

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

supporting EAP professionals

‘Cool Tools’

Evaluating a Technology Approach to Address All Aspects of Substance Use

By Jodie Carter, electronic product manager, Hazelden

With rising health care costs, new technologically driven programs are springing up everywhere with the promise of helping people prevent disease and better identify, manage, and treat current – or looming – health conditions that run the gamut from depression and diabetes to addiction.

While depression and diabetes are widely acknowledged as diseases for which treatment is available, people are less aware that addiction is also a chronic, relapsing disease that is treatable, but *costly* when left unmanaged.

These costs can translate into direct problems for employers. *In fact, nearly two-thirds (67%) of human resources professionals indicated that substance use is one of the most serious issues they face among their workforce.*

Today, more than ever, cost-effective solutions can be found in the online world. Digital programs will never replace in-person counseling



or addiction treatment services, but they *do* have distinct advantages:

- They can be delivered anywhere, at appropriate times, confidentially, and directly to the participant with minimal direct contact.
- They are cost-effective and scalable to large populations regardless of location.
- They can tailor messages based on age, sex, and ethnicity to more personal items like family, work status, and personal goals.
- Live updates and interaction with social networks allow people to offer advice, ask for help, and surface the best content organically, just like they do in face-to-face conversations.

These applications, especially mobile ones, make it easy for individuals to reach out – by email, text message, or phone call – for immediate help. The ubiquitous nature of mobile phones means that support is always available – to keep an individual focused, curtail an anxiety attack, and avoid a relapse or deal with one if it happens.

As technology continues to advance, these applications increasingly leverage “cool tools” like location-aware services, social experience, and biometric monitoring, using wire-

less sensors that track anything from daily calories and stress to the quality of an individual’s sleep.

Applications Challenging to Evaluate

The sheer number and diversity of digital applications make it challenging to evaluate which programs utilize current technology the best, while being the most cost-effective and successful ways to help reduce the impact of alcohol or other drugs on your workforce.

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What's on the Horizon for Digital Health?

We cannot pretend to predict the technological breakthroughs of the next decade, as they no doubt will involve many concepts that we are not fully aware of today. However, some trends to watch in the next year include:

✓ *Expect to see an increasing use of semantic web technology* in which machines interpret data more intelligently in order to better perform various tasks on our behalf. (For example, increasing the usability of the search function.)

✓ *Look for more mobile applications for personal health management*, including apps that use social connections to help people challenge and motivate each another.

✓ *Keep your eye on health gaming*, which continues to show promise in improving anything from diet and exercise to medication compliance and smoking cessation. The basic idea is that while reading text or watching a video is relatively passive, playing a

computer game is an active and immersible experience that demands complete concentration. While the mind is completely absorbed in playing a game, there is an “open channel” to the brain. Gamers have begun to use this channel to educate, and sometimes distract, as a means to achieve behavior change.

✓ *Watch for new programs that wirelessly leverage personal data* (physiological and emotional metrics sent from Bluetooth or ANT devices) for insights that can warn of and avoid problems, such as a relapse, before they happen – and be used to track “what happened” to avoid future mishaps.

With clearly defined goals and measurable outcomes, an EAP practitioner can successfully implement the best of this brave new world of health care technology in a workplace to provide accessible, effective, and affordable solutions.

– Jodie Carter.

Cool Tools *cont'd from Page 1*

With so many new offerings, especially in the “app” world, it’s like the wild, wild, west out there in the marketplace, which is a challenge to both end users and institutions that count on technology to deliver measured results and don’t have much time to shop for services.

Some applications advertise amazing features that sound like a dream come true, but usability testing and customer ratings can reveal:

- Crashed and unreliable servers;
- Web pages that fail to load;
- Social networks that are “not that social”;
- *Instant* support that turns out to be non-existent; and
- Tracking tools that are supposed to be intuitive and easy but can

be harder than a universal remote control to figure out.

Even more disastrous, some apps have disclosed inappropriate information to unauthorized third parties, which is not such a big deal for a movie-finder, but it is hugely problematic for a track-your-drinking app endorsed by a health care provider.

Diversity of Health Conditions Compounds Issue

Adding to this conundrum is the enormous diversity of health conditions that can exist in the workforce. For instance, a stressed-out middle manager may be suffering from mild depression while also facing the reality that his or her

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teenager has become a binge drinker. Meanwhile, a junior associate in accounting suffers from mild anxiety, and thinks that her daily marijuana use is not affecting her performance.

Yet another example is a 15-year warehouse employee with chronic pain from a back injury who is increasingly abusing pain medication. What an EAP practitioner needs is a proven strategy that offers the biggest

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bang for your buck while addressing the complicated needs of all the employees that run a given business.

Evaluating Digital Programs

There are three primary areas to consider when evaluating digital health programs to reduce the impact of substance use in a given workforce:

❖ **Integration** – The current trend is that the web is increasingly becoming a “social, mobile web.” This means that it’s increasingly important that digital programs assess, guide, and motivate change, but they also need to build and support the social communities that can help people sustain positive changes for the long term.

It’s likely that the most effective wellness programs of the near future will have successfully merged traditional web-based digital health coaching with the power of online communities (social networks) and mobile “anywhere, anytime” access to the most effective information and change strategies.

Integration also means that digital programs should provide a seamless connection to – and support for – face-to-face services, including counseling, inpatient and outpatient treatment, intervention services, and in-person programs for family members.

❖ **Continuum** – Programs must be comprehensive or they will fail to address critical aspects of substance use and co-occurring disorders like depression or anxiety.

Hazelden has identified a continuum of care that we believe best addresses all aspects of health improvement regarding substance use. This includes prevention, education, intervention, treatment, and recovery management. Look for a digital program or suite of programs that include offerings spanning this entire continuum.



Editor's Notebook

Facebook. Twitter. Podcasts. RSS feeds. Is it just me, or is the 21st century enough to make your head ping, ping, and bling all over?

But since technology isn't going away – the question becomes: *How to best utilize technology in our professional lives?*

With scores of legal, ethical, and other issues, it's a difficult question for many EAP practitioners to answer. As a result, “Building Business by Blogging,” and “EA Services Online, ‘Let Your Fingers Do the Talking,’” were among the more engaging discussions at the 2010 World EAP Conference in Tampa.

Some online concerns – and potential benefits – are addressed in this month's cover and Brown Bagger

articles. (Thanks go out to Jodie Carter for her cover story.)

What recommendations about online counseling in these articles did *you* find useful? What did *EAR* leave out that we should cover in a future article on this topic? Send an email or leave a comment on our blog – impactpublishing.wordpress.com.

To conclude, today's growing number of “cool tools” remain potentially beneficial to readers, employees, and corporate clients alike. The questions are, *how* will we use them? – and, *when* should we use them? Hope your summer is off to a good start. Until next time.

Mike Jacquart

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❖ **Evidence and Reputation** – Make sure that the content, strategies, and approach included in digital programs are from a reliable expert. The advice and strategies provided to employees are only as good as their source.

At Hazelden, we invest in due diligence to ensure that our programs are based on best practices in intervention and treatment of substance use disorders and in affiliated fields including youth and adult learning, social learning and experience, and incentive-based change strategies.

We track core metrics on each individual digital program so that adjustments can be made to maximize success. The majority of the programs are evidence-based, meaning that outcomes on success have been published.

In addition, Hazelden's Butler Center for Research conducts its own clinical and institutional research and publishes findings, including one-

page research updates on a variety of topics related to substance use and addiction.

Summary

The bottom line? Clearly outline your corporate client's organizational strategies and goals so that calculating the return on investment in digital programs is simple to track.

Then look for digital programs from experts you can trust. Focus on those that have demonstrated hard evidence of success.

Ask questions about the protection of health information, including what information is being transmitted, how it is being stored, how long it is being kept, and whether patients are being notified that the data are even being collected. ■

For more information on Hazelden's digital programs, trainings, and other resources visit www.hazelden.org.

Hallmarks of a Great Workplace – Part I

By Norm Spitzig

What exactly makes a workplace “great?” What are the specific characteristics common to those very special workplaces that are universally recognized as the indisputable signs of a superior operation?

I believe there are seven such hallmarks. I will list three of them in this article. The remainder will appear next month:

❖ **A clear mission & purpose.**

The best workplaces in the world know who they are and what their core purpose is. They have a straightforward, concise mission statement that is readily understandable and enthusiastically embraced by employees.

Great workplaces have carefully identified those factors critical to their long-term success. Great workplaces develop action plans and accompanying areas of responsibility to ensure that their vision



for the future is more than some pie-in-the-sky dream; it is concrete, measurable, and it’s achievable.

❖ **Forward thinking, creative senior management and a caring, well-trained staff.** No workplace can remain superior over any meaningful period of time without quality leadership at the top as well as a caring, well-trained staff.

At great workplaces, everyone from the CEO to a recent hire are committed to doing whatever it takes to ensure the company’s ongoing success. Equally as important, great workplaces attract

people from diverse backgrounds and with various skills. At a great workplace, individuality is valued, but teamwork remains first.

❖ **Meaningful work.** A great workplace encourages its employees to do what they deem meaningful. Of course, this term means different things to different people.

Having said that, for most people, work is meaningful when it has a direct relationship between the effort invested (i.e., “time on the job”) and the accompanying return (i.e., “compensation”).

Great workplaces offer the opportunity for employees, irrespective of their education, talents, and experiences, to consistently do what they perceive as genuinely meaningful [work]. ■

Norm Spitzig, Principal at Master Club Advisors, is internationally recognized as a visionary speaker and industry expert. His groundbreaking book, Perspectives on Club Management, continues to inspire and challenge business leaders worldwide. For more information, visit www.masterclubadvisors.com.

Resources

☞ **Remember the Milk** –

It seems that many of us have more and more tasks than ever to keep track of in today’s fast-paced society. This site – at www.rememberthemilk.com – offers applications to better manage your tasks from anywhere.

☞ **The BrainMap** – at

www.brainmeup.com – Forget left brain, right brain, this total assessment profile offers information on the full range of your brain’s change possibilities.

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Dealing With Credit Card Debt

By Gary Foreman

At the Dollar Stretcher, we receive questions like the following inquiry from “Cornered”: *“I have gotten into trouble with my credit cards. It’s to the point that I can’t pay them and still keep up with my other monthly bills. I know that if I miss the minimum payments that I’ll be penalized. What can I do?”*

You’re right. Once credit card debt gets out of control things can get nasty. Those payments begin to crowd out everything else. Let’s see what your options are and help you plan a strategy for getting out from under the debt.

❖ *The first thing is to estimate how serious the problem is.* How big are all the minimum payments combined? And how does this compare to your take-home pay?

You’ll need to calculate the percentage of your income that the credit card debts consume. Just divide the total of the monthly minimum payments by your monthly take-home pay.

If credit card minimums are more than 10% of your income you’ll struggle to pay them. That’s typically the point where you’ll find that the only way to make the credit card payments is to make painful reductions in what you spend for other things (think food, clothing, medical care, etc).

Based on your question, you’re probably past the point where slight spending cuts will provide the money you need to pay the credit card bills.

❖ *Next, consider ways to increase your income.* Landing a part-time job until the debt is repaid could be your best solution.

❖ *If even significant spending cuts and increased income can’t provide enough cash the next step would be to consider credit counseling.* They negotiate with your credit card companies to lower rates and payments.

Find one that’s affiliated with one of the large national associations such as either the National Foundation for Credit Counseling (www.nfcc.org) or the Association of Independent Consumer Credit Counseling Agencies (<http://aiccca.org>).

There are three benefits to credit counseling:

1. **You’ll reduce your monthly payments.** Although some agencies advertise more, most consumers see a 10 to 20% reduction.

2. **Interest rates on the outstanding balance will be lowered.** If you’ve fallen behind you could be paying up to 30% in interest. Most agencies can get that reduced to the 10% range. That makes a huge difference in your ability to pay down the debt. It’s hard to repay a debt when your monthly checks barely cover the interest that you owe.

3. **The program may change the status of your accounts.** If you’ve been late the accounts are reported as delinquent. A credit counseling program can cause their status to be changed to “current”.

Be aware that there *are* costs to credit counseling. Fair Isaac (who keep your FICO credit score) states that being in credit counseling will not hurt your score. But, being in credit counseling *is* reported. And, that may make it harder (or more expensive) to get an auto or home loan or other unsecured credit.

❖ **In some instances, credit counseling may not be enough to solve your problem.** If you reduce your payments by 20% and *still* can’t pay your bills, more drastic steps are necessary.

If this is the case, check your auto and home payments. They shouldn’t take more than about *half* of your take-home income (combined). If they are, the problem might be in your mortgage or car payment, not your credit card bills. The real solution would be to *reduce your mortgage or car payments*. Could you refinance? Move to a less expensive home? Sell your car?

Do you have any assets that you could turn into cash? If the debt is large enough to ruin your finances you might want to consider selling your home or borrowing from your 401k. Obviously these are not steps to be taken lightly, and you’ll want to thoroughly consider the options and outcomes.

Summary

Finally, you may come to the point where bankruptcy is the only workable option. Again, DON’T make that choice without carefully thinking about the ramifications. Your credit rating will suffer, and it’ll take years to recover.

Once you get to the point where it’s hard to make minimum payments, there are no painless options available. But you do have some strategies that can reduce the payments and the underlying debt. ■

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

Plentiful Resources to Assist Veterans

As Americans approach the 4th of July, our nation's collective consciousness turns to our brave military.

Unfortunately, the unemployment rate for Gulf War-era veterans is 11.5%, according to the latest findings from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Moreover, many of these unemployed military veterans are not aware of the wide variety of nonprofits that help veterans find employment. They include:

❖ **Employer Partnership of the Armed Forces**,
www.employerpartnership.org.



❖ **Employer Support of the Guard Reserve**, www.esgr.org.

❖ **Wounded Warrior Project**,
www.woundedwarriorproject.org.

“We find many qualified veterans from a variety of sources including the Employer Partnership of the Armed Forces, Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve, Military.com, HireVeterans.com, and the Wounded Warriors Project,” says Bill Whitmore, president and CEO of AlliedBarton Security Services, a premier provider of highly trained security personnel. ■

Quick Ideas

Flooding & Tornado EAP Resources Include...

Employee assistance professionals with corporate clients affected by flooding and tornadoes in numerous Midwest and Southern states have numerous resources at their disposal. They include the following:

<http://insurancenewsnet.com/article.aspx?id=258859&type=newswires>

www.bioportfolio.com/news/article/648933/Aetna-Reminds-Members-Affected-By-Midwest-Tornadoes-And-Floods-Where-To-Call.html

EAP Resources Directory:

www.act-eap.com/resources/results.asp?strState=CT&strCity=&strCategory=%25

(includes referrals on additional topics)

www.cignabehavioral.com/web/basic/site/bulletinBoard/disasterResponse/disasterResponseMgrInfo.jsp

(includes crisis in Japan) ■

Editor's note: A different version of this article first appeared on our blog at impactpublishing.wordpress.com. Subscribe (for free) and you'll receive an email when there is a new post. This way, you won't miss out on any timely news and information that crops up between issues of EAR. This article is designed for educational purposes only – and should not be construed as an endorsement of a specific organization or its products or services.

Insight into HR - Association Releases Leading Concerns

As hiring is picking up across the country, what questions are human resources professionals dealing with this year?

While social media and background checks have been covered in the media, there is still high demand for expertise in areas such as the *Family and Medical Leave Act*, discipline, and termination.

The Employers Resource Association (ERA), which specializes in human resources consulting, training, development, etc., recently released its list of top ten questions received by its *HR Hotline*.

In a time when legislative and economic issues are evolving as rapidly as interpersonal and social dynamics, perhaps no business discipline has been transformed as much in recent years as human resources. (Consequently, it is useful for EA professionals to be in-tune with at least some of their concerns).

Leading hotline questions were:

1. *FMLA* is the single most asked-about topic.

Questions center on: who is covered; what is deemed a serious health condition; and how to control intermittent leave.

2. Advice and counsel for taking such adverse actions as termination, suspension, and discipline is a close second.

Commonly requested information includes: what documentation is needed to fire someone; does a recent Workers' Compensation claim or *FMLA* request affect the decision being made; can the employee sue for termination?

3. Performance-management strategies.

Strategies for dealing with a problem employee such as: is it safe to ramp up the heat on a new hire that may not be working out or on a protected-class employee that isn't responding to counseling? Also, group performance issues concurrent with culture changes or business cycle needs.



4. *Fair Labor Standards Act* issues.

Concerns center on correctly classifying a position as exempt, calculating overtime for multiple rates, what travel hours must be paid for an hourly employee, what are federal and state child labor rules. In addition, how much time can we ignore at clock-in or out? Can we round?

5. Immigration.

Many questions arise regarding I-9 documentation and procedural questions, such as: what do we do when the SSN comes back a non-match? An applicant has a matching SSN and ID, but we know it is not his. What can we do? And, we're considering

employing an H1-B employee. How complicated is that?

6. Lunch hour and breaks.

Questions about giving breaks and how many per day: Is a lunch period required? What has to be paid versus non-paid time? Can an employee work through break and leave early?

7. Employee access to personnel files.

Does the law require HR to allow an employee to see or copy his file? What are the pros & cons? If there are employees in other states, are the rules the same?

8. Independent contractor versus employee.

What's the difference between an independent contractor and an employee? Why can't HR just pay this person as a contractor and issue a 1099? What constitutes a legal independent contractor status? Who makes the rules?

9. Employee privacy.

Can HR read employee emails or monitor Internet usage? What about the use of surveillance cameras? Is it legal? Can HR search employees, or their workplace, belongings or cars?

10. Drug and alcohol issues.

Under what conditions can employees be tested? If the employee tests positive, can HR discharge? How can a drug test procedure be set-up, what should be in the policy? ■

Source: Employers Resource Association. For more information, visit www.hrexperts.org.

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Drinking on the Job? It's Allowed at Some Firms

At most companies, drinking on the job is a big, fat “no”! But when it comes to many software companies, Internet providers, and dot-com start-ups – drinking is not only allowed, the booze and beer are supplied by the company!

For example, Twitter keeps a refrigerator full of wine, beer and soft drinks that’s free to employees and visitors. At Yelp’s San Francisco headquarters, a refrigerated keg is always available, and employees can drink as much as they want. The only catch – they have to swipe their employee badge when they tap into the keg – and every ounce they pour is recorded.

Why is on-the-job drinking accepted in the computer world? Experts say that for many programmers, developers, and software



engineers, they spend so many nights and weekends at work – often until midnight or later – that the workplace is more like home. Companies point out that there’s no underage drinking, and there haven’t been any problems, like alcohol abuse or DUIs. Still, many experts don’t think that allowing alcohol on the job is a good idea – especially when it’s free.

Robert Sutton, a professor of management science and engineering at Stanford University,

says that some people can’t stop drinking once they start, and numerous studies show that when employees drink, their performance level drops, absenteeism goes way up, and inappropriate behavior increases.

According to a study at Cornell University, at offices where heavy drinking is the norm, women are at greater risk of sexual harassment. In fact, for every additional alcoholic beverage consumed by male employees, the number of harassment incidents doubled. ■

Additional source: John Tesh, Intelligence for Your Life – www.tesh.com. Editor’s note: This article first appeared on our blog at impactpublishing.wordpress.com. Subscribe (for free) and you’ll receive an email when there is a new post. This way, you won’t miss out on any timely news that crops up between issues of EAR.

Workplace Survey

It Pays to Know Your Body Clock

Do you know what time of day you work best? Does it matter? You bet! In fact, a recent survey confirms what our bodies tell most of us – that we run out of steam as the day wears on.

An estimated 33% of executives surveyed by Accountemps said that 4 p.m. - 6 p.m. is the least productive time of day for employees. Conversely, only 2% said that 10 a.m. - noon is not a productive time of day for workers.

Employees who are well attuned to their body clocks can better

schedule their time and avoid suffering severe energy slowdowns later in the day.

Accountemps suggests the following tips:

❖ **Planning makes perfect.** Don’t delay difficult activities until the end of the day, when your energy and enthusiasm may wane. Instead, use this time to catch up on basic tasks, such as responding to routine emails, organizing files, or planning the next workday.

❖ **Get a breath of fresh air.** Periodically stretch or take a short walk to recharge yourself. Even a few minutes away from your desk can help you be more productive.

❖ **Don’t miss lunch!** Skipping meals is a recipe for a serious afternoon lull. No matter how busy you are, take time for a nutritious meal midway through the day, and healthy snacks inbetween. ■

Source: Accountemps (www.accountemps.com), a division of Robert Half International (www.rhi.com).