional

EAP practice is a constant circle of learning, application, and respect. EA professionals must remain open-minded and promote their work in the Native American work landscape in respectful and meaningful ways. EA professionals must also strive to develop respectful referral organizations and

practitioners across a regional landscape – as opposed to a single city or town.

EA professionals must also be willing to look in the mirror and evaluate themselves as helpers of the Native community. Basically, they must continually monitor their overall efforts and successes.

In summary, the process of improving work performances by understanding how Native communities' function, is key to the success of the EA professional and the EAP organization they work for. Such work should be viewed as a never-ending cycle of learning, sharing, and remaining open-minded. ■

*Rodney C. Haring, Ph.D., LMSW, is the founder of One Feather Consulting, LLC, an international provider of EAP services. He is also a resident of the Cattaraugus Indian Reservation, an enrolled member of the Seneca Nation of Indians, and a master's level social worker with a doctorate in social welfare from the State University of New York at Buffalo. For more information, or a list of references used in this article, contact Rodney at rodney.haring@one-featherconsulting.com.*

# A Brief View into Asperger Syndrome

By Dan Coulter

“What do you do for a living?” is one of the first questions that adults typically ask each other when they meet for the first time.

However, adults with Asperger Syndrome (AS) – often considered a high-functioning form of autism – may not be able to give the answer that they want. While people with AS can be very knowledgeable, and highly skilled, steady employment is often a challenge.

The following are the secrets to success that I discovered in producing a DVD about finding and keeping a job when you have Asperger Syndrome.

1) *They assessed their skills and challenges, and sought jobs that were right for them.*

Many children with AS have trouble socializing in school, even if they do well academically. These problems don't magically disappear in the workplace.

If a person with AS wants to be hired, he/she needs to show the employer that productivity will outweigh efforts that the organization makes to help him/her to fit in.

It's crucial for the individual to seek out a job that he/she has the aptitude, knowledge, and skills to do well. If there is a special interest, the person is much more likely to succeed in a job related to this interest.

2) *They are open with their employers about their strengths and limitations.*

One individual, Kevin Singh, is great with numbers and highly productive, but he can get anxious under stress and tends to engage in long explanations when shorter ones would suffice.

By disclosing his condition, he enabled co-workers to understand the reason for his behaviors and help him fit into the workplace.

3) *They requested, and utilized, reasonable accommodations.*

Another employee, David Moser, works in an accounting position. While he has an extraordinary memory that his co-workers marvel at, he can also become distracted.

Two accommodations help him be productive: a schedule/checklist of what he needs to do during his workday, and a form template. When he deals with a form that includes lots of information, he covers it with the template that only shows him the fields he needs to work with.

4) *They are flexible, and have adapted their own behaviors to fit into their workplaces.*

Another individual, Tori Saylor, found it helped to study her co-workers and model their behavior. “Once I started working there, I had to kind of stand back and just watch how everybody here portrayed themselves. ...what was okay to say and what wasn't okay to say. ...so I just had to watch what they were doing and kind of mimic what they were doing, and that is what I call my act.”

5) *They ask for help when they need it.*

Getting help and support from others was one of the biggest factors in the success of the employees we interviewed. Four of the employees have job coaches who work for public or private agencies. Job coaches help job seekers find the right jobs, create and modify accommodations, serve as objective observers of an employee and the workplace, counsel employees, employers, and co-workers about interacting, and generally serve as ongoing problem solvers.

6) *They work hard, and put in extra effort to excel at their jobs – and, whether they are naturally outgoing or quiet – to expand their social skills and demonstrate a positive attitude.*

Richard Blanks is a relatively quiet person. However, in his state archives job, his good attitude, attention to detail, and productivity draw high praise from his supervisor. “...If I could hire four or five more Richards, I would do it in a heartbeat, because we get so much work done.”

## Summary

These are some examples of how employees with Asperger Syndrome – and their employers and co-workers – work together to ensure mutual success. ■

*Dan Coulter is the producer of the employment guide DVD, Asperger Syndrome at Work. For more information, visit [www.coultervideo.com](http://www.coultervideo.com). Editor's note: April is Autism Awareness Month.*

# Manage Ethnic Tension in the Workplace Part I

By Kyle Scott

One of the biggest debates in the U.S. Congress has been how to integrate gay service men and women into the military ranks without disturbing the balance or camaraderie required in battle.

While the stakes may not be as high on the assembly line or in a cubicle, dealing with diversity in the workplace is an obstacle that stands in the way of productivity.

Whether it is in the government, the military, or the business world, good management is needed to keep

diversity from becoming a hindrance when it could be an asset.

As a result, I offer a three-point plan that can help management in *any* sector better handle diversity. The first point appears this month – the remaining ones will be presented next month.

❖ **Size matters:** An organization that is too big will not be able to treat its members as meaningful contributors and risks alienating them. Moreover, an organization that is too big will not be able to recognize a problem until it is too late.

Conversely, an organization that is too *small* can't achieve its full potential. No one wants a military that is too small to defend its people or a call center that cannot handle its workload. Large numbers of people are often necessary, particularly in businesses where specialization and a division of labor is necessary.

This is where management strategies come into play. The goal is to capture the positive attributes of both large and small organizations. This can be accomplished through the creation of small working groups with enough autonomy to accomplish tasks on their own. This will enable organizations to grow as large as necessary without compromising accountability and interpersonal communication.

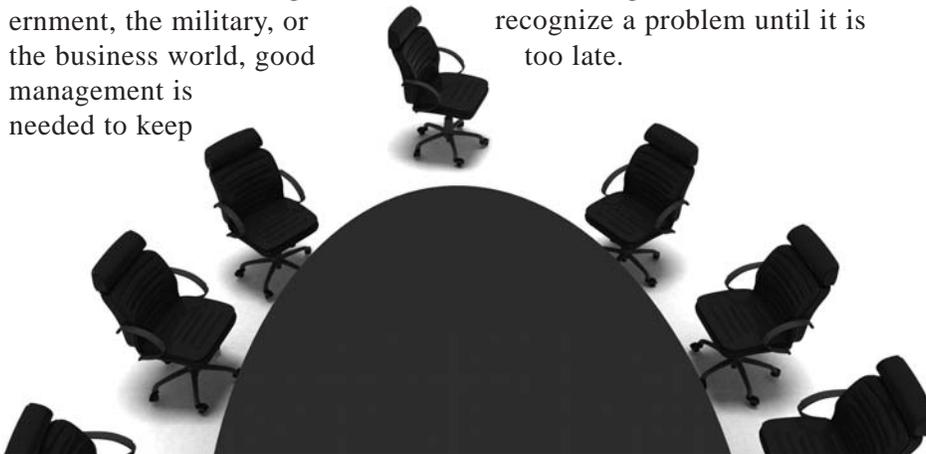
Within such a structure problems can be recognized before they get too big – thus enabling managers to be proactive in finding solutions.

Equally important is the fact that the employees within work groups can get to know one another on a more personal level and thus overcome the prejudices that can occur when people have only worked with their specific race and/or ethnicity.

In small groups, members become more understanding of opposing positions, which in turn makes conflicts less likely.

**NEXT MONTH: Why people matter, and why leaders matter. ■**

*Kyle Scott is a lecturer at the University of Houston, and has authored several books, including the soon-to-be released Federalism: Theory and Practice. For more information, contact Kyle at [kascott@uh.edu](mailto:kascott@uh.edu). See also our new blog - [impactpublishing.wordpress.com](http://impactpublishing.wordpress.com)*



## Subscribe to EA Report Now!

YES! Please start \_\_\_\_ or renew \_\_\_\_ my subscription to *Employee Assistance Report*. If I'm not completely satisfied, I can cancel and receive a refund for the remaining portion of the subscription.

- 3 years (36 issues) .....\$687.00
- 2 years (24 issues) .....\$458.00
- 1 year (12 issues) .....\$229.00

\_\_\_\_ Extra copies per month at \$2 each, \$24 per year (e.g., 5 extra copies per month for 1 yr. = \$120 per year). Add to above rates.

Foreign orders please add \$20 per year.

Name:.....  
 Title:.....  
 Organization:.....  
 Address:.....  
 City:.....  
 State or Province:.....  
 Zip Code:.....  
 Daytime Phone:.....

All payments must be made in U.S. funds or by check drawn on a U.S. bank.

Method of Payment:

- Organization's check
  - Personal check
  - Purchase order
  - Bill me
  - Charge my: MC  Visa Am. Express
- Card #:.....  
 Expiration Date:.....  
 Signature:.....

Credit card orders may call 715-258-2448.  
Mail to: EA Report, PO Box 322,  
Waupaca, WI 54981

# Repaying Charged-Off Debts

By Gary Foreman

**A**t the Dollar Stretcher, we receive questions like the following inquiry from Laura: *“I have fallen behind on some credit card payments and the debts were sent to collection agencies. I have paid them in full except for one. That one offered a settlement amount less than what I owed and I paid it. My question is: Is it still helpful to pay the amount in full as far as my credit score goes? Will they show it paid in full on my credit? As for the debt that I paid the settlement on, will that be worse on my credit than the ones I paid in full, and will it show on my credit as settled? Any help would be appreciated.”*

Let’s start by examining some of the facts about how past due credit card accounts are reported on your credit history.

Depending on which reporting agency you use, the status of your payment may be stated in plain English or a code may be used. If it is in code “R” is used for revolving credit (think credit card), and “I” for installment loans (like a car payment). The letter (I or R) will be followed by a number. “1” means paid as agreed. A higher number means a worse payment history with “9” meaning “charged off as bad debt.”

Next, let’s examine charge-offs since they often confuse people. When you borrow money, two things happen. One: you agree to repay the money plus interest on

some type of schedule. Two: on the bank’s accounting records it replaces a current asset (the money that it lent you) with another asset (your promise to repay the debt).

When the lender decides that you’re unlikely to pay and removes the asset from their books the debt is considered “charged-off.” This is an accounting procedure. It reduces the value of the company by taking

that asset (your promise to pay) off its books. But it does not mean that the borrower stops owing the money!

Expect the “charge-off” to be reported to the credit agency. A charge-off will remain on a credit record for 7 years.

## Checking Credit Reports

Laura will want to check her credit reports to see how the settled debt is recorded. There’s a good chance that it shows “charged-off settled.” In reviewing her credit report Laura may not find her settled account under the “history” section. It could be under a separate section for “collection accounts.”

The accounts that went to collection and were completely paid should be marked “paid in full” although they will probably also show a charge-off. Now that we know something about charge-offs, and Laura has checked her status – *what should she do with the settlement?*

Assuming that the debt is shown as “charged-off settled” she’s right. Paying a settled amount is better than a simple charge-off, but it’s not as good as a “charged-off paid.”

If you pay off the entire amount the lender *may* remove the “charged-off settled” remark from your file.

However, they are not required to do so! You should negotiate this with the lender before you give them the money. Get a commitment from them in writing that the account should show “charged-off paid.”

## Summary

There are two other things that Laura can do to improve her credit score. The first is to reduce any balances she may still have on her credit cards – basically, try to repay a little of the balance every month.

The second is to be very careful to pay her bill on time. Each month that she does so will reduce the damage done by her previous charge-offs. ■

*Gary Foreman is the editor of the Dollar Stretcher website ([www.stretcher.com](http://www.stretcher.com)) and various e-newsletters. The Dollar Stretcher is dedicated to helping people live better on the money they already have.*



# Helping Executives Maximize Their Time

If chief financial officers (CFOs) and other executives could get one thing off their plates, it would be administrative tasks, according to a recent Robert Half Management Resources (RHMR) survey.

More than one-third (38%) of CFOs interviewed said that if they could eliminate one responsibility, it would be basic clerical and administrative work.

“Today’s need to ‘do more with less’ extends to all levels of the organization,” said Paul McDonald, senior executive director of RHMR. “At small and mid-size companies, in particular, this often means financial executives have had to take on tasks once handled by others. The demands of the current economic environment make it even more essential for senior-level managers to use their time wisely.”

Time management, therefore, may be a useful niche for EA professionals to utilize in working with various levels of management.

RHMR offers six such tips for maximizing time:

**1. Set realistic expectations.** High standards are a must, but setting impractical goals can cause frustration and waste valuable time. When initiating a project, executives must consider what they would like to achieve if resources and time were unlimited. Then, determine what can reasonably be

accomplished considering available resources and other priorities.

**2. Don’t procrastinate.** It’s tempting to postpone less challenging assignments for more exciting initiatives, but it can backfire if projects back up. Putting things off strains work relationships and creates unnecessary stress as everyone strives to catch up.

**3. Delegate.** Too many executives do too much. Instead, distribute more routine tasks to other staff members. Look for opportunities that allow top performers to gain visibility and build their expertise and decision-making skills.

**4. Keep meetings on track.** Distribute a detailed agenda prior to the discussion so everyone is prepared. Meetings should begin and end on time. If information can easily be covered in email or phone, a meeting may not be warranted.

**5. Bring in help.** Executives should consider bringing in outside support during peak activity periods or for large-scale initiatives that are finite in nature.

**6. Recharge.** Financial executives are accustomed to long hours and demanding work, but that doesn’t mean they should sacrifice breaks and vacation. Even a short respite can restore energy and a sense of control. ■

Source: Robert Half Management Resources, a premier provider of senior-level accounting and finance professionals. For more information, visit [www.roberthalfmr.com](http://www.roberthalfmr.com).

## Resources

📖 *Letters to Millie*, by Neal Powers, [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), [www.iuniverse.com](http://www.iuniverse.com). Veterans account for twenty percent of the 30,000 suicides committed each year in the U.S. The author, who was diagnosed himself with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), uses his own experience to allow victims of PTSD, as well as those who love and care for them, see that there is hope for recovery.

📖 *The Skinny On™* series of books, by Jim Randal, Rand Publishing, [www.theskinnyon.com](http://www.theskinnyon.com). Using a format light on text and heavy on visuals that caters to today’s Internet style of reading, this book series provides advice on scores of topics, including willpower, success, time management, credit cards, and more.

🔗 *Accommodation and Compliance Series* is an online resource to bring employers, employees, EA professionals, and others up to speed on the *Americans with Disabilities Act* and, especially, the *ADA Amendments Act*. Visit [www.jan.wvu.edu/bulletins/adaaa1.htm](http://www.jan.wvu.edu/bulletins/adaaa1.htm).

Check out  
Our New  
BLOG! 

[impactpublishing.wordpress.com](http://impactpublishing.wordpress.com)

Employee Assistance Report is published monthly. For subscription information contact: Employee Assistance Report, E502 State Road 54, P.O. Box 322, Waupaca, WI 54981. This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought. (From a Declaration of Principles jointly adopted by a committee of the American Bar Association and a Committee of Publishers.) Employee Assistance Report does not necessarily endorse any products or services mentioned. No part of this newsletter may be reproduced in any form or by any means without written permission from the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review which must credit Employee Assistance Report as the source, and include the publisher’s phone number, address, and subscription rate.

## Parity Law Causing Some to Cut Benefits

A 2008 law, which requires that mental-health and substance-abuse benefits, if offered, to be as comprehensive as medical or surgical benefits, appears to be leading some health plans to circumvent these requirements by dropping such coverage.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation's 2010 Employer Health Benefits survey, roughly one-third of firms with more than 50 workers said they made changes in the benefits they offer in response to the law, 5% of which said they dropped mental-health coverage.

The *Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act* was signed into law in 2008. It prohibited large health plans from setting higher co-payments or limiting doctor visits for mental-health care, among other things. Federal regulations on implementing the

legislation weren't issued until 2010, so the new requirements went into effect for many plans starting in 2011.

Those decisions are hitting home now, since plans' open enrollment periods tend to run before the end of a given year (in this case, 2010). Insurers and consultants say few plans are dropping the coverage, but many companies have expressed concerns about how to comply.

The National Business Group on Health surveyed large corporations and found that 89% reported having to make some changes to their plan to be compliant with the law, and 18% increased deductibles to cover the new costs.

Mental-health and addiction advocates say the relatively small number of plans opting out reinforces projections by the

Congressional Budget Office (CBO) that the law would have a minimal impact on insurance premiums. The CBO estimated that premiums for group health insurance would increase by an average of just 0.4%.

In future years, plans that drop coverage might pick it back up due to the federal health overhaul. That law requires that plans selling insurance through online marketplaces known as health exchanges meet a certain minimum level of benefits. Regulations detailing what those are haven't been written, but likely will include some form of mental-health coverage. ■

*A version of this article appeared on the website of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association ([www.eapassn.org](http://www.eapassn.org)). Additional source: Wall Street Journal. These articles are reprinted with permission of EAPA.*

### Work-Life Trends

## We Remain Engaged as We Age

Older adults are productively involved in society, contributing over \$160 billion a year to the gross national product. And yet, negative stereotypes that create barriers for older adults can impede engagement in a variety of activities, including:

- Age-specific volunteer opportunities;
- Availability of adequate training;
- Available transportation; and

- The skill level required of volunteer work.

Looking more closely, 80% of adults aged 65-74 years and 60% of adults aged 75 and older are *already* involved in four key activities: work, volunteering, caregiving, and education or "lifelong learning." In addition, 30% of older adults devote some time to formal volunteer activity.

The longevity revolution and the current economic climate are leading to new views of older adults

and the retirement years. Older adulthood, it turns out, transcends infirmity, leisure, and disengagement from work and society. *Adults remain engaged in life.*

This new view of aging articulates, specifically, how older adults' activities can be perceived as successful, productive, and meaningful. It is an important mindset to bear in mind for young and old alike. ■

*Source: The Sloan Center on Aging & Work at Boston College.*