

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

supporting EAP professionals

Innovative Ideas to Enhance Use of EAPs

By Jeremy Stafford

The use of employment assistance programs is currently on the rise, both in the United States and Canada. However, more can be done to enhance the use and effectiveness of EAPs even further. This article will present several recommendations toward that goal.

Between 2007 and 2008, EAP use increased by 13% according to a study by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). SHRM attributed the increase to workers' financial stress, and while this study reflects worker EAP statistics specific to Canada, there is ample evidence to support the growing trend of EAP utilization here in the U.S.

For example, according to SHRM, in 2008 more than 75% of businesses in the U.S. had implemented EAPs as part of their employee benefits packages.

The popularity of EAPs may be attributed to not only employers' desire to increase returns on their investments, but also to employees' greater acceptance of EAPs as a resource.

However, for EAPs to achieve their full potential, it is important for these programs to become more than just solutions to *existing* problems. Instead, EAPs should play more of a *preventative* role.

In conclusion, greater EA/HR collaboration in the pre-employment context may have several benefits within a broader employee wellness framework.

Health & Wellness Early On

A 2003 report by Towers Watson titled, "Addressing Mental Health in the Workplace" stressed the relationship between the employer and EAP provider, saying that, "By taking steps designed to stop problems before they start such as reducing workplace stressors, facilitating work-life balance, and promoting healthy lifestyle choices, employers can reduce the incidence of mental health disorders and a wide variety of other forms of illness in the workforce."

The point is that employers should implement health and wellness programs *early on* in their relationship with an employee. However, current involvement of EA professionals is restricted

almost entirely to the *post*-selection employee context.

To a large extent, the reason for this can be attributed to the traditional roles, functions, and liabilities related to the EA and HR professions. One area of concern for any EA/HR collaboration lies in compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) legislation, primarily Title VII, ADA, and ADEA.

As such, any collaborative effort, particularly in the recruitment and selection context, must be pursued with extreme caution

continued on Page 2

FEATURED INSIDE

- ▶ We've Got You Covered!
 - ▶ Don't Underestimate the Importance of Workplace Culture – Part I
 - ▶ EAPs Work, Study Claims
 - ▶ 7 Tips to Improve Communication
 - ▶ 9/11 Q & A
 - ▶ A 'Little' Difference Actually Makes a Big Deal
 - ▶ Rules on Saving for Retirement
- INSERTS
- ▶ *Brown Bagger*: Every Employer Needs an Emergency Plan
 - ▶ *Payroll Stuffers*
 - ▶ *LifestyleTIPS*®

to ensure that EEO mandates are met. In short, any anticipated benefits must be carefully weighed against the potential for discrimination liability.

Pre-Employment Collaboration

Nonetheless, pre-employment EA/HR collaboration within the overall employee framework is an additional EAP benefit worth considering. In fact, a cursory review of available research clearly suggests that job candidate attitudes and behaviors are an important part of the employee wellness framework. As such, some researchers have advocated assessing candidate attitudes as part of the pre-screening process.

However, candidates for employment have generally NOT been a focus for EA professionals to date, and assessments of certain relevant constructs may be beyond the scope of HR professionals' role and expertise. Therefore, it is unclear what role that collaboration between EA and HR professionals may provide.

In other words, the basic question that needs to be addressed is: *What aspects of the pre-employment context (if any) might be enhanced by EA/HR collaboration?* One potential area might be in how employee candidates perceive the selection process itself.

Specifically, research has shown correlations between candidate perceptions regarding the fairness of a selection system and outcomes such as self-efficacy, anxiety, or even withdrawal from the process. Other candidate reactions directly relate to perceptions of the organization itself, which may affect the individual's trust and commitment to the employer. *Such attitudes may then influence subsequent behaviors such as willingness to utilize an available EAP as*

an employee. Therefore, EA and HR professionals should work together to develop ways to ensure that the selection process is perceived as being fair.

EA professionals may also help in the selection process by developing and communicating realistic job expectations that not only provide information to candidates about the job, the organization, and the work environment, *but also the potential individual and social impacts of the job on work-life balance.*

Specifically, the difficulty in achieving this balance for today's workers are more pronounced than in past decades, particularly for the estimated 20 million members of the "sandwich generation" – employees that have to care for their parents as well as their own children, while still managing the demands of a career.

Therefore, it would be highly beneficial to candidates to be informed prior to being hired about the potential impacts on work-life balance associated with a particular job.

In addition, *EA professionals might also be consulted to a larger extent when assessing a candidate's fit within a particular organization's culture.* For example, it is common for candidate interviews to include general personality-oriented questions in addition to more structured behavioral and situational questions, which are intended to assess a candidate's analytical or problem-solving skills. Input from EA professionals with more specialized training and experience in personality theory may increase the validity and quality of these questions.

Finally, some organizations may find it necessary to employ "stress interviews," which can yield valuable insights into a candidate's ability to manage stress. However,

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

Editor – Mike Jacquart
Publisher – Scott Kolpien
Designer – Laura J. Miller
Circulation – Matt Deets

COPYRIGHT © Impact Publications, Inc. 2011. *Employee Assistance Report* (ISSN 1097-6221) is published monthly by Impact Publications, Inc., P.O. Box 322, 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*, P.O. Box 322, 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.

without more grounded theoretical or practitioner guidance, such interviews may damage or undermine the relationship between the candidate and the organization.

Summary

In conclusion, greater EA/HR collaboration in the pre-employment context may have several benefits within a broader employee wellness framework:

continued on Page 3

❖ **Input from EA professionals may improve the effectiveness of the job selection process** by decreasing detrimental hires, while at the same time reducing the potential for discrimination lawsuits that may stem from perceptions of perceived unfairness of the selection system itself.

❖ **Input from EA professionals in developing realistic job descriptions and expectations may provide the candidate for employment with a greater clarity of the specific job** that he or she is seeking – as well as the larger impact the job might have on his or her work-life balance.

❖ **By establishing a positive employment relationship from the start** (the individual's initial contact with the employer) **candidates who are subsequently hired might be more willing to seek out and utilize EAP benefits.**

In light of the growing popularity and expanding role of employee wellness programs, the intent of this article is to draw much-needed attention to important, and yet often overlooked aspects of the relationship between employee and employer.

The goal is to spur debate, generate thought, highlight new areas for research, and in general to provide an impetus for two mutually exclusive and yet interdependent fields – EAP and HR – to come together in new ways to improve the lives and working conditions of not only today's employees, but tomorrow's as well. ■

Jeremy Stafford (Ph.D., M.A.) is an associate professor of management at the University of North Alabama. He holds advanced degrees in industrial/organizational psychology & human resource management and organizational analysis & change. He is currently working toward an advanced degree in community counseling.



Editor's Notebook

This month's cover article debates the interesting concept of whether pre-employment should be among the services offered by EAP. Certainly, there are concerns.

Legal issues may keep EAPs away from pre-employment evaluations. Second, even if EAP *DOES* venture into this territory, does this make it an instrument of management (or at least perceived as such), diluting the EAP role as a neutral party?

However, another EA professional considers it, "a thought-provoking article for a new area for EAPs to *consider*."

Jeremy Stafford, author of the article, adds: "Behavioral and situational interview questions are more often than not developed, scored, and interpreted by HR professionals who most likely have little to no psychology or counseling background. Thus, the questions

developed and the subsequent interpretations tend to be task-focused, and those that are relational focused are highly subjective and most likely lack content and construct validity.

"...Thus, in my opinion it would benefit both the organization and the applicant to have EA professionals develop questions that could be incorporated into the existing interview structures or even pre-screens ... in making selection decisions."

What do YOU think? Is Jeremy Stafford's idea one that *your* EAP might consider? Or do you think it's too murky an area to get involved in? As always, we're interested in your thoughts – and all it takes a few minutes to send us an email. Until next time.

Mike Jacquart

Mike Jacquart, Editor
(715) 258-2448

mike.jacquart@impacttrainingcenter.net

We've Got You Covered!

The Journal of
Employee
Assistance

EMPLOYEE
ASSISTANCE
REPORT

Whether it's monthly – or quarterly – the *Employee Assistance Report (EAR)* and the *Journal of Employee Assistance (JEA)* are the publications that EA professionals need to stay on top of trends and other developments in employee assistance.

An electronic subscription to *EAR* offers the same great benefits of our printed newsletter – but at a fraction of the cost – a \$130 savings annually! Each month, links to the newsletter and its inserts are emailed directly to your inbox. Going electronic helps the environment, too!

The *JEA* – published quarterly by the Employee Assistance Professionals Association – is a core benefit of EAPA members. The *JEA* features a broad range of important EAP topics – including international, legal, and technological issues – every three months.

Both publications are edited and designed by Impact Publications, Inc. ■

Don't Underestimate the Importance of Workplace Culture – Part I

Workplace culture, also referred to as corporate culture, is probably one of the most overlooked aspects of getting and keeping a job.

Certainly, the job seeker needs to have the skills necessary to do the job, but that's only part of the equation. It's likely that you – as an EA professional – are aware of an employee of a corporate client who clearly had the ability to do the work – and yet the job didn't work out for this individual. Did you scratch your head wondering why? A workplace culture that wasn't a good fit for the individual may have had something to do with it.

Workplace Culture

Workplace culture may be defined as the type of working environment that exists at a given company or organization. This often makes the concept of workplace culture rather subtle, which is why it is not difficult for employment specialists to underestimate its importance.

However, consider: Have you ever had a feeling when walking into a company or formulated impressions based on initial observations? Chances are you experienced a glimpse of their workplace culture in action. In other words:

- The *type* of environment the people work in;
- The *way* employees interact with one another; and
- The *unwritten "rules"* that often exist in any business (i.e. "the way we do things around here.")

Some of these areas quickly become apparent at first glance while others aren't as obvious, not revealing themselves until much later. The sad part is, in many cases a bad job situation could have been avoided if the pre-screening process had revealed that the applicant was not a good fit for the business's workplace culture.

The Importance of Workplace Culture

Workplace culture exists in any business or other organization, whether a person realizes it or not. While the main reason people are there is to work, human beings are also social creatures. As a result, they do more than perform their day-to-day tasks – they also talk, socialize, etc.

Some people are adaptable and can function well in most work

environments whether it's boisterous or quiet, fast-paced or slower, etc.

However, in other cases an individual is more likely to be successful in some types of workplaces than others. A good workplace culture match is often even more important for people with disabilities, many of whom will fare better in some kinds of environments than others. This is partially true because some individuals with impairments, such as autism, have difficulties in social situations, and as such, they need job coaches who can provide social-skills training in order for them to succeed on the job. ■

NEXT MONTH: Personality profiles and follow-up.

Sources: *George Nostrand, Vocational Opportunity Works; and Career Choice, Change & Challenge, by Deb Koen and Tony Lee, JIST Publishing, www.jist.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

EAPs Work, Study Claims

Mental health in the workplace is costing Canadian organizations a lot of money and much of it is unnecessary, according to a new study by Morneau Shepell.

The study says that intervention through EAPs translates into improved employee mental health and higher productivity, as well as a 25% reduction in costs due to lost productivity.

The Morneau Shepell study collected data to measure four specific outcomes: general health status, mental health status, productivity, and absenteeism. Here are some of its findings:

- ❖ Employees rated their mental health 15% higher after receiving EAP support.

- ❖ EAP intervention resulted in a 34% reduction in costs related to lost productivity.

- ❖ Before EAP intervention, decreased productivity and absence was costing organizations almost \$20,000 per employee per year.

The Mental Health Commission of Canada estimates that mental illness costs the Canadian economy **\$51 billion** a year in terms of health care service use, lost work-days, and work disruptions.

Today EAPs serve about 75% of North American businesses and are a key component of benefit plans. The Morneau Shepell study makes two key recommendations:

- ❖ **Organizations should develop a more strategic partnership with their EAP provider as a first step in realizing the return on their investment.** The provider can recommend strategies to optimize the use of the EAP as

a preventative measure with the objective of saving costs down the line, and be positioned to make recommendations around the strategic use of EAP services to support the organization's health priorities.

- ❖ **Organizations should consider a comprehensive, strategic approach to absence management.** To promote sustained attendance at work, and prevent downstream costs and consequences, they should shift from standalone absence administration programs to attendance management strategies aligned with the company's business objectives, cost management goals, and strategies related to employee engagement and retention. ■

Additional source: Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) – www.eapassn.org.

Quick Ideas

7 Tips to Improve Communication

Remember the character in the movie Cool Hand Luke? "What we have here is... failure to communicate." It's true: effective communication – whether it's to resolve a conflict, share important information – or for any other reason, is crucial in any workplace.

But like anything else, it takes practice to build communication skills. The following are 7 tips for employee assistance professionals to share with their corporate clients:

- 1) Repeat what you thought you heard. You may have heard it wrong.

- 2) Provide examples of what you mean.

- 3) Speak clearly and distinctly.

- 4) Maintain a positive attitude. People will be more interested in what you have to say, and are more likely to listen, when you display a positive attitude.

- 5) Listen actively. Put down your cell phone or BlackBerry and give the person your undivided attention. Really listening is key in any type of communication (and relationship).

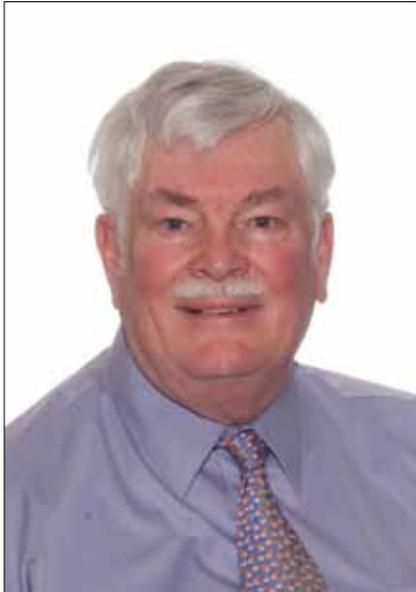
- 6) Share. Sharing ideas is a personal effort to relate to others.

- 7) Find a common ground. Start from something you both can agree on ... and go from there. But you have to start first. ■

Source: City of Milwaukee EAP.

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 and tips that crop up between issues of *EAR*.

9/11 Q & A – With Peter Schweitzer



The *Journal of Employee Assistance* had the opportunity to interview Peter Schweitzer, a CEAP in New York City, about his 9/11 experiences, which included debriefings for American Airlines, the Cop-to-Cop intervention organization, and the Port Authority of the NY/NJ Police Department.

JEA: *I understand that you coordinated a lot of resources – not just EAP – after 9/11. Would you explain your role and how this effort unfolded?*

PS: Coordination was by the Cop-to-Cop organization and the Port Authority of NY/NJ Police Department. I was involved in airline debriefings right away, and Cop-to-Cop the following March (2002). The numbers dictated triage debriefing.

This included inoculating exposed individuals from even worse situations such as divorce, alcohol addiction, and suicide. One thing we learned was that

there were hundreds and hundreds of sights and sounds that would remind people of 9/11 events. For instance, a BBQ brought back memories of burning bodies for one individual.

The police were angry they didn't get debriefed until months later. At every session, I had to deal with their anger before we could go on with healing. That was actually good because it meant – according to the Elisabeth Kubler-Ross model – that they weren't in denial.

Another thing we learned was that people tend to retreat to their comfort zones when they're extremely upset. For example, there was an airport official who was very fixated on retrieving the emails from his computer. At first, this seemed callous that someone would be focused on something like that during such a troubling time, but it turns out this is a coping mechanism for many people. A cop, for instance, might retreat to his or "beat," while this gentleman's thoughts were centered on getting his e-mails.

JEA: *Could you describe how those of you in the EAP profession that were on the scene at the time, responded to this tragedy?*

PS: We collaborated, attended debriefing meetings designed for EA professionals, and we stayed in touch with each other. We were aware we could be overwhelmed by what we experienced. There was a great deal of vicarious trauma. Ten years later, I think

9/11 has made us more aware than ever of vicarious trauma.

Another thing we learned was that it's important to separate emotions from reality. In other words, don't get trapped by what you think "should be" going on, but remain focused on what is actually in front of you.

JEA: *I understand that some EA professionals who worked together closely remain in touch with each other to this day – and yet it remains difficult to discuss your experiences. Has an event of this magnitude helped you and some of your colleagues to better understand and respond to the strong emotions that grieving individuals are experiencing?*

PS: We remain silent about our experiences. It is similar to battlefield survivors who don't talk [about them]. You acknowledge what went on, and you move on. There was a wonderful presentation at last fall's World EAP Conference in Tampa, in which keynote speaker Carol North described how 9/11 exasperated problems, but it didn't create them.

For instance, a husband and wife may have been tempted to split before – and 9/11 would have made it worse – but the event didn't create their issues; they were there *before* 9/11. In other words, we learned that you couldn't blame a tragic event for your problems.

continued on Page 8

A 'Little' Difference Actually Makes a Big Deal

By Gary Foreman

Sometimes the difference between success and failure is very small. Occasionally you'll see a horse race or car race that's decided by just an inch or two – a tiny amount that determines winners and losers.

A similar thing occurs in personal finances. The difference between financial success and failure is really quite small. And, somewhat surprisingly, it's NOT tied to being more disciplined or working harder your entire life. Rather, it's a simple rule of economics that can work for – or against – you.

What is it that makes such a difference? It's *compound interest* – truly the double-edged sword of personal finance.

When it's working for you, compound interest is wonderful. If you save a dollar today and invest it, it will be worth more tomorrow and still more the day after that. If you wait long enough, even relatively small amounts of money can grow to become quite large.

Saving-Investing Examples

Let's take a look at the difference between saving/investing \$1,000 versus spending/borrowing the same amount of money.

To save \$1,000 requires some effort on the front end. You'll need to find a way to accumulate the money. After that you'll need to decide where to invest it. However, from that point on,

it's just a matter of monitoring your investment. No heavy lifting is required.

The \$1,000 that you saved, if invested today earning 9% – which is the long-term average for stocks – would be worth \$2,367 in 10 years, \$5,604 in 20 years, or \$13,268 in 30 years. Again, that's just from the initial investment! You don't need to add anything to the account.

But what happens if you end up on the other end of the coin? In other words, if you *borrowed* and *spent* \$1,000, you'll be paying interest on the borrowed money. This requires you to work to earn the money – over and over again. At 15% – a fairly typical rate on credit card accounts – you'll need to come up with \$150 just to cover the interest every year!

In this case, borrowing \$1,000 will cost you \$1,500 in interest payments in 10 years, \$3,000 in 20 years, or \$4,500 in 30 years.

Saving Really isn't that Hard ...

I can envision readers thinking to themselves, "*I can't save \$1,000, Gary! I can't do it.*" That's usually not true. Skipping a \$3 latte every day would save \$1,095 in one year.

Or, if you go out for lunch every day, try brown bagging it three days a week. That would save roughly \$4 per lunch – or \$624 in one year. If you brown bagged every day, or nearly every day, you saved even more; probably \$1,000.

The point is, most of us can find a place or two where we could easily save \$10 to \$15 a week.

... Or Earn the Money

In some cases, you may already have cut your spending to the bare essentials – there's just no place to cut anymore. What then?

If this is the case, consider getting a McJob during your off hours until you earn the \$1,000. No one is asking you to work two jobs forever. If you earned \$8 per hour and worked just 10 hours per week, you'd have your \$1,000 in just 13 weeks. Salt that money away, as described previously, and taking a part-time job for three months could add up to \$13,268 in 30 years. That's pretty good pay for a little part-time work!

Summary

What's the point in all of this? Simply that the difference between being in good shape financially and always struggling with money isn't that big. It often doesn't take a superhuman effort to put off borrowing money or to save a little. However, the results in doing so make the payoff quite big – and that makes the effort extremely worthwhile. ■

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.

Employee Assistance Report is published monthly. For subscription information contact: Employee Assistance Report, 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.

Rules on Saving for Retirement

\$ The automatic rule – Start saving money today. Even if it's only a buck or two each pay period, savings is a habit you must start and *stick with for the rest of your life*. To improve your chances of saving success, automate the process. Have money withdrawn automatically from your paycheck or your checking account each month. If you don't want to think about saving, automation can take care of it for you.

\$ The 1% rule – At a minimum, save 1% of your earnings each payroll period. When you get a salary increase, add an extra percent to your savings and spend the rest. For example, when you get a 3% increase at work, save 1% and spend the other 2%. This way, you'll con-

tinually increase your savings while enjoying a higher standard of living.

\$ The time rule – Many people in their 50s and 60s regret not saving earlier in life. It's never too early or too late to start saving for retirement. Time is your friend. It can work for you – or against you – but it's your choice. Choose wisely.

\$ The most important rule – The government and the company where you work will NOT take care of you. Read, listen, and learn about personal finance, investments, and strategies. Ultimately, your financial well-being is *your* responsibility. There are factors that are out of your hands, but control those things that you *can* control. ■

Source; Bill Losey, author of *Retire in a Weekend! The Baby Boomer's Guide to Making Work Optional*. For more information, visit www.billlosey.com.



9/11 Q & A cont'd from Page 6

JEA: *What would be some best practices, or lessons learned, that both yourself, and others on the scene at the time, learned that you could pass along to EA professionals involved today in critical incident stress management or related matters?*

PS: Several things: For one, don't be surprised by the information that you receive.



Recognize that you're going to hear something that will make your jaw drop to your chest. Second, realize that these sorts of things aren't unusual; they're actually normal.

Third, remember that these things are being revealed to you as a matter of trust – you have to keep it to yourself. You have to convince the person that what they are saying will remain confidential; that was huge.

Fourth, you must continue to listen and offer support. We had some informational sheets in Cop-to-Cop that really helped. For instance, we told people that “debriefing lessens the impact [of the event],” and that this was, “not a critique but a discussion.”

Fifth, recognize that not everyone has the same reactions and that there were a lot of people that *weren't* overwhelmed by 9/11 as well. As Carol North stated, the effect of 9/11 on the individual depended on the person's closeness to the event. Finally, the EA professional must be aware of, and guard against vicarious trauma. ■

Editor's note: This article originally appeared in the 3rd quarter 2011 issue of the *Journal of Employee Assistance (JEA)*. The JEA is published quarterly for \$13 per year (from the annual EAPA membership fee) by the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA). It is edited and designed by Impact Publications, Inc. For more information, email journal@eapassn.org.