

# EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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supporting EAP professionals

## Fear & Anxiety at the Water Cooler Countering Recession-related Feelings

By *Morrie Shechtman*

The recently proposed \$700-billion bailout of the financial industry brought matters to a head, but the nation's uncertain economy concerned many Americans long before that.

Opinions vary whether America is in a recession. But ask any business leader, and he or she will tell you that *something* is going on. Employees are scared. They're afraid of their companies failing, of being downsized, and of losing their homes and everything they've worked so hard to achieve.

What's more, many people feel like failures. Few people seem to be reaching sales goals and other

business targets, and they're even reminded of it in meetings when they are confronted with embarrassing numbers, or given patronizing and hollow "pep talks."

If you suspect that fear (and even shame) is showing up in employees' day-to-day behavior, you're probably right. The following strategies should help:

➤ **Don't try to cajole people out of their anxiety.** Stop trying to talk people out of their feelings. It won't work. Nobody's going to think their way through this floundering economy, and workers are not going to be logically talked out of their fears or their feelings of failure.

➤ **Get real.** Openly talk about reality, from the top of the organization down to the bottom. No one needs to be cold-hearted about bad news, but it's better for management to take an, "*It's fear; it's here, get used to it*" approach than to be evasive or dishonest and leave employees out of the communication loop until the pink slips are issued. It's better to be honest and tell people the facts than to allow rumors to run ram-

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## Getting Maximum Return from Employees

The key to long-term growth and productivity isn't pink slips, it's a workforce that's familiar with the company and in sync with business goals. So, how *do* you foster a growth-oriented workplace, the kind that will survive and thrive even in a "downturned" economy? In addition to my previous comments on the need to find "familiar" and to encourage healthy confrontation,

the following are a few more insights and tips:

➤ **Forget monetary incentives, focus on relationships.** Even if you could afford bonuses and other perks right now, they do not tend to increase employee loyalty. Only through better work relationships can people change

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pant. Employees need to be able to focus on work.

➤ **After you address fear, bring up the other F-word (failure).**

Employees and managers need to engage in discussion about what it means to fail. Does it mean they're worthless? Does it wipe out everything done well? Or, does failure signify a missed opportunity and a lesson to be learned? It is crucial to "clear the air" and talk about feelings of having disappointed others, and of being disappointed in others.

➤ **Don't assume that all conflict is bad.** Employees who disagree — even when doing so vehemently — are not the problem. Conflict is actually healthy for a company. After all, there can be no growth without challenge, and no challenge without conflict. It's when employees argue pointlessly, over non-productive issues, and with an edge of hysteria, that they're acting out of fear. Address the cause, and the symptom will resolve itself.

Employees should not be discouraged from speaking their minds. In fact, it's the employees who avoid all confrontation that should be the source of concern. Effective teams are made up of people who care enough about each other to generate conflict and

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*"If you make decisions from a place of desperation — taking on clients that are bad for you, for instance, or cutting prices out of fear — you'll ultimately cut your own throat."*

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confront the tough issues. If everyone agrees with co-workers without question what usually happens is the whole team marches down the "rosy" path to self-destruction.

➤ **Live by theory of abundance, not the theory of scarcity — and teach employees to do the same.** The theory of scarcity holds that there are very limited resources to meet your needs, and you must therefore accept any opportunity that comes your way. However, the theory of abundance says that there are infinite resources, and you can pick and choose opportunities that mesh with your values and that will be beneficial.

You might say, "*But business is scarce right now,*" and that may be true — but only to a point. If you make decisions from a place of desperation — taking on clients that are bad for you, for instance, or cutting prices out of fear — you'll ultimately cut your own throat. Look at it this way: People still need your services, and they have to get them from someone. Why *not* you? Focus on being the best at what you do, and move forward confidently. You'll not only keep your customers, you'll probably gain new ones.

➤ **Help clients conduct a "recession review" of employee skills.** The EAP can assist by asking key leaders (and their employees) to answer the following question: "*Of all my personal skills that have led to success thus far, which fit the current economic climate and which do not?*" A successful sales manager we worked with has hit the wall in the last six months, along with the salespeople who work for him. His results have been mediocre and getting worse. A portion of this is the economy — but he is aware that a big chunk of the problem lies with him.

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

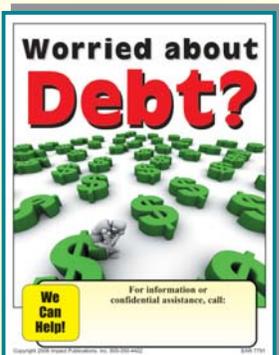
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This individual is smart, articulate, very professional, and a problem solver. This has produced great results — until now. He is also emotionally distant, difficult to read, and defects attempts to engage him in humor. He has had to develop new skills involving self-disclosure, transparency, and vulnerability. There's nothing wrong with his previous skills — it's simply not enough anymore.

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*Fear*

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➤ **Help employees to find their “familiar.”** Why is the sales manager in the previous tip so “closed off”? Why are so many business people afraid to take risks? Because, whether they work or not, at least they’re *familiar*. Simply put, it’s a feeling that we return to repeatedly. It is an emotional pattern that holds tremendous power over our choices, relationships, and careers. A familiar is subconsciously reproduced, sometimes to our benefit, but often to our detriment.

Managers can help employees tremendously by learning about their familiars. You can be sure that when things are stressful — like they are for many people these days — employees’ familiars are asserting themselves in a big way. If enough of them run counter to the skills it takes to overcome tough economic times, management has a major challenge to master.



**Editor’s Notebook**

With our crazy production schedule, this is the year-end issue of *EAR*, even though you’re receiving the December newsletter in early November.

In any case, I’d be remiss if I didn’t thank our contributors this year: David Fisher, RaeAnn Thomas, Dave Worster, and Gerald Lewis, to name a few.

I was thrilled that we probably had more writers this year for *EAR*, than at any other time since I began serving as editor in mid-2004. I am always impressed how many of you, provided we give you sufficient notice and a workable deadline, will take the time to

write excellent articles for this newsletter — and in turn assist your peers on the job!

I look forward to hopefully working with some of you again in 2009. I’m also looking forward to working with additional employee assistance professionals willing to assist either directly (writing) or indirectly (referring me to other potential writers and resources).

Thanks again! Until “next year.” ■

*Mike Jacquart*

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**Summary**

Painful as the current economy may be, in some ways it’s the proverbial blessing in disguise. Why? Because it brings employee weaknesses out into the light, where they can be confronted and conquered.

Having been through a number of recessions, what I’ve learned is that good times and high profits not only hide many sins; they also disguise a profound and damaging lack of personal and professional growth. It sometimes takes a challenging economy to demonstrate that 80% to 90% of what made us successful is *also* the cap on future growth. Remove that cap and the sky is the limit, no matter what the economy looks like. ■

*Morrie Shechtman is an international change management consultant and the author of numerous books, including “Fifth Wave Leadership; The Internal Frontier” (\$19.95, Facts on Demand Press). He is also the chairman of the consulting company, Fifth Wave Leadership (<http://fifthwaveleadership.com>).*

**Return**

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and grow — and growth is the key to business survival.

➤ **Provide honest, caring feedback.** Constantly tell employees how they’re doing. Honest feedback can be painful, but it’s the backbone of a growing organization.

➤ **Form an accountability group.** Many people fear receiving or giving feedback because they don’t want others to see their weaknesses, or to make someone uncomfortable. However, put someone in the proper setting and things can change. In accountability groups, feedback is turned into action, and group members are held accountable for implementing plans. I have found such groups to be amazingly effective in helping people overcome problems. ■

— **Morrie Shechtman**

# The Future of Meetings: Part I

By Daniel Burrus

Cutbacks and skyrocketing costs have more and more companies looking for ways to eliminate or greatly reduce travel expenses, many of which are related to meetings.

Eliminating meeting expenses is not a new concept. After 9/11, many people were afraid to fly. In response, companies rushed to try video and Web conferencing in an attempt to save time and money.

But the tools available at the time had limitations. Low bandwidth speeds made video fuzzy, and high-quality conferencing rooms were always booked. Web conferencing was useful, but limited as well.

As a result, video and Web conferencing went back to playing a minor role as companies reverted to traveling for their meeting needs.

## The Future of Relationships

Today, due to high air travel and gas costs, more people are again using video and Web conferencing to save money. However, if their only motivation

is to save money on travel, rather than the more important goals of collaboration and enhancing communication, they're missing the boat.

Smart companies are thinking of these tools more in terms of the "visual communication" benefits they provide when one can't be there face to face.

## Video, Web Can't do Everything

Consider the pros and cons of video and online conferences to determine when they are likely to work, and when face-to-face is a better option.

Face-to-face meetings are still the norm because there is no better way to build trust. And trust is the glue that creates strong, successful, and enduring business relationships.

Those who believe video conferencing will end face-to-face meetings are using "either/or" thinking, which often occurs when dazzling new technologies first appear. They see the new "gadget"

as taking the place of the current way of doing things — except that rarely is the case.

Smart companies offer both in-person and video and online conferences — allowing each to do what it does best. Video conferencing is a superb tool for saving travel time and expense, focusing on a structured agenda, obtaining senior-level points of view in real-time, building consensus, and making announcements.

However, it's *not* so good at smoothing out contentious give-and-take arrangements, or handling other emotional or sensitive issues. It's *not* either/or — "both/and" thinking is the new paradigm.

**NEXT MONTH:** How determining the goal of a meeting will reveal what technology is most appropriate. ■

*Daniel Burrus is the founder and CEO of Burrus Research, and the author of six books, including the highly acclaimed "Technotrends." For more information, visit [www.burrus.com](http://www.burrus.com).*

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# Implementing Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace: Part II

By Dr. Jarik Conrad

Ask yourself if your corporate clients employ any “Peters” in their organization. A decision has to be made about Peter, an accomplished sales director. Peter is a smart, dedicated employee who often works long hours — and it shows as the company is enjoying a record year.

But there is one problem. Peter has trouble controlling his emotions. He has frequent outbursts and talks down to people. His peers hate working with him and one of his best co-workers has threatened to quit — again.

What should be done? Many employers will try to ignore the issue because Peter has had such a positive impact on the bottom line. Unfortunately, this problem rarely goes away, and it often gets worse.

Emotional intelligence methods can help! Last month, we discussed what emotional intelligence is. In the conclusion of this two-part article, we will describe ways to improve emotional intelligence — and minimize “Peter” incidents — in *your* organization:

**1. Incorporate EI into hiring processes.** The first step to implement emotional intelligence is to develop interview questions designed to assess self-awareness, interpersonal skills, stress management, adaptability, and optimism. This is important because it is better to be proactive on the front end than reactive once an individual with attitude problems is hired.

Such questions will also help set appropriate behavioral expecta-

tions for any aspiring candidate. Examples include:

- a. *What has been your most stressful work experience? How did you manage your stress?*
- b. *Tell me about a time when your ability to empathize with a customer or co-worker enabled you to solve a challenging problem.*

**2. Assess the emotional intelligence of current, and future leaders.** Since everybody is different, an assessment such as the Bar-On Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQi), the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT), or the Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI) would be ideal to pinpoint specific areas of opportunity for leaders and aspiring leaders. The EQi provides a good sense of how people assess their own EI, the MSCEIT measures one's EI abilities, and the ECI measures how others assess one's EI.

**3. Ensure that performance appraisals take into account HOW a job gets done.** Reinforce to employees, especially leaders, the importance of interacting with

others effectively. Help them understand how to maximize their contributions without minimizing the contributions of others. This can be accomplished through ensuring that a significant portion of performance is attributed to areas like communication, teamwork, and flexibility.

**4. Make emotional intelligence a cornerstone of the succession planning process.** Along with the standard technical and educational requirements, document the “soft” skills necessary for effective performance in each key position in the organization. Ask employees what it takes to be effective in their jobs — the skills *not* included in their job descriptions.

## Summary

Using emotional intelligence strategies effectively in an organization will dramatically increase the likelihood of having a great combination — people who do the right things, while doing things right. ■

*Jarik Conrad is president of Conrad Consulting Group, and author of “The Fragile Mind,” which explores emotional intelligence, race relations, and urban violence. For more information, visit [www.conradconsultinggroup.com](http://www.conradconsultinggroup.com).*

## Resources

🔗 *The Common Sense Fix* contains scores of suggestions and resources to address the nation's economic woes. Visit [www.daveramsey.com](http://www.daveramsey.com).

🔗 *Record Retention Dos and Don'ts: What to Save, What to Dump*, \$99, .pdf download, PBP Executive Reports, [www.pbpreport.com](http://www.pbpreport.com), (800) 220-5000. This report sorts through the requirements

of state and federal regulations — telling you what records to keep, where, and for how long.

📖 *Value Prop: Create Powerful B Value Propositions To Enter and Win New Markets*, by Jose Palomino, Cody Rock Press, [www.codyrockpress.com](http://www.codyrockpress.com), [www.valueprop.com](http://www.valueprop.com). This concise book focuses on marketing challenges, such as product branding, and explaining how to stand out in a crowded marketplace. ■

# Tips to Safely Share Holiday Happiness

By Carrie Brown-Wolf

Today's politically correct climate calls communities, schools, and businesses to question their holiday traditions. School choirs no longer sing "Silent Night" without fear of lawsuits. Community menorahs are snuffed and manglers vandalized.

But don't toss the Christmas tree or Kwanzaa candles out just yet. Employees benefit from a healthy holiday party or other gathering. Options *do* exist. Follow these tips to create an all-encompassing holiday tone:

☑ **Survey employees to discover their cultural heritage in a positive, informative manner.** This is a terrific time of year to engage people in their personal identities. Let workers know that your organization cares about their personal

lives and does not want to offend or exclude anyone.

Moreover, raising the issue of cultural and religious diversity will help eliminate fears and misconceptions. If a business sets an accepting tone, employees will feel the freedom to express themselves. However, allow people to opt out of participating if it is sensitive or uncomfortable.

☑ **Decorate and design a non-offensive holiday party.** Almost all cultures cherish and celebrate light during the dark winter months. String white lights throughout the office and light candles during formal parties. Include employees by asking them what they'd like to see.

☑ **Offer a training program or workshop to raise awareness.** Workshops can be specific to gender issues, race and ethnicity, etc. The EAP may be able to help.

☑ **Celebrate all traditions.** Play ethnic music and offer a variety of foods at holiday gatherings. Through the survey, discover what foods aren't tolerated by their culture and don't offer them. Don't back away from wishing someone "Merry Christmas," but also offer "Happy Hanukkah" or "Happy New Year."

Say "hello" in Arabic (Marhaba) or "peace be with you" in Hindi (Namaste). Be clear the intent isn't to speak another language, but rather to recognize and respect cultural heritage.

## Summary

We live in a global society and organizations should reflect and encourage personal traditions. Communication, productivity, and a peaceful atmosphere will abound. ■

*Carrie Brown-Wolf is a national speaker and author of "Soul Sunday: A Family's Guide to Exploring Faith and Teaching Tolerance." For more information, visit [www.carriebrownwolf.com](http://www.carriebrownwolf.com).*

## Workplace Survey

# Lunch Breaks are Disappearing

Could the "lunch hour" be facing extinction? According to a recent survey, executives said their average lunch break is 35 minutes — seven minutes less than what they reported five years ago. Managers also admitted they work through lunch more than half of the time.

"In today's 24/7 workplace, a lunch break often takes a back seat to emails, phone calls, meetings and pressing deadlines," said Dave Willmer, executive director of OfficeTeam, which conducted the study. "Many people are doing more work with fewer resources and, therefore, putting in more time at their desks."

But Willmer cautioned that professionals need time away from their desks to recharge and remain productive. He added, "Managers set an example for their staff. If they don't take a break for lunch, their employees may feel inclined to do the same."

Use the following tips to reclaim the shrinking lunch break:

✓ **Plan your day.** Schedule your break to fall between projects, if possible, and set morning deadlines for important tasks so you can relax over lunch.

✓ **Schedule lunch with colleagues.** During a busy period, change a team meeting to a working lunch outside the office. The time

away will improve your energy while maintaining productivity.

✓ **Book an appointment.** Block off your online calendar so co-workers don't schedule calls or meetings during that time. Be flexible, though, if there are no other options.

✓ **Step away from the desk.** If you are unable to leave your building for lunch, take a walk around the office. Eat in the lunch room or break area with colleagues.

✓ **Put work aside.** If you have to be near your computer or phone, face your chair away and do a non-work activity, such as reading a newspaper or magazine. ■

*Source: OfficeTeam ([www.officeteam.com](http://www.officeteam.com)).*

# Declare Your Independence from Chaos

By Michelle LaBrosse

It's easy to get caught up in the pace of our hectic lifestyles, both at home and at work. If you're finding that stress and chaos are becoming the norm, it's time to transform the storm into calm. Here are a few tips that I use to manage stress:

☑ **Identify the source of your stress.** Do you find yourself saying, "I'm stressed," without really knowing why? Are you saying, "yes" to everything and overloading your calendar? Are you working long hours without a break and feeling cheated because you don't have any personal time? Are you part of the sandwich generation caring for both your children and your parents? Before you develop a plan, you need to identify what stresses you most.

☑ **Build a support team.** Many times, we're stressed largely because we've taken everything onto our own shoulders without asking for help. Pinpoint the people you need on your support team. The EAP? Others? They are probably already there, but you're not asking them for help.

☑ **Catch your ZZZZ's.** While getting little sleep may have been a badge of honor in college (or even in some companies), don't buy into this myth. Sleep deprivation reduces your concentration and overall effectiveness. If you're not getting enough sleep, get some ideas that will help. Again, the EAP may be able to help.

☑ **Find joy in exercise.** Exercise is one of the best stress-busters, so find something you'll enjoy and stick with it. Whatever exercise it is, even a short walk,

it'll give your brain a boost as you take a break from the computer and whatever is weighing heavily on your mind.

☑ **Make fun a bigger part of your life.** What is really fun for you, and more importantly, when was the last time you had fun? If fun is relegated to a handful of times a year, you need to make a commitment to enjoy life more and stress about things less.

☑ **Design your own personalized stress-management plan.** Use steps like these to formulate ideas and pinpoint what *you* need to do to lower the stress in *your* life. ■

*Michelle LaBrosse is the founder of Cheetah Learning. For more information, visit [www.cheetahlearning.com](http://www.cheetahlearning.com).*

*(Editor's note: This article was accidentally teased as appearing in the November newsletter. EAR apologizes for any inconvenience caused by this error.)*

## Washington Beat

# Congress Passes Bill to Address Mental Illness

Congress was recently commended for passing the *Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Reauthorization and Improvement Act*. The legislation now proceeds to the President's desk for signature.

The bill, reauthorized for an additional five years at \$50 million per year, is designed to address the fact that people with mental illnesses are overrepresented in all aspects of the criminal justice system.

Estimates indicate that between 7% and 16% of inmates have mental illnesses, rates that are four times higher for men (and eight times higher for women) than found in the general population.

In many cases, these individuals are not violent criminals, but low-level offenders. Moreover, it costs more to treat people in jail or prison than it does in community-based settings.

The bill created a program to improve collaborative efforts between criminal justice and mental health systems. The reauthorization will expand training for law enforcement officials to identify and appropriately respond to individuals with mental illnesses. ■

*Source: Council of State Governments Justice Center (<http://justicecenter.csg.org>).*

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## Companies Must Do Better Job Recruiting Millennials

Companies must do a better job of hiring, appreciating, and motivating younger workers or risk competitive disadvantage, warns Jobfox CEO Rob McGovern.

McGovern was responding to a new Jobfox poll in which Gen-Y workers, also known as Millennials, are perceived by recruiters as being the weakest performers among the four generations that now comprise the U.S. workforce.

McGovern believes it is corporate leaders — not Gen-Y professionals — who need attitude adjustments. Gen Y will ultimately represent the largest population of workers since the Baby Boomers.

“The companies that succeed over the next two decades will be the ones that can most inspire Gen Y,” he said. “This is the most edu-

cated and technologically savvy generation ever.”

Only 20% of recruiters surveyed classified Gen Y as “generally great performers.” This compares to 63% of recruiters polled who said Baby Boomers (43 to 62 years old) were great performers, 58% who gave high marks to Gen X (29 to 42) and 25% for Traditionalists (63 and older).

McGovern cites four major motivators for Millennials at work:

➤ **The new reward is balance.** Gen Y doesn’t understand the rigidity of the 9-to-5 work week created by Baby Boomers. Millennials work best when they can set their own hours to get work accomplished. Flexible schedules are highly coveted by younger workers.

➤ **Keep them cutting-edge.** Millennials understand better than older workers that everything

becomes quickly obsolete, including skills. Companies must do a better job at providing new learning experiences for Gen Y or they will seek new opportunities elsewhere.

➤ **Don’t treat them as “junior” anything.** “This is a generation that was taught that everyone is special, that everyone gets a trophy — win or lose,” McGovern said. “They won’t be satisfied working inside the corporate machine. They want to contribute immediately and companies must do a better job of helping younger workers see how their work is important and how what they do relates to the overall goals of the company.”

➤ **Provide stability.** Counter to what many think, Gen-Y workers are loyal team players as long as they can balance work and life goals, gain new learning opportunities, and feel a part of company goals. In a recent survey, for example, 60% of Gen Yers agreed that an employee owes loyalty to their employer. ■

Source: Jobfox ([www.jobfox.com](http://www.jobfox.com)).

## Lack of Trust in HR a Significant Concern

Are employees fearful of their HR department? A recent survey revealed that nearly 70% of employees go elsewhere when faced with a problem in the workplace.

According to the Ouch Point® survey from Opinion Research Corp., workers are nearly twice as likely to speak to a friend or colleague than their organization’s HR department if they have an issue at work. Results broke down like this:

➤ Although 66% of employees would opt to speak to their manager about an issue, 39% prefer to turn to friends, and only 22% would go to their HR department for help.

➤ With more experience in the workplace, only 17% of older respondents (ages 55-64) were not likely to contact HR — as opposed to younger workers (ages 18-24), approximately one-third (32%) of which said they wouldn’t approach HR with a problem.

➤ One of the survey’s more surprising findings is that over one quarter of respondents (26%) expressed doubt about the ability of HR to keep personal details confidential. Older respondents between the ages of 55 and 64 were significantly less confident about the discretion of HR (33%) than those between the ages of 18 and 24 (22%).

“The role HR plays within an organization should not be underestimated,” said Vicki Wheatley, vice president. “The success of any enterprise depends significantly on the extent to which its workforce is engaged with and dedicated to its mission.”

Social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook continue to wield influence in the workplace. Nearly one-third of those polled for the survey said that an odd profile would influence their view of an individual’s employability. ■

Source: Opinion Research Corp., an infoGroup company, is a global market research firm. For more information, visit [www.opinionresearch.com](http://www.opinionresearch.com).