

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

supporting EAP professionals

Supervisor Training: It's Time to Think Outside the Box

By Tamara Cagney

Can you think of a field in which the training has remained essentially unchanged for 40 years? For many employee assistance programs this is what is happening with supervisor training.

The philosophical approach that forms the backbone of this training is referral based on declining job performance. Supervisors are told to observe, document, discuss with the employee, set clear expectations and consequences, and then follow up. But supervisory referral continues to be poorly understood and reluctantly utilized by supervisors.

Employee assistance programs are frequently described as vehicles for early intervention. It is argued that the workplace, and especially the supervisor, is in a position to identify employee problems through deterioration in work performance and to confront the employee, break through the denial, and leverage the employee to take action.

Available research raises questions, however, about the degree to which supervisors actually identify issues through work performance problems. Although supervisory referrals and constructive con-

“...supervisors may have as few as one referral for every six years of supervision.”

frontation are seen as core components of employee assistance programs, there have been problems with implementation and practice since the inception of EAPs.

The Policy Practice Gap

As early as 1968, Harrison Trice and James Belasco maintained that despite the existence of carefully worded policies, treatment resources, and trained staff, the majority of employees treated were in the later stages of their disease or other problem, at which time the prospects for treatment success were seriously reduced. These authors labeled the difference between the company policy and the actual program operation as the “policy practice gap.”

This gap remains a problem for current employee assistance programs. Evidence has accumulated that demonstrates that supervisors are reluctant to use this referral strategy. This leads to underutilized, less effective EAPs. Referral

rates appear to run well below estimates of prevalence of problems in the workplace. It's true they are relatively high in newly implemented employee assistance programs, but they decline rapidly thereafter. Research has found that supervisory referral rates were surprisingly low even when considering the severity of a subordinate's problem.

Research also indicates that supervisors may have as few as one referral for every six years of supervision. In some EAPs, even

continued on Page 2

FEATURED INSIDE

- ▶ Coaching Techniques that Inspire Employees to Improve
 - ▶ Retirement Becoming More Difficult
 - ▶ What's the Riskiest Job?
 - ▶ Companies Watch the Web
 - ▶ Ways to Retain Great Workers
 - ▶ Dazzle Audiences, don't Put Them to Sleep
 - ▶ Ensure the Right Fit!
 - ▶ From Our Files: Overcoming Cultural Barriers Becoming Increasing Niche for EAPs
- INSERTS
- ▶ *Brown Bagger*: Applying What we Know to Training Design
 - ▶ Payroll Stuffers
 - ▶ LifestyleTIPS[®]

that would be an improvement.

Three Indicators of Dissonance

Brad Googins, an established researcher of EA programs, describes three indicators of the growing dissonance between the referral model and how it's actually put into practice by employee assistance programs:

- 1) The numbers and percentages of supervisory referrals have declined significantly.
- 2) Supervisory training, which prepared supervisors to become an effective early intervention and prevention agent, has been either abandoned or minimized in many EAPs.
- 3) Employees with substance-use disorders arrive at the EAP for help in the *latter* stages of their disease rather than being identified *early* through declining job performance.

As a result, it's time to consider some different approaches to supervisor/manager training. It is well established that the majority of supervisory referrals are actually *reactive* referrals based on a triggering event. We need more *proactive* referrals that are based on observation and documentation of declining work performance. We need to redesign our trainings to match the realities of the workplace.

Exploring Two Approaches

It's often difficult to "think outside the box" when we've been part of the box for 30 or more years. However, if we're serious about having more effective supervisor referral strategies, we have to try some new approaches.

Two different approaches that

we can explore include cognitive mapping and attribution theory. These approaches to supervisory training are described in this month's *Brown Bagger* insert.

Incorporating evidence-based methods into training design can help us move beyond the barriers to referral. Exploring how supervisors decide to take action or to tolerate poor performance can help make the EAP a more valuable resource for supervisors.

Using the technique of **cognitive mapping** in training can help lead supervisors through a discussion of policy, procedures, and safety concerns that establishes EAP as a real alternative.

Incorporating **attribution theory** into training design can help all supervisors and managers become more aware of how they sort out situations of poor performance and how they decide to refer and/or discipline. For example, a referral form that incorporates the attribution theory method might ask questions like these:

- Is the employee performing poorly?
- If so, on one specific task? On work in general?
- Is the employee's behavior similar to that exhibited in other situations?
- Is the employee's behavior unlike that exhibited by his/her co-workers?

Summary

Examining supervisor/manager trainings is long overdue. EAPs have been doing the same thing the same way, and for too long. As a result, supervisors and managers continue to be reluctant to utilize EAP referrals as a management resource.

Redesigning our approach to these trainings may provide us with different results and, in turn, lead to a more effective and integrated

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approach to dealing with troubled employees. Sharing new approaches with EAP colleagues can make our field much more viable as part of an organization's health and productivity management. ■

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Coaching Techniques that Inspire Employees to Improve

By Sheri Jeavons

If you've ever tried to coach someone to stop doing a particular behavior or to change a certain action, then you know how difficult it can be to get adults to alter their ways.

Why is it often so hard to get people to improve, even when you point out that what they're doing wrong is hurting them? Because most adult learners are self-critical, and they typically don't learn by hearing negative feedback.

In fact, the natural tendency for most people is to defend their existing behavior, no matter how bad it may be. So if you really want to motivate someone to improve, you have to do so in a positive, solution-oriented way:

- **Coach the positive rather than critique the negative.**

Let's use the example of a selling situation. Most new salespeople talk about their company, the product, and the reasons why someone should buy from them. In the midst of their talking, they neglect to ask the prospect open-ended questions that prompt dialog and encourage the prospect to reveal his/her wants and needs.

In order to get the salesperson to change his or her approach, a manager might say, *"In that last call I noticed that you did most of the talking and then ran out of time to ask questions. Do you really feel that you know what the prospect needs? The next time, ask some questions before giving an explanation and see if you can get them talking."*

The problem is, this type of feedback focuses on the negative first, which could result in the employee shutting down prior to listening to

your suggestions. A better, more motivating approach is to say, *"For the next call, let's talk about how we can facilitate more discussion with the client."*

See the difference? Instead of criticizing what you don't like, you're stating what you're going to do to help the salesperson achieve. With the criticism gone, the salesperson is automatically more open to your suggestions.

- **Ask the other person what he or she needs to learn.**

Asking other people for their input regarding their performance engages them about the skills they want to improve. After you do this, have the person clarify some very specific things they'd like to learn. This enables you to get the individual to agree that change and improvement are necessary. Next, have the person prioritize what he or she feels the most pressing objective(s) should be. Lastly, offer some coaching tips and learning ideas so the person feels they have some say-so in the learning process.

- **Focus on the future.**

In discussions with subordinates, always talk about "next time." Never go back and recreate a bad situation. For example, with a person who becomes defensive during meetings, rather than pointing out when he or she became defensive, you could say, *"Next time, when you're getting a defensive conversation with someone, immediately put on your facilitation hat. At that moment, stop defending your position and start asking questions."*

Begin coaching dialogue immediately after the behavior has occurred — within 24 hours — so the event is

Editor's Notebook

I'm always impressed by and appreciate the time that already busy people take to write articles for this newsletter — information and expertise they wish to share to assist their EAP colleagues.



Last month, I neglected to thank Dave Worster for his fine job in putting together a piece on EAP models. Sorry about that Dave!

This month, I thank Tamara Cagney for compiling what I hope you'll agree is some thought-provoking advice about what she terms as the need to improve the supervisory referral process. I'm told that Tamara led an excellent training on this topic at EAPA's 2006 Annual World EAP Conference. My goal, of course, was to adapt it into a useful article for this month's *EAR*. Feedback on this, or any article in *EAR* is always appreciated.

I hope you're enjoying the summer until the busy fall season kicks in again. Until next month. ■

Mike Jacquart

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fresh in the person's mind and he or she can grow from it. Never wait until an annual performance evaluation to provide feedback.

Summary

By using coaching techniques like these on a regular basis, you will motivate and inspire people to improve. When that happens, you will have professionals eager to change and achieve to the next level. ■

Sheri Jeavons is the founder of Power Presentations, Inc. (www.power-presentations.com), a company that specializes in presentation and communication skill training programs and products.

Retirement Becoming More Difficult

The founder of a job search website that connects educated professionals with meaningful, flexible employment opportunities, has found that many of the job seekers in her firm's database include retirees who can't afford to stop working altogether.

"With out-of-control housing, utility, and healthcare costs, I've heard from thousands of older individuals who still must work. Sadly, these are people who felt their retirement savings, pensions and Social Security income would comfortably cover their living expenses," says Elyse Shapiro, founder of MyPartTimePRO.com.

Upon further research, Shapiro realized that the people in her database were representative of the working world:

- 36.8 million individuals — 12% of the U.S. population — are age 65-plus; 10.1% of this group lives in poverty. This is a statistic that is virtually unchanged since 1985. (US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1960-2006)
- In 2005, 5.3 million Americans age 65+ were employed, constituting 3.6% of the U.S. labor force; 8.7 million individuals are expected to be employed by 2014. (U.S. Census Bureau, 7/1/05)
- Over half (51%) of non-retired adults plan on working part time before fully retiring. (Gallup Poll: "Future Retirees Planning to Keep on the Job," by Lydia Saad, 6/06)
- While median income rose less

than 3% between 2004-2005, pharmaceutical costs increased 6% and healthcare costs rose nearly 7% during the same period. (AARP 4/10/06; National Coalition on Healthcare, 2005)

"Sadly, the jobs available to this population tend to be entry-level or unskilled positions — many of which are low paying, and in many cases, require a lot of physical activity. This is clearly a waste of talent and experience," Shapiro states.

"My goal is two-fold," she adds. "First, to educate employers about the 'treasure trove' of talent they are not tapping into by creating positions that don't satisfy the needs of the aged. And second, to link these enlightened employers with this wealth of 'employee resources.'" ■

What's the Riskiest Job? You Probably won't Guess

When it comes to job security, the leading marketing job in a given organization is a perilous position. The average tenure of a Chief Marketing Officer at Fortune companies is just 23 months, according to leading worldwide executive search firm Spencer Stuart. That is far shorter than the average tenure for Chief Executive Officers — 54 months.

Trouble in the ranks of corporate marketing affects even the best and brightest companies. A marketing campaign at Wal-Mart early last year was meant to get more upscale shoppers into the store. It didn't work, and heads rolled.

But Wal-Mart isn't alone in experiencing turmoil and turnover in marketing. Volkswagen, Sears,

Hewlett-Packard, and Taco Bell — all have either recently filled, or are trying to fill top marketing spots. What is the primary problem in marketing? According to David Minter, partner with Denver-based marketing firm Minter + Reid, the root of the problem is a lack of reliable marketing tools and processes.

He and Mike Reid are co-authors of *Lightning in a Bottle: The Proven System to Create New Ideas and Products That Work*. "There are proven systems for other business functions like manufacturing and accounting," Minter said, "and as a result, products come off assembly lines defect-free, and accounting reports are accurate. But when it comes to corporate marketing, quality is the exception — not the norm. Nine

out of ten new products that marketers develop fail. The result is a revolving door for senior marketing executives."

Reid added, "Until marketing folks adopt better tools, I'm afraid this trend is going to continue. The irony is that better marketing tools and processes are available. Senior marketing people that seek out better ways to solve marketing problems are having tremendous success."

Minter added, "We studied marketing success and failure for three decades before writing *Lightning in a Bottle*. The solutions we discovered are not fancy or complicated — they just work." ■

For more information on "Lightning in a Bottle," visit http://sourcebooks.com/content/featured_authors/index_Jan07.asp. For more about Miller + Reid, log on to www.minterandreid.com.

Companies Watch the Web

Businesses are becoming increasingly sophisticated about managing employee Internet use at work, a new survey shows.

More than three-quarters (78%) of chief information officers (CIOs) polled said their company has either installed content-filtering or blocking software, instituted policies that detail acceptable web browsing, or done a combination of both.

The poll includes responses from more than 1,400 CIOs from a random sample of U.S. companies with 100 or more employees.

“All companies should have a corporate policy in place that outlines acceptable web use by employees,” said Katherine Spencer Lee, executive director of Robert Half Technology. “Communicating and explaining web access policies, along with the risks associated with web browsing, helps employees understand why these guidelines are in place.”

Lee added that it’s crucial to inform new staff of expectations from day one. “Including web access policies in new-hire training and restating the information on the company Intranet or in internal newsletters, for example, reinforces this message.” ■

Source: Robert Half Technology (www.rht.com).

look ahead

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Resources

 **Change Your Career: Transitioning to the Nonprofit Sector**, by Laura Gassner Otting, Kaplan Publishing (www.kaplanpublishing.com). The author demystifies the nonprofit sector by addressing the challenges and rewards of working in a mission-driven environment.

 **The Online Advertising Playbook: Proven Strategies and Tested Tactics from the Advertising Research Foundation**, by Joe Plummer, Steve Rappaport, Taddy Hall, and Robert Barocci, \$29.95, Wiley, ISBN: 978-0-470-05105-4. This book provides action-based, proven principles that will help marketers leverage the vast opportunities that exist in Internet advertising.

 **Ultimate Performance: Measuring Human Resources at Work**, by Nicholas C. Burkholder, Scott Golas, and Jeremy Shapiro, \$50, Wiley. Too often employees have been considered more of a burden than a corporate asset. This book proposes to change that mindset.

 **Managing People...What's Personality Got to Do with It?** by Carol Ritberger, Hay House, Inc. (www.hayhouse.com).

Understanding how to communicate with all four personality colors may be one of the most important tools a manager can have. Consequently, the author offers help to successfully manage, influence, and motivate subordinates, peers, and associates.

 **Fifth Wave Leadership: The Internal Frontier**, by Morrie Shechtman, \$19.95, Facts on Demand Press, ISBN: 1-889150-38-X. The author explains how true accountability is not about tasks and to-do lists; it's about establishing productive relationships, which he says are the secrets to success in the 21st century.

 **NO: The Only Negotiating System You Need for Work and Home**, by Jim Camp, \$23, Crown Publishing (www.crownpublishing.com). Rather than being negative, the author explains how saying “no” allows you to get to the real issues. Camp uses easy-to-understand steps that anyone can learn and practice. ■

Ways to Retain Great Workers

By *Daisy Saunders*

Susan landed her dream job in sales. It had everything — pay, perks, reputation, and challenge. She started the job with lots of energy, enthusiasm, and high expectations. However, within six months she was running out of steam. In 12 months, she crashed and left the company disappointed and disillusioned. What happened?

Employee retention has moved onto the radar screens of corporate executives. Small businesses and major corporations alike have experienced the impact of employee turnover — lost customers, decreased production, poor morale, and increased unemployment claims and hiring costs.

While there is no magic formula when it comes to employee retention, there ARE some things that an EAP can do to help retain the employees of its customer clients. And when a company or other organization sees the EAP as a valuable tool in increasing retention, it stands to reason that everyone benefits — the EAP, employer, and employee.

1. **Work with HR to “hire smart.”**

What types of skills and personality traits are necessary for an employee to have in order to perform the duties described in a job description. The organization must hire people who can do what they say they can. Hiring the right person for the right job at the right time will reduce turnover.

2. **Clarify expectations.** Employees must know what’s expected of them. It makes no sense to make them guess, but many organizations do just that. Clarifying expectations helps to avoid potential conflicts

that can occur due to lack of knowledge and miscommunication.

Establishing expectations also helps employees stay focused on their individual responsibilities, which in turn helps the company realize corporate goals.

3. **Get to know the employees.**

People aren’t wind-up robots there only to perform a given task. What are their long-term goals? Hobbies? A company that knows its employees can better meet their needs. This sends the message that the company cares, which boosts morale and productivity.

4. **Offer feedback.** Let employees know how they’re doing; that you value them; and want them to stay. Too many times it takes a resignation letter for a manager or supervisor to realize that the worker was unhappy. Don’t let it get to that point. Everyone wants to feel wanted, valued, and needed. Positive, ongoing feedback results in improved performance, communication, and decreased turnover.

5. **Make employee retention a part of the organization’s culture.**

Emphasize the need for staff members who can motivate other employees to be committed, passionate, and accountable to the company. This cultivates a “we’re all in this together” team atmosphere in which everyone feels included.

6. **Educate and train.** It’s up to employers to make sure their team members are confident in their abilities to perform the required tasks. Employees need opportunities for education and training. To see growth in a business, there must be a commitment to growing the people who work there.

7. **Offer incentives and rewards.**

Businesses reward their customers,

so why do they overlook thanking the employees that made it happen?

The passion and energy of those who are acknowledged for their work is far greater than those who receive little recognition. Offering incentives and rewards (they needn’t be big ones) creates a happy and charged work environment, and it shows employees that they’re appreciated.

8. **Empower.** Within reason, empower employees to make decisions that allow them to expedite customer service and satisfaction. Empowering employees sends the message that you trust them and their ability to make sound decisions.

9. **Provide performance updates and evaluations.** Periodic updates allow employees to address challenges and build on strengths. When evaluating, use the sandwich technique — start with praise for work well done, discuss challenges or problems, and together create a plan of action to address them. This gives employees a positive place from which to begin a corrective course of action.

Finally, don’t overlook the organization’s leaders. People may “sign up” because of the job or its perks, but they’re more likely to stay if they like and respect their leaders. Companies and other organizations must be committed to investing in their leaders. And, after all, top-notch leaders are more likely to implement the strategies described in this article. ■

Daisy Saunders is a speaker, trainer, and founder of Big Eyes International, a consulting firm specializing in personal empowerment and leadership development. For more information, contact her at (941) 266-0676.

Dazzle Audiences, don't Put Them to Sleep!

By Karen Friedman

Why do business people create slide shows that put people to sleep? You know the type — hundreds of slides read to you one by one by someone with a monotone voice and no facial expression. You may have struggled to stay awake during some of these presentations.

I spend a lot of time coaching people through presentations and meetings in which they've spent a considerable amount of time designing and perfecting slides, but they've spent *little if any time thinking through their message*. So, what is a presenter to do?

- **No one came to see a slide show** — What's the theme of your presentation? If the slides crashed, could you still tell the

story? If your answer is no, then your message is muddled. Write your presentation *first* and *then* create slides that reinforce what you're saying instead of using your slides as a script.

- **Talk, don't read** — Create slides that speak in phrases, not sentences. Use 3 to 5 words per line to reinforce what you're saying to prevent people from reading ahead and to focus their attention where you want it. Less is more when helping people retain information.
- **We don't do it that way here** — Just because other presenters drone on doesn't mean you have to be boring, too. Think of a presentation as an opportunity to inform and persuade. Look for ways to personalize the informa-

tion and create moments that audiences will remember.

Provide an overview and tell the audience that details will be available later.

- **Hit them over the head** — Your first few words determine whether your audience tunes in or out. When you open your mouth, "hit them over the head" with a story or example that grabs their attention and evokes emotion. Help them understand why they should listen. What's in it for them?

Look for ways to stand out and set the bar higher so people look forward to hearing what you have to say. ■

Karen Friedman is founder of the Philadelphia-based Karen Friedman Enterprises, and one of today's leading communications coaches. She can be reached at www.karenfriedman.com.

Workplace Survey

Ensure the Right Fit!

Everyone wants a job that suits his or her work style and personality, but a new survey shows that's no easy task — for job seekers *or* employers.

Nearly half (46%) of administrative professionals said they have, at one time or another, misread a work environment. Similarly, 59% of HR managers polled admitted having misjudged someone's fit for a specific job. Moreover, the vast majority (85%) of these managers also said their companies have lost an employee because he or she was not suited to the firm's work environment.

Diane Domeyer, executive director of OfficeTeam, which conducted the study, pointed out that the interview

process is a prime opportunity to assess whether the organization is a fit, and vice versa.

"The interview is a two-way street," she said. "Employers are looking for clues to an applicant's work ethic and personality, and job seekers want to learn more about the company culture."

To help job applicants and hiring managers make the right match, OfficeTeam suggests asking the following questions during the employment interview:

For Job Seekers

- What is it like to work at your company?
- What skills/attributes are needed to be successful in this role?

- What characteristics does your company value most in its employees?
- How do you define success at your company?
- How is good performance measured and rewarded?

For Hiring Managers

- What type of work environment brings out your best performance?
- What type of work environment are you least likely to thrive in?
- What did you like best/least about your last job and why?
- Considering your greatest accomplishments in previous roles, what were the factors that allowed you to be successful? ■

Additional sources: International Association of Administrative Professionals (www.iaap-hq.org) and HR.com (www.hr.com).

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Overcoming Cultural Barriers Increasing Niche for EAPs

By Sally Lipscomb and
Noel Kreicker

The global village that Marshall McLuhan wrote about in the 1960s has ushered in a world economy in which employees from different nations work outside their borders, far from family and friends.

The EA professional can play a key role in helping expatriated employees and their families. Rarely are failed assignments attributed to the employee's lack of technical skills. As a result, developing a deeper understanding of unfamiliar cultural values, different communication styles, etc., will enhance the chances of success for the employee living abroad.

It's important to note that adapting to a foreign environment can be a very different experience for each family member. Immediately absorbed by the new job, the employee may work in an office environment where learning a new language isn't necessary and there is a built-in company support system.

The spouse, however, may have given up a career for the assignment and cannot legally work in the new country. He or she is now left to navigate the foreign city and household alone, simultaneously grappling with a foreign language.

Similarly, children may feel on

the fringes of their peer groups, unsure of what's expected or "in fashion." The family may become alienated from former friends and relatives who cannot relate to the international experience. And financial pressures are common once expatriate perks and benefits end.

While international assignments can ensure a company's economic future, consider also the following dilemmas and what might be done to resolve them:

- **A Danish executive accepts a three-year transfer to Switzerland.** He telephones his EAP, upset that his wife refuses to accompany him. She insists that the education for their five-year-old twins be based in the Danish language, an impossibility in Switzerland.
- **A Brazilian engineer is transferred to Canada for two years.** He and his wife are very lonely. They miss their extended family and more socially-oriented lifestyle. His new Canadian colleagues are friendly but distant. His wife speaks limited English, and their teenage daughter cries every day before school.
- **A senior manager from a company in the United States has been sent to China to start up Asian**

operations. He is under a lot of pressure to meet specific financial targets. His spouse envisioned the assignment as a "sabbatical" from his accounting practice, expecting the three-year assignment to help repair their faltering marriage. She is suffering from migraine headaches amid a hectic travel schedule, and worries about her spouse's growing problems with alcohol.

- **An Indian dual career couple comes to the United States for a two-year assignment.** The spouse, a bank executive, has never been totally responsible for the household and care of her two toddlers. Unable to drive in the United States, she feels trapped in the home with the children. Cooking and cleaning house are unfulfilling. With no local contacts, she becomes despondent.

Summary

The situations are typical problems faced by expatriated employees. Cultural values, communication styles, and transition dynamics impact each predicament. The need for expatriate EA support services will undoubtedly expand as the global economy continues to grow.

As a result, EA professionals who broaden their cross-cultural knowledge to help resolve expatriate challenges can be expected to find abundant opportunities in this specialized area. ■

At the time of this writing, Lipscomb was affiliated with ComPsych International; Kreicker with IOR Global Services.

Editor's note: This story is condensed from an article that originally appeared in the September 1999 EAR.