

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

supporting EAP professionals

Selling an Employee Assistance Program *Building a Successful Business Case*

By Chris Smith

When businesses search for opportunities to trim their budgets, employee benefits are typically among the first to feel the ax, from workplace wellness initiatives to employee assistance programs (EAPs). In today's uncertain economic climate, everything needs a solid business case, and making that case for an EAP can be crucial to closing the deal.

“Research on productivity and ROI make a clear business case that companies see a payoff from investing in an effective employee assistance program.”

Sometimes, to get the right answer, you have to reframe the question – and the beliefs that companies have about EAPs. Following a business-case approach, I'll state the challenge, solution, resource requirements, and measurement criteria.

The challenge: Maximize Employee Productivity

This is your “foot in the door.” Right away, eliminate any defense

that companies might raise about EAPs being a fringe or “extra” benefit. Every business wants productive employees, regardless of the economic environment. The most important thing to know about employee assistance programs is that they have a positive impact on the bottom line.

You may have to help your clients overcome some outdated impressions of EAPs, which were first created as a way to refer employees who had substance abuse problems and needed to seek treatment. However, EAPs have changed with the times.

Research has uncovered a number of root causes of lost workplace productivity:

❖ According to a study by the National Mental Health Association, “presenteeism” – showing up for work but being less productive – costs more than \$200 billion annually in the United States. For a business, this might mean giving up 5% to 12% of its workforce's productivity each day.

❖ Depression and anxiety are among the top five reasons for absenteeism and presenteeism, according to research published in the April 2009 edition of the *Journal of Occupational and*

Environmental Medicine. This applies to management as well as line workers, and represents a significant drain on a company's productivity.

❖ Stressors such as family issues and financial, credit, and legal problems can detract from employees' valuable time,

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attention, and energy even when they're at work.

The solution: A multi-faceted approach to boosting productivity

While supervisors may be able to spot troubled employees, it's unlikely that they or a human resources staffer would feel comfortable making a direct suggestion such as, "Get yourself into counseling."

While many health plans do cover counseling, a depressed person often struggles with even the simplest of tasks, and they may have difficulty identifying the problem, let alone finding a provider. In addition, co-payments or limited visits can hinder employee access.

Moreover, there can be many non-medical reasons for presenteeism and absenteeism as well, such as family-related or financial issues – issues that a health plan won't address.

Resource Requirements

The goal of a good EAP is to equip businesses with the tools required to resolve any problems affecting productivity. Today's EAPs offer a wide range of services that can be accessed with a simple phone call. There is also no upfront cost sharing, removing yet another barrier to assistance.

In fact, EAPs target the very issues that can lead to depression and anxiety:

➤ A referral to reputable mental health assistance that can resolve certain issues in as few as four sessions (this also helps meet federal mental health parity requirements).

➤ Family and marriage or couples counseling, which is often not covered by health plan-provided mental health benefits.

➤ Financial planning, debt counseling, and guidance in creating and implementing a formal household budget.

➤ Legal assistance for basic functions, such as creating a simple will.

➤ Connecting workers to community resources, such as child or elder care.

Of particular assistance to some businesses are work-related services, such as:

➤ A supervisor consultation to help build action plans and walk the supervisor through handling new or complicated employee situations, from incompatible employees to workforce reductions.

➤ On-site trainings for staff development, such as stress management, customer service, and other types of skill-building training.

➤ On-site critical incident stress management.

Measurement Criteria

To clinch the sale, it's important to show that the benefits of EAPs are measurable. These measures can be used to select an effective EAP and to gauge its performance and return on investment.

One study for a third-party EAP covering more than 11,000 employees across various companies found a return on investment of \$1.42 for those reporting depression.

Furthermore, the outcomes from a Federal Occupational Health study of more than 60,000 workers using EAP services measured both objective and subjective data and found that:

➤ Unplanned absences and tardiness from work decreased by an average of 1.5 days per case.

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➤ Employees' clinical functioning rose by an average of 10%, according to counselors' reports.

➤ People who reported a great amount of difficulty completing their daily work because of emotional problems showed a 73% productivity improvement rate after using EAP services.

Economic Convergence

The same economic climate that leads businesses to cut costs can cause their employees unprecedented stress that can hurt their productivity at work. Among one health plan's 100,000 members that were served by an EAP, more than 14% used the program's services in 2008, a number well above the traditional industry average of roughly 7%.

The use of EAP-provided legal, debt management, counseling, and family/parenting support has increased by up to 27%; employees are also more frequently seeking help for real estate law, estate



Editor's Notebook

It's true that the economy has picked up in many areas, with more and more companies hiring. As a result, returning to work is an EA issue of increasing importance. (See the August 2010 cover article.) It's a topic we may re-address in *EAR* later this year.

However, at the risk of sounding pessimistic, it's also true that economic times remain uncertain – particularly if gasoline prices spike sharply this year as some predict. Consequently, ideas on how EAPs can grapple with workplace issues related to layoffs also remain relevant and are covered

this month – particularly in the *Brown Bagger*.

Moreover, the *Brown Bagger* topic was one of the suggestions stemming from the 2010 reader survey – and we try to honor as many of those requests as possible.

Promoting and selling your EAP, another ongoing topic, is addressed in this month's cover article. As always, we try to provide as much useful information as possible throughout. Until next time.

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planning, student loans, credit reports, and tax issues.

Research on productivity and ROI make a clear business case that companies see a payoff from investing in an effective employee assistance program. EAPs are an effective solution to keep personal

problems from becoming personal issues that divert time and energy from the workplace.

These are sound selling points in *any* economy. ■

Chris Smith is the EAP product manager for Regence BlueCross BlueShield. He can be reached at Chris.Smith@Regence.com.

A Well-Stocked EAP Plan

When helping your clients choose an EAP plan, here are some common services and features you should look for.

Services for the individual

- 24-hour crisis telephone hotline
- Confidential assessment and counseling services
- Referral support, tracking, and followup
- Emergency intervention/critical incident stress management
- Substance abuse expertise
- Access to qualified employee assistance clinical providers, ideally those holding the Certified Employee Assistance Professional credential
- Dependent and domestic partner coverage
- Guaranteed confidential recordkeeping

Services for the company

- EAP orientation for all employees
- Supervisory-leadership training
- EAP communication/awareness materials
- EAP policy development and coordination
- Labor coordination
- Management communication and consultation
- Annual and periodic utilization reports
- EAP evaluation
- Client/company satisfaction evaluation

Source: Employee Assistance Professionals Association.

Adding Value to the EAP

By John Pompe

Today more than ever, employee assistance programs are positioned to add value for their customers. Each organization will have different needs, and EAP services need to be tailored accordingly.

However, the following bulleted points serve as a starting point – representing some of the requests commonly made of EAPs during mass layoffs and/or other downsizings.

❖ **Promote “people initiatives.”** There is a direct correlation between the strength of the economy and the resources invested in employees. During a recession, investments in learning, wellness, and benefits are at risk of being cut. EA professionals can be the no-nonsense voice that reminds business leaders about the importance of “people initiatives.”

When businessmen lapse into a state of financial tunnel vision that sees people only as “opportunities for cost savings,” we can

remind them that, even in the face of layoffs, employee engagement and productivity are essential for business success.

❖ **Mitigate workplace risks.** An uncertain economy can have a substantial impact on mental and physical well-being. It is widely recognized that mental health concerns, medical complaints, and family problems increase during an economic downturn. EAPs should take this opportunity to educate management about the potential business risks that stem from the negative impact on employees. These include, but are not limited to:

- ✓ Increased health care costs;
- ✓ Increased turnover of key employees; and
- ✓ Increased risk of workplace violence.

❖ **Promote leadership development.** The fundamentals of good leadership do not change when the economy plummets. EAPs can be proactive in reminding managers

about the importance of modeling optimism and commitment, using good communication, demonstrating empathy, challenging and empowering employees, and reinforcing good work.

❖ **Offer support during layoffs.** The logistics of how, when, and where to have layoff meetings are often complex. Many business leaders are uncomfortable conducting such meetings and may lack the interpersonal skills to effectively interact in tense situations. EAPs should be prepared with expert insight to support managers during times of layoffs, benefit reductions, and redistribution of work assignments to employees.

❖ **Prevent workplace violence.** EAPs should seize every opportunity to provide training to supervisors on identifying the warning signs of workplace violence and how to take appropriate action. Such trainings should also include suicide prevention strategies.

❖ **Manage survivor guilt.** Organizations often make the mistake of focusing solely on those being laid off. While “survivors” may initially have feelings of relief, guilt can set in as employees feel anxious, guilty, depressed or even angry. What starts out as feeling “lucky to still be here” can erode into apathy or bitterness about being “left to clean up the mess” or “captain a sinking ship.” ■

Editor’s note: For more on this last point, see this month’s Brown Bagger insert. John Pompe, Psy.D, SPHR, is manager of disability and behavioral health programs with Caterpillar, Inc.

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Achieve More in Less Time: Part II

By Joelle Jay

If your corporate clients – employers or employees – or even yourself for that matter, are ready to trade in a frantic pace of work for one that’s more relaxed, yet still efficient, the following strategies will help anyone achieve more in less time. (An additional strategy was presented in part one of this two-part article.)

❖ Power Down

Fact: Your brain gets a stress signal every time an email comes in.

Power down means turn off the technology. Yes, today’s technology can help us maximize our time.

However, if you’re not careful, technology can also *use up* all of your time.

Think about it. Just because you can be available 24/7 doesn’t mean you *should*. Just because you can instant message at the same time you’re writing a report doesn’t mean you *should*. Just because you can perch your laptop on the passenger seat of your car to tap out ideas during traffic doesn’t mean you *should*.

The trouble is not with the technology itself; it’s the *abuse* of the technology that’s the issue. Take *control* of technology so you can get the important things done and not get distracted all day long.

“*But wait a minute,*” you may be thinking: “*My boss/clients/colleagues* expect me to be available 24/7!” Recognize this is not about ignoring people or shirking responsibility. Rather, it’s about helping you focus so you can be more productive during working hours.



Ask yourself: Do people *really* expect an immediate response or 24/7 availability? Or is that a standard you set for yourself? Determine the actual expectations from your boss and co-workers and then create appropriate guidelines.

When you occasionally “power down,” you’ll be much more effective in your efforts.

❖ Take a Virtual Vacation

Fact: Research has shown that your brain needs time to rest and recover.

Anyone works more productively after they’ve taken a break. Just as muscles need to recover from hard workouts, the brain needs time to recover from hard work. While it would be wonderful to take a two-week trip to Tahiti every few months, few people can realistically do that! However, anyone *can* take a short virtual vacation as often as they like.

A virtual vacation is simply a form of meditation with a twist. Like meditation, close your eyes, breathe deeply, and release your thoughts. To go “on vacation,” fill your mind with restful images, thoughts, or even music. If you’re worried about falling asleep, set an alarm and tell yourself that if you

do fall asleep, you’ll awake feeling refreshed and energized.

You may combine the techniques of meditation and imagination with exercise to come away revived and restored. Yoga, walking, running, biking, and swimming have a rhythmic solitude that are especially well suited to resting the mind, but you can also get away from stress and frustration with any kind of sport.

Of course, it doesn’t have to be exercise. A bath, a hot shower, or some quiet time on a bench outside can also bring the rest you need if you’re able to detach from pressure and stress.

Whatever you choose, be sure it *engages your mind*, either by helping you escape into a meditative state or getting you so involved in something else that you forget about work for a while.

Virtual vacations increase productivity by giving the mind the rest it needs to function at its best. As a result, you gain a clearer mind with clearer thoughts, which leads to more productive work.

Summary

Ultimately, gaining productivity by maximizing your time is not about what you *should* do; it’s about what you *choose* to do.

Do you want to have more time to yourself and find ways to be rested and renewed? Then these strategies can help. Take control of your time and watch your productivity soar. ■

Joelle K. Jay, Ph. D., is an executive coach and the senior managing partner of the leadership development firm, Pillar Consulting. She is also the author of The Inner Edge: The 10 Practices of Personal Leadership. For a free sample chapter, go to www.theinneredge.com.

New Title Encourages Readers to Kick 9-to-5 Lifestyle

At a time when unemployment figures are dismal and job dissatisfaction is soaring, people are hungry for a solution that will revive their career and invigorate their passion.

According to author Kristin Cardinale, there's a problematic mindset preventing people from achieving these goals: They're too dependent on traditional 9-to-5 jobs.

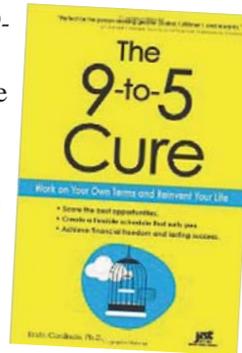
Whether fear or habitual thinking is to blame, people often assume that another 9-to-5 job is the only remedy for unemployment or unhappiness.

According to Cardinale, a career coach and consultant, "A 9-to-5 job isn't the answer. It's an addiction."

In her new book *The 9-to-5 Cure*, Cardinale explains that people crave salaried jobs because they mistakenly believe they provide security. "In reality, these jobs may end at any time and reignite the cycle of job loss that people work so hard to overcome."

Cardinale's *9-to-5 Cure* teaches people to think and act like entrepreneurs. Readers discover that in creating their own career, they can achieve the freedom, security, and satisfaction that traditional jobs no longer offer.

Readers are given a plan that empowers them to work on their



own terms and reinvent their life through the launch of a new business, freelancing, consulting or a string of multiple gigs.

Cardinale shows readers how to make their skills irresistible to employers and clients; market themselves in

unique, attention-getting ways; and generate non-stop momentum and leads.

The *9-to-5 Cure: Work on Your Own Terms and Reinvent Your Life* is available in major bookstores, at www.amazon.com and from the publisher (www.jist.com or call 1-800-648-JIST). ■

Workplace Survey

Executives Say Their Jobs are Tougher than Ever

Leading a company appears to be a tougher job than it used to be. In fact, a new Robert Half Management Resources survey shows that 81% of chief financial officers believe it's more difficult to be a company leader today than it was just five years ago.

"Because of dramatic changes

in the business landscape in recent years, executives are facing additional pressures as they attempt to keep service levels high and position their companies for growth," said Paul McDonald, senior executive director of Robert Half Management Resources, which developed the survey.

"A variety of new challenges – from smaller employee teams to uncertainty about new healthcare and financial regulations to economic concerns – are making it more difficult to be a business leader today."

McDonald added, "As firms have reduced staff levels, managers have fewer employees to rely upon. Some companies are hiring selectively to fill personnel gaps and bringing in project consultants who have the experience necessary to help them address critical priorities." ■



Robert Half Management Resources is a premier provider of senior-level accounting and finance professionals on a project and interim basis. For more information, visit www.roberthalfmr.com.

Twittering the Day Away?

As social media makes its way into the workplace, executives are weighing the potential risks and benefits. Approximately half (51%) of chief financial officers (CFOs) interviewed recently for an Accountemps survey said their greatest concern is that employees are wasting time during business hours using sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

CFOs also expressed worries their staff may behave unprofessionally or post inappropriate information online.

However, nearly three in 10 financial executives (28%) said using these sites can improve customer service.

“Many companies are still evaluating the risks and rewards of allowing employees to access social media websites at work,” said Max Messmer, chairman of Accountemps and author of *Human Resources Kit For Dummies*®, 2nd Edition (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.). “Firms with concerns about employees wasting time online while at the office can encourage appropriate online activity

by developing and establishing a set of consistent guidelines.”

Messmer also pointed out, “More executives are seeing value in employees using social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter for business purposes like promoting a product or service or connecting with target audiences. Employees in customer-facing roles, for example, can leverage these networks to communicate directly with customers and quickly address service issues as they arise.” ■

Clinical Perspective

Retraining the Brain; Those Dangerous Energy Drinks

Mental illness and addiction often occur together and understanding this fact is a critical element in treating addiction. This condition is called dual diagnosis or co-occurring disorders.

Addiction and mental illness are both brain diseases. A person susceptible to one type of brain disease (addiction) may also be vulnerable to another. They involve the same pathways, molecules, and chemicals in the brain.

Neurofeedback is used in conjunction with other therapies as part of one organization’s treatment program.

“Drug abuse is considered a brain disease because drugs change the brain, they change the structure and how the brain works,” said Rick A. Harris, Psy.D., clinical

psychologist and executive director of the Neurofeedback Institute.

“These changes can be long lasting and lead to the destructive behaviors seen in people who abuse drugs. However, it is also my belief that we need to consider the brain and its functioning prior to first trying drugs.”

For more information, visit <http://challenges-program.com>.

Dangerous Drinks

Alcoholic energy drinks appear deceptively innocent. Sold in convenience stores, in attractive (and kid-friendly packaging) and priced reasonably at \$2-\$3 a can, they are a veritable teen magnet. And, they contain the “magic ingredients” of alcohol and caffeine. What many people don’t know is that at 12% alcohol by

volume, they have twice the alcohol you’d find in a typical can of beer.

The biggest trouble with alcoholic energy drinks is that when you combine alcohol, which is a depressant, with caffeine, which is a stimulant, the result is that you get more intoxicated – and may not even know it. With today’s binge-drinking teens, that’s problematic.

“When it’s reported that some 60% of teens engage in binge drinking and you add dangerous products like alcoholic energy drinks that are specifically marketed to young people, it can very well be a recipe for disaster,” said Dr. Jeffrey Huttman, chief clinical officer of Challenges. “These stats are alarming, to say the least.” ■

Additional sources: “Addiction and Recovery News,” Challenges Treatment Center.

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Marriage Appears to Lead to Better Health

Married men are healthier than men who were never married or whose marriages ended in divorce or widowhood, according to a major survey of American adults.

Is marriage itself responsible for better health and longer life? It's hard to be sure, but marriage certainly seems to deserve at least part of the credit, according to a recent issue of *Harvard Men's Health Watch*.

Numerous studies conducted over the past 150 years suggest that marriage is good for health. Now scientists are beginning to understand how marriage affects heart disease, cancer, and other conditions in men, says *Harvard Men's Health Watch*.

A recent report from the Framingham Offspring Study notes that married men had a 46% lower rate of death than unmar-



ried men, even after taking into account major cardiovascular risk factors.

In this study, the happiness of the marriage did not seem to influence the overall protective

effect. In other studies, though, marital unhappiness and stress were linked with high blood pressure (hypertension), an important cardiac risk factor.

Over time, marital stress is associated with thickening of the left ventricle, the heart's main pumping chamber. On the flip side, a supportive marriage is associated with improved survival among men who develop heart failure.

Marriage doesn't appear to reduce the overall risk of getting cancer, but it may influence the outcome. One survey of people with cancer found that those who were unmarried were more likely to have advanced disease at the time of diagnosis than those who were married. Among those who receive cancer therapy, marriage has been linked to improved survival. ■

Source: Harvard Health Publications.

Workplace Survey

Integrity Cited as Important Trait

A strong moral compass can give high-potential managers a leg up the career ladder, a new Robert Half Management Resources survey suggests.

One-third (33%) of chief financial officers (CFOs) interviewed said that, other than technical or functional expertise, integrity is what they look for most when grooming future leaders.

Interpersonal and communication skills also ranked high, cited by 28% of respondents.

"History has shown time and time again the importance of ethics in business – even a single lapse in judgment by one employee can significantly affect a company's reputation and its bottom line," said Paul McDonald, senior executive director of Robert Half Management Resources, which developed the survey.

"Leaders who are principled and forthright inspire this same behavior in their teams, creating a culture in which integrity is a core value," he added.

McDonald pointed out that communication skills are also critical as executives take on greater responsibility.

"Executives in companies that have moved successfully through the downturn understand the importance of listening intently to feedback from employees and are always on the lookout for this skill in potential leaders," he said. ■

Source: Robert Half Management (www.roberthalfmnr.com).