

# EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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supporting EAP professionals

## A New Foundation to Lead EAP through the 21st Century

By Carl Tisone

It will come as no surprise to anyone working in the Employee Assistance field that we are, once again, facing a perplexing dilemma. At the very least, this predicament impedes our effectiveness as practitioners. At the worse, some believe it threatens our existence as a profession.

If you haven't already guessed, I am referring to the phenomenon of "commoditization" of the EAP industry. Consider the following statement from Dave Sharar in his "Institute for Advanced EAP Training" 2007 Web seminar: "Over the period from 1994 to 2004 in the U.S., the average capitated rate for a 'full-service EAP' declined from \$25 per covered employee household to just under \$17 (unpublished survey). During that same period of time, total corporate spending on health-care benefits rose from approximately \$3,600 per employee to over \$6,200. One of the most significant components of this increase was in the purchase of psychotropic prescription drugs." (Editor's note: Capitation may be defined as a uniform per capita payment or fee.)

What's wrong with this picture? Have prescription drugs escaped the scrutiny of the managed behavioral care industry? (Yes, by being prescribed by general practitioners.)

Have EAP professionals decided that they were grossly overcharging their clients? (Hardly!) Then why do EAPs continue to be commoditized even as drug treatments are gaining so rapidly in popularity?

Sharar suggests that we may have "shot ourselves in the foot" with capitated pricing of EAPs. While there are certainly pros and cons of capitation as a pricing tactic, I believe that more fundamental factors are at play in greasing the slippery slope toward commoditization. In this article, I will propose a modest solution of sorts. However, we must first examine the factors that led to commoditization if we are to have any success in reversing them.

### EAP as a Commodity

The EAP profession must assume responsibility for allowing commoditization to happen. Markets always seek equilibrium, and if the right factors are in place, they will commoditize virtually any industry. In our eagerness to expand EAPs, we have been willing partners in the march toward EAP commoditization.

Commoditization is a threat from two different, but equally dangerous directions. For providers, of course, it creates huge challenges to the ability to maintain financial health and solvency. Although these chal-

lenges are not insurmountable, failure to adequately cope with them raises the specter of potential ethical violations as a result of desperate cost cutting and/or misleading client reporting.

Commoditization forces even the most ethical of providers to use every ounce of market and operational creativity they can muster in order to stay afloat. This is a serious risk to our industry — and more importantly — it's a risk to both our corporate and individual clients.

I contend that true EAP need not become a commodity unless we

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allow it. Moreover, I would suggest that we have lost sight of our roots — specifically the *focus on job performance*. When is the last time we have been asked in a “Request for Proposal” to develop a program for the primary purpose of enhancing work performance and productivity? We have modeled a commodity-style counseling program that the world is responding to by buying “cheap and cheerful” counseling services. Are they cost-effective? It doesn’t really matter since they’re so darn cheap.

### Professionals and Providers

At first glance, the distinction between EAP “professionals” and “providers” may appear redundant. Aren’t there EAP professionals who are also providers? Of course. Aren’t all providers also “professionals”? Maybe not, although certainly the majority of providers maintain some level of professional credentialing.

Rather, the significant issue is that this lack of consensus is undermining our credibility and effectiveness, in terms of both professional recognition as well as our financial viability as providers. Put another way, the blurring of this distinction has contributed to the problem currently facing the EAP field. Providers are locked into a spiral of downward pricing and industry consolidation precisely because *our body of work is not valued as a profession*.

### Health Benefit or Work Program?

Due to the managed-care imperative with which we were faced, we need not apologize for the movement of EAPs into health care in the late 1980s and early 1990s. EAPs played a significant role in managed-behavioral care in the U.S., and they continue to do so today.

However, the shift of focus from the workplace has undermined the appreciation of the primary benefit that gave rise to our industry — i.e. the improvement of organizational performance. Perhaps we are now paying the price for this foray into the world of health. (**Editor’s note:** See also the July and September 2007 *EARs*.)

### What Can We Do?

It is time for EAP “professionals” and “providers” alike to pull together to revive our field and raise it to a level where we can truly optimize our effectiveness. This will require focus, commitment, and a refusal to engage in turf wars. I propose to create a nonprofit foundation, unaligned with any EAP provider or professional interest group. Its purpose — to bring professional legitimacy to our field through the funding and conduct of high level, academically rigorous research on the efficacy of EAP and its many components. I envision an organization that is inclusive in its participation requirements, but strictly independent in its mission to seek empirical proof of EAP efficiency.

The Employee Assistance Research Foundation would most likely be comprised of an advisory board, a funding component, a decision-making council, and possibly a publication arm. To register your interest in any level of participation, visit [www.eapfoundation.org](http://www.eapfoundation.org). (**Editor’s note:** See the accompanying story on page 3 for more information about the formation of this foundation.)

### Summary

My proposal is not revolutionary — many others have voiced similar sentiments. What I hope to stimulate, however, is the momentum required to overcome the inertia caused by the overwhelming daily demands of our work. The forma-

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

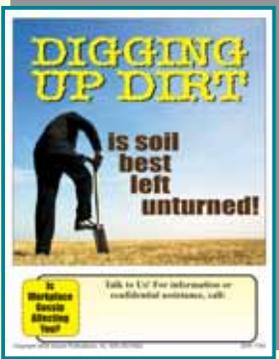
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tion of an EAP Foundation may not be as *urgent* as our desire to win the next competitive bid — but I would contend that, in the long run, it is actually more *important*. It’s time for the EAP industry to move from our perceived image as a “field” to that of a true “profession.” We must pull together as never before in order to achieve success. ■

*Carl Tisone is the founder and CEO of PPC Worldwide ([www.ppcworldwide.com](http://www.ppcworldwide.com)). Editor’s note: This article is condensed with permission from Carl’s “Call to Action” article at [www.eapfoundation.org/call\\_to\\_action](http://www.eapfoundation.org/call_to_action). Additional information on this organization is available at the aforementioned website.*

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## Editor's Notebook

Happy new year!  
You may notice a few minor “tweaks” to the January *EAR* —

including this notebook and a more casual picture of myself. Speaking of “new” things, the recent reader surveys led us to make a few changes for 2008:

- By a slight majority, readers indicated they find Payroll Stuffers useful, and of those, many indicated they’d like to see them appear in this newsletter more often. As a result, beginning with this newsletter, Payroll Stuffers will be included monthly with each issue of *EAR*.
- Instead of providing a quarterly Poster catalog — in 2008 we ask you to access and order

Posters on our website at [www.impact-publications.com](http://www.impact-publications.com). From there go to the “EARN” link. You may view posters by **category** (i.e. stress, anger management, etc.) This is something you weren’t able to do in our catalog. We also have **20 NEW** full-color posters for you to choose from. Most importantly, we believe that Posters are a very cost-effective way to enhance awareness of your EAP.

If you have any questions about our changes, contact me at the phone or email below. Until next month.

Mike Jacquart, Editor  
(715) 258-2448

[mikej@impact-publications.com](mailto:mikej@impact-publications.com)

# \$1 Million Pledged; Senior Advisor Named

**S**eed money totaling \$1 million from the Tisone Family Foundation has been pledged to launch the Employee Assistance Research Foundation. In addition, Paul Roman has accepted the position of senior advisor to the foundation’s Board of Directors. The board is currently being formed from leading industry experts.

“The Employee Assistance Research Foundation is the *only* way forward for the industry,” said Dr. Paul Roman at the foundation’s inaugural meeting in San Diego. “It is time for providers and purchasers alike to focus on the efficacy of our many and varied EA practices. A foundation to support independent, scientifically-based research on EAP practices is long overdue.”

Roman is considered the leading academic scholar in the Employee Assistance field. He is best known for “EAP Core Technology,” a set of guidelines issued in 1984 that rapidly became the industry standard. Roman is currently Distinguished Research Professor and Director of the Center for Research on Behavioral Health and Human Service Delivery with the Institute for Behavioral Research at the University of Georgia.

Other distinguished attendees at the meeting included Dr. Dale Masi, who led one of four breakout discussion groups; Dr. Paul Maiden, Vice Dean of the University of Southern California’s School of Social Work; Paul Heck, Global Director of EAP for the DuPont Company;

and John Burke, internationally recognized EA advisor. Each individual provided personal perspectives on the need to elevate the EA profession.

“We need not accept commoditization,” stated Foundation Chairman Carl Tisone. “But we need to recognize and accept the efficiency of mature markets. We need not give away ‘free’ EAP services, but it is incumbent upon us to demonstrate the true value of our services if we expect to be compensated fairly. What we must do is reinvent ourselves and elevate our profession to the respect it deserves.” ■

Source: Employee Assistance Research Foundation. For more information, contact Carl Tisone, foundation chairman, at [ctisone@eapfoundation.org](mailto:ctisone@eapfoundation.org) or visit [www.eapfoundation.org](http://www.eapfoundation.org).

# Better Understanding Borderline Personality Disorder

By *Jamie Brinkman*

If it wasn't self-mutilation, it was drugs. If it wasn't drugs, it was depression. Worst of all, even when \*Marie wasn't experiencing these problems, she was often hysterical and engaged in outbursts of rage against her two loving parents, who had done nothing to trigger it. (\* This is a fictional name.)

Marie's parents took her to several psychologists and before the age of 15, she had a mental health file three inches thick with a variety of contradicting diagnoses. Many doctors could see symptoms of bipolar, but they ruled it out because she was considered too young for that diagnosis.

Medications worked to relieve the most serious symptoms, such as anger and reckless behavior. Unfortunately, Marie couldn't keep a therapist for very long and would ultimately end up making irrational accusations against them.

## Problems with the Law

After years of trying to find a solution, Marie's parents gave up. She soon found herself in the world of drug addiction and alcoholism. Marie was finally sent to juvenile detention after she was caught in possession of drugs and drug paraphernalia. She was taken to a drug treatment center in a nearby city, where she was released a few weeks later.

Within a few months Marie's parents began noticing that her prescription medications were

being used before the refill date. They later found out that she had been abusing her medications to get high. Marie informed her therapist that she knew her probation officer wouldn't be able to detect her drug use.

The next few years brought a mix of continued anger and problems with the law. Marie was either shoplifting, driving recklessly, or displaying episodes of anorexia nervosa. It seemed as though there was no hope for her.

## Borderline Personality Disorder

While researching mental illness on the Internet, Marie's mother came across some information on Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). She printed out the information and show it to Marie's therapist. This was the turning point of Marie's recovery. She underwent an extensive psychiatric evaluation and was diagnosed with bipolar and BPD.

While less known than schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, BPD is actually more common, affecting 2% of adults, mostly young women. There is a high rate of self-injury and suicide attempts. Patients often need extensive mental health services, and those with BPD account for 20% of psychiatric hospitalizations. Yet, with help, many people with BPD improve over time and are eventually able to lead productive lives.

## Symptoms of BPD

Symptoms of BPD include:

- Unstable and intense interpersonal

relationships;

- Impulsiveness in potentially damaging behavior such as substance abuse, unsafe sex, shoplifting, reckless driving, and binge eating;
- Severe mood shifts;
- Frequent and inappropriate displays of anger; and
- Recurrent suicidal threats or gestures, or self-mutilating behavior.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), while a person with depression or bipolar typically endures the same mood for weeks, a person with BPD may experience intense bouts of anger, depression, and anxiety that may last only hours, or at most a day. They may feel misunderstood, bored, and empty, with little sense of identity. Symptoms are most severe when people with BPD feel isolated, and may result in frantic efforts to avoid being alone.

The NIMH explains that people with BPD often have highly unstable relationships. Their attitudes toward family and friends may suddenly shift from great admiration and love to intense anger and hate. Thus, they may form an immediate attachment and idealize the other person, but when a slight separation of conflict occurs, they unexpectedly switch to the other extreme and angrily accuse the other person of not caring for them at all.

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### What Causes BPD?

The family background of someone with BPD may include alcoholism, depression, or other extreme dysfunction, such as an absent or abusive parent. The childhood of someone with BPD is often lonely, painted with violence, and ruled by fear. Individuals with BPD will go to dangerous extremes to satisfy their longing for affection and then, at the drop of a hat will lash out in violent rages against the same people that they desire affection from.

Marie has learned to live with her illnesses. She attends a weekly Dialectical Behavior Therapy group. Her therapy is designed to help Marie reconstruct her “broken” thought process. As a result, Marie is creating a better balance for herself and the people in her life. She takes medications and participates in monthly meetings with her psychiatrist to remain stable.

Although her disorders have the potential to throw her back into the abyss of chaos, Marie has maintained a focus that helps her succeed in life. She recently graduated from a local college and is working her way up in the medical field.

Marie’s story offers hope to other people still searching for the answers to their problems. Mental health centers can help with treatment of this mysterious illness. If either yourself or a loved one has any of these symptoms, find help. There is another side of life. ■

*Jamie Brinkman is the coordinator for the South Dakota chapter of Citizens United to Rehabilitate Errants (CURE), and is a student at the Institute of Children’s Literature. Editor’s note: The information provided in this article is for educational purposes only and should not be construed as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.*

## Legislative Update

# Suicide Prevention Bill Advances

The Suicide Prevention Action Network USA (SPAN USA) recently praised the U.S. Senate for unanimously approving an amended version of the House-passed *Joshua Omgig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act*. The House also passed the bill in late 2007.

“Research shows us that male U.S. veterans are twice as likely to die by suicide than those without military service – making passage of the *Joshua Omgig Veterans Suicide Prevention Act* all the more critical,” said Jerry Reed, executive director of SPAN USA.

The bill is named for Joshua Omgig, who suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder following an 11-month tour of duty in Iraq, and completed suicide in 2005 at his home in Iowa.

The bill directs the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to develop and

implement a comprehensive program to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans, would make available 24-hour mental health care for veterans found to be at risk, and would develop an outreach and education program for veterans and their families to recognize readjustment problems and promote mental health.

More than 31,000 people die by suicide each year in the United States and approximately 1.4 million attempt suicide. In contrast, fewer than 20,000 die by homicide or from HIV/AIDS. Two-thirds of those who die by suicide are not receiving treatment at the time of their death. ■

*Source: SPAN USA ([www.spanusa.org](http://www.spanusa.org)). SPAN USA recently announced a new Web page with information for how advocates in each state can work to prevent suicide in their community. See [www.spanusa.org/states](http://www.spanusa.org/states).*

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# The Destructive Gossip

By Tom Terez

There's good reason for the saying, "A lie is halfway around the world while truth is still putting its shoes on."

Unfounded rumors and gossip spread quickly and can be devastating — reputations can be damaged and people can even get fired before the truth is revealed.

The trick lies in not letting yourself get sucked into the gossip vortex. If you're with a group, and the water-cooler conversation starts sounding like the *National Enquirer*, politely excuse yourself and walk away.

If you're willing to take a stand

against gossip in the workplace, stay with the group and do your best to change the subject. Do it subtly, though — there's nothing to be gained by turning this situation into a heated confrontation.

Here's one approach that can get the conversation back on course: "You know, we probably shouldn't be talking about John when he's not here to give us his side of the story. When will we be seeing him next?"

Be ready to offer your response if people are spreading rumors about you. You have to intervene — otherwise the stories will take on a life of their own.

Approach the source of the stories in a civil way. Mention that you've heard the stories that are going

around, and ask the person where they heard them and what they believe to be true. Use the conversation to state the facts. Ideally, try to include a few colleagues in this exchange. With some co-workers on hand, it will turn into a public clarification — perhaps even an apology.

If gossip and rumors are running rampant, start analyzing why. Is internal competition pitting people against one another? Are systems in place that compel people to hoard data and resources? Is there an up-or-out culture, with people spreading rumors to keep colleagues from getting ahead? Dig deeply to uncover root causes. The EAP can help. ■

*Tom Terez is a speaker, workshop leader, and author of "22 Keys to Creating a Meaningful Workplace." His website, [www.BetterWorkplaceNow.com](http://www.BetterWorkplaceNow.com) is filled with tools for building a great work environment. Call (614) 571-9529 or email [Tom@BetterWorkplaceNow.com](mailto:Tom@BetterWorkplaceNow.com).*

# Meetings can be FUN!

By Kevin Eikenberry

We all know that meetings can be as much "fun" as going to a dentist's office.

If you're not leading — or participating in — meetings that make a difference, that are worth your time, and (dare we say it) FUN — there is hope!

What's more, there are real "bottom line" reasons for making meetings more fun — reasons such as increased communication, improved working relationships, and increased energy. The following are some suggestions for making meetings fun, and not boring:

- **Set a fun expectation** — Let people know that it is OK to have a little fun in a meeting. In fact, let them know that is your preference, as long as the meeting's objectives are still reached.
- **Set the atmosphere** — Loosen people up and allow them to be more relaxed and open. Consider playing fun, upbeat

music before the meeting starts, or find a funny cartoon and share it with everyone at the start of the meeting (or project it on the screen for people to see).

- **Engage their brains** — Come up with a quick trivia question or a simple puzzle exercise. Award the winner a candy bar or something else that's simple, and yet fun. As well as fun, you now have people ready to work, clearing any mental cobwebs they may have had.
- **Moment of appreciation** — Give people the chance to thank others or to otherwise express appreciation. This is a powerful way to build teamwork. While this isn't fun in a traditional sense, it will bring an important and enjoyable element to your meetings.
- **Toys on the table** — Many people are fidgeters. When you give people something to do with their hands they will remain more

engaged in the meeting. Koosh balls, Nerf balls, or Silly Putty work great. Or, you may find other items that will work. ■

*Kevin Eikenberry is the author of "Remarkable Leadership: Unleashing Your Leadership Potential One Skill at a Time," [www.RemarkableLeadershipBook.com](http://www.RemarkableLeadershipBook.com).*

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# Assertiveness can be Learned — Just not in a Day

By *Korrine Rietz*

I was once invited to be a presenter at a conference about learning how to speak up to bosses and co-workers.

I did not feel qualified to speak on this topic, as I have never seen myself as an expert on assertiveness. In fact, it took me many years to develop the confidence and courage I needed to stand up for myself and tackle difficult situation.

Then, I remembered that I had helped many employees get what they needed and wanted from their jobs. Having faced many of the same fears about being assertive has taught me strategies and techniques that I can share with others.

Assertiveness is a way of thinking and behaving that allows a person to stand up for his or her rights while respecting the rights of others. Assertive people generally have a positive self-image. They have a sense of pride and self-respect. Other people usually view an assertive person as being capable, independent, honest, and able to make his/her own decisions. Being assertive means:

- Standing up for your rights;
- Making sure other people understand what you need and want;
- Openly and honestly expressing your opinions and feelings;
- Respecting other people's rights and opinions; and
- Listening to other people.

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*“Role-playing a variety of problems or situations is a good way to help people overcome their fears and learn to speak up...”*

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## Teaching Assertiveness

But how can you help someone learn to be assertive? I have known many people who avoid or tolerate situations they are unhappy with for fear of rejection, hurt feelings, or dealing with another person's anger. In addition, some people simply can't express themselves very well, while still others may be shy. Role-playing a variety of problems or situations is a good way to help people overcome their fears and learn to speak up for themselves.

Role-playing can be done individually or in a group. If you're teaching in a group, ask participants to choose several scenarios to role-play. Act out the problem and have two different solutions — one that is inappropriate because it is aggressive or passive; and the other, an appropriate, assertive solution.

Discuss which response was most successful and why. The group I used this approach with reported it was fun, and they learned a lot. The following problem situations were among the most common:

- *Exclusion in workplace* — “On Monday everyone at work was talking about the

party my co-workers had all attended. I didn't even know about it.”

- *Poor or non-existent relationships with supervisors and/or co-workers* — “No one talks to me at work. Sometimes I feel like I am invisible.”
- *Different expectations for doing the same job* — “I get yelled at when I don't double-bag the garbage can. My co-worker doesn't do this, and he never gets in trouble.”

The following are a few of the problem-solving steps the EAP can role-play with the employee to help the individual present his/her case.

- Explain what is happening, why it is a problem, or why you want a change made.
- If there is something you think can be done to solve the problem, tell the other person what you think the solution should be.
- Even if you don't have any suggestions to solve the problem, make sure the other person still understands your concerns.

In conclusion, assertive behavior is not learned in a day. Only by practice will assertiveness become a natural part of behavior. ■

*Korrine Rietz is a team leader and division manager with Community Industries in Stevens Point, WI.*

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# Building an Effective Referral Network

By Alan Bayham

For many small-business owners, the thought of attending a networking event is enough to make them cringe. After all, overworked people don't enjoy spending what little free time they have attempting to sell products or services; often with little to show for their time.

But instead of networking with potential clients, consider networking with other businesses that can help you succeed. In this way, you're developing a referral network of sorts, meaning that everyone within your circle of influence sends clients to each other and uses the skills and expertise of each other to build their own business.

For example, a plumber can form an alliance with a carpenter. Then, when the carpenter has a job to do — like installing new kitchen cabinets in a home — he can refer the plumber to the homeowner to help install the new sink or move any existing water lines. Since the homeowner knows, likes and trusts the carpenter, he or she takes the referral as a sincere recommendation and a testimony to the plumber's skills, and is more likely to call the plumber for the job.

While this is a simplistic example, the concept works for any profession. A graphic designer can network with advertising firms, a restaurant owner can network with hotel owners, a car insurance agent can network with car dealers or auto body repair shops...the possibilities are endless.

If this idea of networking

sounds more appealing than chasing down potential clients, consider these guidelines:

## 1. Know Thyself

Before you attempt to network, you first need to know your business and what makes it unique. Why would someone choose you over your competitors? What do you do or offer that no one else can match? The idea is to pinpoint why another business would want to partner with you and refer their clients to you. Think in terms of how you can make the other person's life easier. Be specific. Simply saying you offer "great customer service" is not unique.

## 2. Be Clear About Your Wants

What do you hope this business can do for you? What kind of referral are you looking for? Again, be specific. So if you're looking for referrals who are dog owners, live on the north side of town, and earn over \$50,000 per year, state that. By doing so, you can better team up with other companies that can give you a specific type of referral.

## 3. Network Face-to-Face

Now that you're clear on who you are and what you want, it's time to make some contacts. You can do this by going to Chamber events, or even simply go to the office of another business owner and introduce yourself. When you network, make sure you do it face-to-face, not through emails or phone calls. You need to see and gauge body language, facial expressions, and eye contact to

know if you have a valid contact. Finally, ask the other person questions, and listen more than talk. The idea is not to sell your business, but to sell your *relationship*.

## 4. Follow Up

As with any networking endeavor, follow-up is extremely important. Chances are, someone won't remember you after one brief meeting. Also realize that sometimes following up with someone needs to be done more leisurely, such as breakfast or lunch. However, this type of personal touch will enhance the relationship.

## 5. Give as Well as Get

No relationship can be one-sided and successful. You have to *give* referrals to those you've built alliances with as well as getting referrals. On the flip side, if you're always giving referrals and never *getting* them, you need to re-consider the relationship and whether it is truly beneficial. Finally, when you do receive a referral from someone, thank the party whether the referral pans out or not. Gratitude goes a long way.

## Summary

While networking with an individual client may give you quick rewards, networking with other businesses and creating referral sources will give you long-term results in 2008. ■

*Alan Bayham, the president of Bayham Consulting, LLC, has worked with small, medium, and large businesses. For more information, contact Alan at (504) 259-8682 or visit [www.bayhamconsulting.com](http://www.bayhamconsulting.com).*