

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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supporting EAP professionals

The Returning Veteran: *An EAP Update*

By Jon Christensen

A number of articles on how employers might best serve veterans returning to the workplace have been published in *Employee Assistance Report*. These articles, and others, outline many of the concerns facing returning veterans and their families. This month's article presents an opportunity to consider issues specific to employers, co-workers, and the EAP professionals who provide services in the work environment.

Lessons Learned

"Lessons Learned" is a military term for: "Did we do it right, and what can we do to be more effective next time?" The good news, and there is a great deal of good

news, is that this is a more diverse group of veterans than we have seen in the past. The following are some examples of this diversity.

➤ This is a professional and volunteer force. These men and women know what they signed up for, and it wasn't just for part-time employment and education benefits. It was to do a job, and to be of service. As a result, their training and preparation is different. It corresponds to the intelligence of enlisted personnel and officers. Both groups understand the mission, and want to be part of making that mission successful.

➤ While still a young person's job, older veterans in the Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserves are pulling their own weight. However, older vets may have distinct concerns and perspectives on deployment-related tasks, and different responsibilities waiting at home, than their younger counterparts.

➤ U.S. soldiers serving in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan, and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) are male and female, young, and old. They are single, married, and they are single parents. Whatever the case, their lives have been changed, and those changes will have an impact on the family and work environments they return to.

Additional Lessons Learned

Americans have traditionally "mingled" with the people in the countries they visit during their military service. There are usually many opportunities to develop relationships with the natives of a particular country. However, because of the significant differences between American and Middle Eastern cultures, those occasions have been curtailed and carefully monitored. The impact of this decision is not yet known.

As in any war, veterans return

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to the states feeling much different about life than when they left. Moreover, they have experienced a radically different culture under stressful conditions. They have assumed responsibility, and made decisions “beyond their years.” Those experiences have been added to the fabric of who they are and how they view the world.

However, unlike other conflicts, OEF and OIF soldiers know they will probably have to return to a combat theater, and that awareness places a strain on them, their families, and their employer. **(Editor’s note:** Merriam-Webster online defines a theater of operations as “the part of a theater of war in which active combat operations are conducted.”)

Yet, this is what they signed up for — it’s part of their military obligation. Veterans are proud of their mission, and their abilities. In fact, “The Mission” is another military term (and it’s all about the mission).

OEF and OIF veterans are men and women who are working together, serving together, and learning from each other. They are resilient, intelligent, mature, and able to lead — as well as to follow.

In summary, OEF and OIF vets comprise an employee group that has made a contribution to the workforce, and is ready to make an

“Treatment providers will have to closely watch those showing symptoms of PTSD to see how stress develops with these vets. It is hoped that the correct tools are being used, but there may be some surprises.”

even greater contribution when given the chance. Do they have emotional baggage from their wartime experiences? Most soldiers experience at least some “baggage.” Other veterans have a lot of baggage. A fortunate few appear to escape relatively unscathed.

One real plus for these returning soldiers is that the military and the Veterans Administration are learning from past experiences. They are doing things for these veterans that they didn’t do for Vietnam vets. Consequently, these “lessons learned” are paying off as it has led to an offering of proactive services and has helped with the soldier’s adjustment to work and family life.

Debriefings and Counseling

Soldiers are given on-site help in the combat theater when it is needed. Assistance comes in the form of debriefings and counseling designed to help normalize experiences. There is an additional debriefing when units return home, and follow-up debriefings are held over the next several months to help the veterans and their partners and spouses adjust to the return to civilian life.

Veterans are screened for medical issues, and are encouraged to use their medical benefits through their local VA. Medical and mental-health screenings are part of their medical history and provide supporting documentation should medical or mental-health problems surface, or worsen in the future. New VA programs are being created, while others are being updated, to help with the growing physical and mental-health needs of returning vets.

What about outside of the VA? Communities and the families of veterans have also organized various resources to provide support for the veteran and his or her fami-

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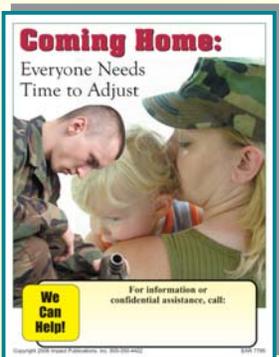
ly both during and following deployment. Employee Assistance Programs are in a perfect position to integrate experience and expertise with these groups as a bridge to the workplace.

Aftermath

What will be the aftermath of these conflicts? No one has all the answers, but it IS clear that many veterans are experiencing terrible physical wounds. These injuries — traumatic amputations, face-

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Editor's Notebook

Many thanks to Jon Christensen for contributing another article on military issues in the workplace. As a CEAP and Vietnam veteran, Jon has a unique perspective on this important topic. I hope you'll agree.

A few years ago, it seemed that only social-service professionals like Jon were aware of the issues facing the veterans who are re-adjusting to work and family life after returning from Iraq or Afghanistan.

As a result, it's great to see the media increasingly covering these issues. Hopefully, increased awareness about the difficulties experienced by returning veterans will lead to increased solutions.

This isn't to say that anyone has a magic wand. Dealing with the after effects of war will always be a time-consuming process that requires extensive support — support that an EAP is well-positioned to provide.

And it's support of veterans, regardless of one's opinions on the war in Iraq, that matter most. From the June 6 D-Day anniversary being noted this month, to Korea, Vietnam, and the present, veterans have always secured our freedom and way of life. When they return to the U.S., helping them is the least we can do. Wouldn't you agree? Until next month.

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and-head wounds, and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) concussions caused by explosions — will be with the veteran and his/her family for the rest of the soldier's life.

Moreover, the issues of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (this group prefers to call it Post-Combat Stress) appear to have a slightly different look and feel than in the past. Certainly, there are the expected stress reactions that have been recognized from past trauma experiences.

However, today's proactive education and debriefings are also expected to provide benefits. Finally, the "can do" attitude of today's military should also be taken into consideration.

But all is not rosy. Incidents of warning signs such as domestic anger, suicide, road-rage, and high-energy workaholicism suggests that returning veterans are experiencing more "under the surface"

than is recognized by anyone, including the veteran.

Treatment providers will have to closely watch those showing symptoms of PTSD to see how stress develops with these vets. It is hoped that the correct tools are being used, but there may be some surprises. Fortunately, the fact that today's vets are returning to a more supportive society than did Vietnam veterans may ease the

adjustment of these soldiers.

The Veterans Center program is one VA tool that clearly helps in this transition. Created in 1979, Veterans Centers were able to respond to the needs of Vietnam vets who demanded a quicker and less bureaucratic response to their needs than the large VA health care structure was able to provide.

Today, Vet Centers continue to provide confidential, flexible, easily obtained support for veterans and their families as they adjust to life after service in a combat theater. They are easy to access, free, and confidential. In many ways, the Vet Center program is similar to an EAP. ■

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Veterans' Resources

American Legion:

www.legion.org

Disabled American Veterans:

www.dav.org

Operation Comfort:

www.operationcomfort.com/index.php

U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs:

www.va.gov

Keys to Surviving Business Downturns

By *Monica Wofford*

Downsizings. Home foreclosures. Everywhere you go, it seems people are complaining about an apparent “down” economy. Sellers are fearful, buyers are fearful, and employees are “hearing it” daily from consumers.

Regardless what the truth is about the economy, the fact is, if you *believe* that things are bad, what do you think the impact on your organization will be? Negativity, whether accurate or ill-founded, breeds more negativity.

Change organizational morale from “*it’s all going down*” to “*we can turn things around*”. Try these steps:

Rally the Troops

Much of what begins as grapevine fodder is due to miscommunication. One misunderstood memo can create an avalanche of damage control and attitude issues.

Rally the troops and openly discuss what is actually going on. Employees that are a part of the process and have the information they need, are less likely to create

their own answers to keep from feeling in the dark.

Understanding Stress

Under stress, people will use traits and behaviors not normally utilized. If an employee exhibits an attitude problem during times of high stress and frequent change — but not when times are good — it’s possible that increased awareness will alleviate the problem.

Bring in an Outside Source

Parents have seen what happens when their children ask them a question. Somehow, what they say lacks validity. And yet, if a neighbor or stranger provides the same answer, the unfamiliar party seems to have real insight!

The same is true in your organization. The voices of familiar faces lose their value over time and when an outside source comes in and shares similar information in a different way, their credibility is automatically greater. Bring in a consultant, advisor, or a trainer that you trust to diagnose and deliver a solution to the problems that you are facing during these times.

Re-Motivate Middle Management

No one seems to suffer more than those in the middle of any situation. Middle management, when times are tough, gets it from senior levels in asking for more numbers and better results. But, they also get it from their employees in the form of complaints and personal issues that hinder performance.

Give some thought to the middle managers in your ranks who could use a little pat on the back for being the glue that holds everything together.

Summary

What you do during the “down” times shows character and strength and conviction of your beliefs. It’s easy to be upbeat when things are good, but who are you when the chips are down?

Making it through the tough stuff builds character, but you have to make it through it to see the new character you now possess. ■

Monica Wofford has more than 17 years of experience as a business consultant, trainer, and speaker. For more information, visit www.monicawofford.com.

LEGAL LINES

Employee Codes of Practice are Vital

The most common method for handling third-party ethics and compliance issues is to adopt and stick to a code of practice or policies that governs the manner in which a company’s own employees deal with third parties, according to a report by The Conference Board.

Ninety-five percent of the 169 companies surveyed said that while

it is important to address third-party ethics and compliance issues through codes of conduct for their own employees, they are less inclined to involve third parties directly in these programs.

“With the exception of helplines or whistle-blowing systems, the direct inclusion of third parties in companies’ ethics and compliance programs is the exception, not the

rule,” says Ronald E. Berenbeim, principal researcher at The Conference Board and co-author of the report. “Nevertheless, companies are growing more dependent on third-party relationships for the achievement of business objectives.”

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Third-Party Compliance

Seventy-seven percent of respondents perform background checks on certain third parties prior to entering into a business relationship; 74% scrutinize agents; and about half subject all categories of third parties to due diligence.

The most common component that companies extend to third parties involves offering employees of third parties an opportunity to report ethics — or compliance-related concerns. Virtually all of these systems (98%) rely on the same means used for a company’s own employees to report suspected misconduct, rather than a separate system for third parties.

Ethics and compliance training programs are a frequent step that survey participants take in extending their own program to third parties. Slightly more than one-third (38%) of survey participants offer but don’t insist on some kind of training program for third parties. Most of these programs devote at least some discussion to the company’s own code. In almost every case, parties asked to adopt a company’s internal code of conduct are offered some form of training.

Room for Improvement

“The survey suggests that companies are satisfied with current methods of seeking to extend ethics and compliance standards or requirements to third parties but are willing to search for new approaches,” Berenbeim says. “Companies rated all ethics and compliance efforts within a narrow and not especially positive range — they deemed them somewhat effective.” ■

Source: “Finding the Right Balance: The Essentials of Third Party Ethics Programs” research report, by The Conference Board.

When Anxiety isn’t Routine

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses in America, affecting as many as one in 10 people. Unfortunately, these disorders can be difficult to recognize, and many people who suffer from them are either too ashamed to seek help, or they don’t realize they can be treated effectively. The following are a few of the most common anxiety disorders:

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Someone with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) has recurring fears and worries that are difficult to control. This person worries about almost everything. He/she may be restless, irritable, tense, easily tired, or have problems concentrating or sleeping.

Someone with GAD is usually eager to please others and may be a perfectionist, dissatisfied with their less than perfect performance.

Panic Disorder

A person with Panic Disorder has unexpected and repeated periods of intense fear or discomfort, along with other symptoms such as a racing heartbeat or feeling short of breath. These periods are called “panic attacks” and last minutes or even hours.

Panic Disorder often begins during adolescence, and it sometimes runs in families. Panic attacks can interfere with relationships, work productivity, and other areas. Some people avoid situations where they fear a panic attack may occur.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

An individual suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) may “re-experience” the trauma through nightmares, constant thoughts about what happened, etc. Children are more easily traumatized than adults.

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It's important to note that an event that may not be traumatic to an adult — such as a bumpy airplane ride — might be traumatic to a child.

In fact, a 2006 study conducted through a collaborative effort led by Casey Family Programs found that rates of PTSD among adults who were in foster care were twice as high as war veterans!

Researchers examined the long-

term effects of foster care on adults who are now between the ages of 20-33. Although the study participants were from Oregon and Washington, the findings were considered indicative of national trends, according to researchers.

What can be Done?

It's important to diagnose and treat anxiety disorders as early as possible. Effective treatments may include some form of psychotherapy, behavioral therapy, or med-

ications. In particular, a child who exhibits persistent symptoms of an anxiety disorder should be evaluated by a mental-health professional *who specializes in children*.

But regardless if the person suffering from an anxiety disorder is an adult or a youth, a comprehensive treatment plan is usually advised. ■

Sources: NAMI, National Mental Health Association, American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry.

Quick Ideas

Are Your Corporate Clients Experiencing Anxiety Overload?

Stress is at an all-time high, and it's no wonder. The uncertain economy keeps everyone, even those who work for successful companies, slightly off-balance. Doing more with less has become a way of life: fewer dollars, fewer employees, and what feels like fewer hours in the day.

It all adds up to anxiety overload, and that can be very dangerous for any organization.

Certainly, *some* anxiety is normal, but when it becomes excessive, employees start operating on “fight or flight” instinct rather than thinking clearly and rationally.

Are any of your corporate clients drowning in an ocean of anxiety? Consider the following questions:

1. Do people take sides with other people instead of taking stands on issues? Do they form cliques?
2. Are feuding, backstabbing, and turf wars a way of life?

3. Do work groups come to rapid agreement, with little discussion or dissent?
4. Are particular individuals or departments blamed for organizational problems?
5. Is there a problem with employee turnover? Are people constantly quitting due to job stress or dissatisfaction with the organization?
6. When conflicts and problems arise, are people exhorted to show more “team spirit”?
7. Does leadership send out mixed messages? Are organizational objectives contradictory or unclear?
8. Do people avoid conflict by avoiding each other altogether?
9. Is “improved communication” considered the solution to all problems and conflicts

rather than making decisions based on solid principles?

10. Is high productivity emphasized as the key to organizational well-being? Do you get the feeling that people are *really* overworked?

If the answer to most of these questions was an emphatic, “Yes,” the level of anxiety is likely too high — for employees *or* the company. ■

(Editor's note: While anxiety may be a big problem for an organization, it should be noted that only a mental-health professional is qualified to diagnose and treat someone with an anxiety disorder.)

Source: Excerpted from “The Anxious Organization, 2nd Edition: Why Smart Companies Do Dumb Things” (Facts on Demand Press, January 2008, ISBN-13: 978-1-8891505-2-9, ISBN-10: 1-8891505-2-5, \$19.95) by Jeffrey A. Miller.

Editor's note: See also this month's *Clinical Perspective* article.

Bridging the Employment Gap

By Tamara Vaughn

For many people, having a voluntary gap in employment is inevitable. With more and more employees opting to temporarily leave their job to take care of an elderly parent, raise children, or even pursue social or missionary work, hiring managers are noticing an increase in employment gaps.

And while those people who took time off from the workforce know they have done the right thing, when it comes time for them to re-enter the job market, they often have hesitations and fears: “What if the industry has changed so much that I can’t keep up?” or “What if no one wants to hire me because of my gap in employment?”

Recognize that any hesitation you may have about re-entering the workforce is likely unfounded! Today, employers know that many people have to take time off, and most employers actually expect it.

According to AARP, more than 30 million households are currently caring for a senior. That’s a large number of people who are potentially out of the job market! Savvy employers realize the value people with experience bring, regardless of any employment gaps. The following guidelines will help:

1. Be upfront and honest about the employment gap.

If you’ve chosen to leave the workforce to take care of a parent or to raise your children, you are

showing a distinct level of commitment that employers are seeking. Many employers complain of a lack of commitment from their staff these days, so demonstrating that you have commitment, even in a non-workplace environment, is a definite selling point.

Don’t lie by stretching the dates of your previous employment to make the gap appear shorter. Honesty really is the best policy.

2. Keep up with your industry and education.

With the Internet, it’s easier than ever to stay up-to-date on industry trends. Regularly visit any pertinent industry websites and subscribe to relevant industry journals and magazines.

Additionally, take online courses that would sharpen your skills or advance your education. Be sure to state on your résumé that during your leave of absence you took steps to keep your skills and industry knowledge current, and detail the exact measures you took.

3. Take care of yourself.

Many people who assume a caregiver role ignore their own needs and push themselves to the limit. When you’re trying to re-enter the workforce, the last thing you want is to appear exhausted and frazzled. Therefore, give yourself a few weeks to rest and get yourself mentally and physically ready to be employed again.

Also, if you’re going back to work because the person you were caring for died, remember that

you’re still dealing with the grieving process. So don’t push yourself too much. The last thing you want is to feel overwhelmed and regret your decision to go back to work.

4. Explore a new business.

If you’re still uneasy about going back to your old profession, then maybe it’s time to look into starting your own business or trying a new industry. For example, if you’ve been taking care of a parent with Alzheimer’s disease for the past five years, chances are that you know a lot about the condition and how to care for someone in that situation.

Perhaps you can go into an Alzheimer’s related field, either assisting patients or providing guidance for caregivers. But take the time to investigate options before making any big moves.

Confidence = Employed

When you do get hired and are on the first few days of your new job, be honest with co-workers about what you’ve been doing for the past few years. Don’t hide your employment gap from anyone, because there’s no need to anymore. Chances are that a co-worker is going to end up doing the same thing or something similar at some point. ■

Tamara Vaughn is a speaker and author of the upcoming book, “The PowerShift Principle: Empowering Yourself through Life’s Challenges.” She is the president of SuccessNRG, Inc. For more information, visit www.SuccessNRG.com. Editor’s note: See also the February 2008 EAR.

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Get Customers to LOVE You!

By Jeanne Bliss

Do your customers love you? Not the ho-hum, lukewarm, check-the-“generally-satisfied” box in surveys kind of “love.” No? Then you’ve got work to do!

Customers who don’t adore you are more detrimental to your business than those who belong to your competitors. The latter might give you a chance in the future, but the former have already tried you and found you lacking. If you don’t enthrall your customers — and make them believe you respect them — you’ll lose them. The good news is you *can* make them love you. The following are a few ideas:

- **Eliminate the obstacle course.** The problem with most

companies is that they simply aren’t structured to act collectively on behalf of customers. People are stuck in their “silos” making independent decisions, taking isolated actions for the purpose of achieving good numbers, and earning a good review. Instead of seamlessly executing a customer interaction of, let’s say placing their first order from start to finish, we deliver discontinuity in the experience where organizational breaks exist.

Sales sells the product, but Operations is not given the specifics of what the customer needs. Who does the customer call? Sales? Customer service? It’s in these hand-offs that customer failures occur. Stop customer hot potato! He who speaks to the customer first should “own” the customer. There’s

nothing that sends a signal of disrespect faster than trying to pass a customer off to “*someone who can better help you with your problem.*” Yeah, right.

- **Deliver what you promise.** Corporate memory loss aggravates customers every day. A customer calls in a product return and is promised a mailing label that never arrives. All too often, the customer has to strong-arm his/her way through the corporate maze just to get basic things accomplished. Customers are exhausted, annoyed, and when they get the chance, they’re going to go somewhere else!

- **When you make a mistake, right the wrong.** If you’ve got egg on your face, for whatever the reason, admit it. Then right the wrong. There’s nothing more frustrating to customers than a company or other organization that does something wrong, and then is either clueless about what they did or won’t admit that they goofed up.

Here’s the bottom line: Companies need to please customers rather than forcing them to navigate a organizational chart. Getting customers to love you *has* to start with showing them the respect they deserve by making it painless and a joy to do business with you. ■

Excerpted from “Chief Customer Officer: Getting Past Lip Service to Passionate Action” by Jeanne Bliss, \$27.95, ISBN: 0-7879-8094-3, Jossey-Bass/A Wiley Imprint. For more information, visit www.customerbliss.com.

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Finally, we remind readers that you may also customize the *Payroll Stuffers* and *LifestyleTIPS*® insert with company imprinting for additional convenient and professional-looking printed documents.

We are committed to being a great resource for EAP professionals, and we appreciate your input. Please direct any questions to Jennifer Heisler, (715) 258-2448, ext. 223 or email jennifer@impact-publications.com. ■