

# EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

supporting EAP professionals



Union members are dealing with the emotional after effects from this summer's bridge collapse in Minneapolis. Photo courtesy of Karen Hagen.

## 35W Bridge Collapse:

### *Building a Safety Net for the Future*

**By Karen Hagen, President, T.E.A.M.**

Talk to anyone who was on or near the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis the evening of Aug. 1, 2007 and you find out fast that while there is so much to tell, no combination of words can truly capture what these people saw, heard, and felt. But it doesn't take many words to convince folks that some people — especially those working in the trade unions — will feel the impact of the collapse for years to come.

"I wish I could describe to you what those folks went through, because it was surreal," recalls Chuck Felling, a counselor who was immediately dispatched to perform critical incident stress debriefing at the site. "It was catastrophic. To see it, it just doesn't register."

One of the busiest bridges in Minnesota collapsing at rush hour,

killing 13, injuring 100 — is a disaster with an impact far beyond the Mississippi River banks that was the site of this catastrophe.

After a tragedy of this magnitude, it is common practice for first responders like police, EMTs, and firefighters to go through critical incident stress debriefing. However, when all of those tons of cement and steel plunged 65 feet into the Mississippi River, it wasn't just a bridge that collapsed — for employees of PCI, Inc., it was a worksite and one of their co-workers that went down with it. Greg Jolstad, 45, cement worker and Local 49 Union member, was the last victim pulled from the river.

"I don't think we know completely how these people will respond over the years to this," says Dave Semerad, CEO of the Associated General Contractors of Minnesota. "I think it's going to haunt them in ways that we can't

imagine for many years."

It is a unique challenge facing workers, management, union leaders, and EAP counselors. That's because, while construction workers are no strangers to job-related

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risks, 1,900-foot-long bridges are just *not* supposed to collapse under your feet.

“I think they will be fearful of working in a similar situation for the rest of their lives,” says Semerad, “which is frightful when you think about it.”

### ‘Tough Guy’ Nature

Adding to the challenge for employee assistance counselors is the “tough guy” nature of the people involved, which is something that Felling knows well. “You’ll say to them that, ‘*you may find it hard to get out of bed, you might feel depression or anxiety,*’ but you’re talking to cement workers or electricians, and they just kind of roll their eyes.”

What those workers may not realize until it’s too late, is that unprocessed emotions will come out somehow. If not dealt with directly, Felling says they often come out “sideways.”

“You might not become an alcoholic, but the people you love might think you are impossible to be around,” Felling explains. “All of a sudden, your kid doesn’t want you to bring him to the softball game because you’re saying you’re OK, but you get so mad at the game because what’s unprocessed comes out sideways.”

### Addressing Safety Changes

“An event of this magnitude will clearly show the impact that workplace accidents have on employees,” says Karen Hagen of T.E.A.M., Inc. “Our hope is that the trades will use this renewed awareness to help make safety changes.”

When Hagen talks about safety changes, she’s not talking steel-toed boots and safety goggles. “Safety is forever compromised if

you don’t properly prepare your guys for emergency or trauma response when you train them for the trades,” Hagen insists.

Workplace accidents have a ripple effect, and every worker will respond differently. This means that everyone, from apprentices to supervisors, need to be able to recognize the signs of stress. Stress can lead to distraction, and it is well-documented how distracted workers can cause more accidents, and in turn cost employers money.

“We don’t know how this (bridge collapse) will affect people,” Semerad says. “Will it affect their health? Yeah. Will they be worried? Yeah, they’ll be worried. Are they going to want to turn down a job that is similar to this? Maybe. Are they going to want to change careers? Maybe. Are they going to want to go back to their company. Maybe, maybe not.”

### Need for Training

But it’s this type of uncertainty that is revealing the importance of effective training in critical incident response, stress management, and communication skills for union members. Everyone, from apprentices to union representatives, need to be able to recognize stress indicators. And then, they need to understand how to effectively communicate their concerns with co-workers.

This is why Glen Johnson of Local 49, is more thankful than ever that the union has an employee assistance company like T.E.A.M. on board to help them deal with the effects of the 35W bridge collapse. Johnson says that he wouldn’t have any idea how to assume an EAP-type role, and talk to the union members and other workers. “I wouldn’t have a clue as to how to go about doing that,” he admits.

But an EAP well-versed in the

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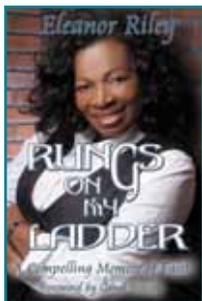
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unique challenges of the building trades can help address their concerns.

“I don’t get a lot of thanks from people for the things I do,” Johnson says of his position at Local 49, “but I get a lot of thanks from people after they’ve taken advantage of EAP counseling and they find out its value.” ■

*Karen Hagen is the president of the St. Paul, Minnesota-based T.E.A.M./Total Employee Assistance Management. She can be reached at khagen@excello.us.*

# Five Tips to Spiritual Fitness



Just like your body and mind, your spirituality needs special care and attention to stay fit. Life is full of obstacles and challenges that test your faith and spiritual well-being.

In order to meet those challenges head-on, you must give your spirituality the proper nutrition and exercise — just like you would treat your body if you were training for a marathon. After all, you're in this for the long haul, right? The following are five key tips that you can focus on daily to improve your spirituality:

## 1. Learn to Share

Learn to share many of the things

you love, even if you are most comfortable having them all to yourself. That means changing your focus from “I” to “we.” Find something you have a gift or talent for and start sharing the fruits of that talent with others. When you start with something simple and enjoyable, such as cooking a meal for others, fellowship becomes easier in the difficult times.

## 2. Don't Seek Praise

God wants you to be a team player. But that doesn't mean you should seek praise when you lend a hand to those in need. Even if the people around you don't recognize your work, remember, the reward is in the good deed itself.

## 3. Remember Promises

When you are faced with temptations, remember your promises to

God. God never gives up on you, so focus on staying true to the promises you make to yourself and to God.

## 4. Picture Yourself as a Mentor

The lessons you've learned both in good times and bad can provide guidance for others. Live your life so that someone will pattern their life after yours.

## 5. Choose to Climb Higher

Your spiritual journey is like climbing a ladder. You must leave your useless baggage — such as jealousy and greed — on the ground. Each rung you climb will take you higher and give you a better view of the things that you have left behind. ■

*Source: Eleanor Riley, author of “Rungs on My Ladder: A Compelling Memoir of Faith,” by Cornerstone Publishing ([www.cornerstonepublishing.com](http://www.cornerstonepublishing.com)).*

## Clinical Perspective

# Bipolar Epidemic?

## Study Reveals Huge Increase

A long-term study published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry* found that the number of young people treated for bipolar disorder increased 40-fold nationwide between 1994 and 2003. The study's authors say it's unclear if this increase represents a tendency for recent overdiagnosing or a tendency to underdiagnose in the past.

Although bipolar disorder may have its onset during childhood, little is known about national trends in the diagnosis and management of bipolar disorder in young people. Consequently, the study sought to present national trends in outpatient visits with a diagnosis of bipolar

disorder, and to compare the treatment provided to youth and adults during those visits.

Rates of growth in clinical visits by youth 19 or younger diagnosed with bipolar versus those age 20 or older, were compared between 1994-1995 and 2002-2003. For the period of 1999 to 2003, the authors also compared demographic, clinical, and treatment characteristics of youth and adult in visits for bipolar disorder.

The estimated annual number of youth office-based visits with a diagnosis of bipolar disorder increased from 25 (1994-1995) to 1,003 (2002-2003) visits per 100,000 population, while adult visits with a diagnosis of

bipolar disorder increased from 905 to 1,679 visits per 100,000 population during this same period.

In 1999 to 2003, most youth bipolar disorder visits were by males (67%), whereas most adult bipolar disorder visits were by females (68%). Moreover, most youth (91%) and adults (86%) received a psychotropic medication during bipolar disorder visits, with comparable rates of mood stabilizers, antipsychotics, and antidepressants prescribed for both age groups.

This increase highlights a need for additional clinical studies to determine the accuracy of clinical diagnoses of child and adolescent bipolar disorder in community practice. ■

*Source: Reprinted with permission from the Employee Assistance Professionals Association ([www.eapassn.org](http://www.eapassn.org)).*

## Many Workers Postponing Retirement

**H**ow many employees will be “hanging it up” at the end of 2007? Not as many as you might think.

Only one in three workers (34%) polled said they plan to quit work entirely once they’re ready to retire from full-time employment, according to a recent survey developed by Robert Half Management Resources.

“Longer life spans, increased financial responsibilities, and a desire to remain mentally and physically active are prompting today’s workers to view retirement differently than their predecessors,” said Paul McDonald, executive director of Robert Half Management Resources ([www.roberthalfmr.com](http://www.roberthalfmr.com)).

“The desire by many professionals to remain in the workforce past the traditional retirement age could be a boon to employers concerned about talent shortages, which are predicted to intensify,” McDonald added.

According to McDonald, companies are increasingly recognizing that greater flexibility, such as part-time employment, can be a valuable way for companies to continue to tap into the expertise of professionals who have “retired,” and are now consulting instead. ■

**Editor’s note:** Retirement is also discussed in this month’s Brown Bagger insert.

## Temporary Help is a Clear Trend

**T**he use of temporary workers — once viewed primarily as a stop-gap measure — is now included in

*“This approach...can boost productivity... because it eases the burden on full-time staff.”*

the long-term planning of many companies. Seventy-one percent of executives polled in a recent survey say this staffing practice is included in budgeting.

“The need for companies to be more agile and responsive to changing circumstances has prompted them to more frequently rely on temporary employees,” said Diane Domeyer, executive director of OfficeTeam, which conducted the study. “This approach also can boost productivity and retention rates because it eases the burden on full-time staff.”

Companies’ use of temporary workers is not new. What IS new for an increasing number of firms is the level of experience and

expertise that managers can bring into their organizations on an as-needed basis.

“More businesses are recognizing that they can hire highly skilled professionals in specialized areas like finance, information technology, and administrative support,” Domeyer said. “In addition, more companies are using temporary assignments as a way to evaluate prospective full-time employees.” ■

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

## Employees Want Fitness Programs

**A**n overwhelming majority of workers (83%) say they would definitely take advantage of employer-sponsored health and wellness programs, according to a new poll by LifeCare®, Inc., a provider of comprehensive specialty care services and a leader in the work/life industry.

“For the nation’s employers, this really is good news,” said LifeCare CEO, Peter G. Burki. “The total average cost of employee health care and absenteeism now exceeds 20% of payroll, so

most employers simply have no choice. They *must* take action and adopt health improvement programs of some kind. And, based on the results of our poll, employees are more than willing to take part in these programs.

“Offering employees resources to improve their health can pay huge organizational dividends if you can get them to make lasting, sustainable changes to their lifestyles,” Burki added. ■

Source: LifeCare®, Inc., [www.lifecare.com](http://www.lifecare.com).

# 'Happy' Holidays? Not when Employees are Grieving

By Karla Wheeler

The loss of a loved one, especially an employee at a small, tight-knit company, can dim the brightest of holidays. However, there are some practical steps that managers and EAPs can take to help boost morale and keep productivity from plummeting.

### Choose Rituals Wisely

Decide which holiday departmental rituals and customs feel right, and which ones seem too stressful. Some traditions, such as a couples' dinner and dance event at the same country club where everyone has partied for years, might seem like a downer for the group. Fun-loving Marianne will be missed, and her bereaved husband would probably feel uncomfortable attending solo.

Ask employees for alternative suggestions, perhaps an event held on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon, with parents and children invited. Such camaraderie would likely be

very healing, especially for Marianne's family.

### Memorial Gifts

Rather than the time-worn gift exchange among employees, ask staff to consider giving a gift to a cause or charity that was important to the deceased employee. If Marianne was an animal lover, you might choose the local humane society. Compassionate initiatives, like donating to a charity, help employees work through the grieving process.

### The Empty Chair

At a December staff meeting, go ahead and leave the deceased employee's chair in its usual spot. Everyone is feeling the impact of the empty chair, so why not take time to acknowledge this loss? Ask each employee to say something about Marianne, if they are comfortable doing so. For instance, they might share a fond or funny remembrance — or, perhaps a co-worker will want to express some of the many reasons

that Marianne is missed. Validate each person's approach, and reaffirm that together you will all get through this time of sadness.

### Grief is a Process

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that each of us heals from a major loss in our own way and on our own timetable. Camaraderie and support can be powerful healers within an office. But while one worker might have deep faith from which to draw to sustain him/her, another person might feel "rocked to the core."

Be aware of triggers that can bring on a grief attack. For example, perhaps a long-time customer calls to wish Marianne happy holidays and needs to be told of her recent passing. Be gentle and honor where each employee is in their journey through grief.

### Grief Support Meetings

If the emotional trauma of the death is adversely affecting productivity in certain employees, grief support meetings led by an EAP and/or other resources may be helpful.

### Receive the Joy

Even when a recent death has turned our world upside down, it's still OK to enjoy the holiday season. When we're mourning, we sometimes feel guilty about laughing and having a good time. Give yourself permission to experience those moments of joy. You will be honoring the memory of the employee. ■

*Karla Wheeler is the founder of Quality of Life Publishing Co., a direct outgrowth of her personal and professional hospice experience. She is the author of grief support books. For more information, visit [www.qolpublishing.com](http://www.qolpublishing.com).*

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# Be on Your Best Holiday Behavior

By Colleen Rickenbacher

Michelle and her husband, Dan, planned to attend her company's holiday party. It was her first year attending, and they were looking forward to making the best possible impression. Unfortunately, they made some serious mistakes.

First, they forgot to RSVP, and Stephen, the host, and Michelle's regional manager, was forced to bring in additional seating to accommodate them.

Second, Michelle and Dan brought their hosts a gift of wine; however, they didn't realize that Stephen and his wife abstained due to their religious beliefs. At the end of the evening, Dan ended up having too much to drink, and accidentally spilled red wine on the carpet. Instead of getting off on the right foot, these mistakes damaged Michelle's reputation at the office.

The key to success when attending any office function or event is preparation and planning. Here are some etiquette guidelines:

- **Attending office parties** — Yes, you should attend. At least make an appearance and find the host or hostess as soon as possible to extend your thanks for the invitation. Don't make an obvious exit, and never tell anyone you're leaving because you have another party to attend. It will give the impression the other party is better.
- **When to arrive** — Get to your party or other engagement within 15 minutes of the designated start time. You don't have to be the first to arrive, but food or other plans may be geared around the starting and ending time of the



event, so you never want to be overly late, either.

- **Don't talk only about business** — Parties should be networking opportunities *only*. You may approach someone to set up a future meeting and exchange business cards, but leave it at that. Remember, people also love to talk about their families, hobbies, etc., not just work.
- **Food and alcohol** — Drink and eat moderately. Continuously eating and drinking may mean you won't be invited again. The key is moderation. Your focus should be on talking and mingling, not seeing how much you can eat and drink.
- **Buffets** — Along similar lines, avoid looking like a chowhound if the event involves a help yourself buffet. You can go back again, but don't stack your plate so high you need help. If the entire table is going through the buffet line, try to start at the same time. You may begin eating when at least two or three people have returned to the table.
- **Party gifts** — You should always bring a gift when invited to someone's home for the holidays, or any time of the year. The exception to this rule is if you have a weekly or

monthly get together. Bring something that you know the host and hostess would enjoy. If you are not familiar with their home or décor, stay on the safe side with a bottle of wine (if they drink!), candles, or a small non-personal gift.

- **Gift giving at the office** — Holiday gift giving can be tricky with various celebrations and religious beliefs. A nice card showing appreciation is always welcome — or give something homemade, like cookies. Another nice gesture is to get your co-workers to chip in together on a gift. Be respectful of traditions and religious beliefs. It doesn't mean you have to exclude people from holiday parties and gift giving, but give them the option whether they want to participate.
- **Client gift giving** — Be careful here, too. Your intention should be a gift they will enjoy and appreciate, not a lavish or outrageous gift that will "outdo" the competition. The gift should be sent to the office, and it should be business appropriate.

## Summary

The morale of the story — always be on your best behavior, no matter what the situation. Understanding the proper ways to socialize will do more than build contacts — you just might make some of the most important connections of your career! ■

*Colleen A. Rickenbacher CMP, CSEP, CPC, is a business etiquette expert and author of "Be on Your Best Business Behavior," and the forthcoming, "Be on Your Best Cultural Behavior." For more information, visit [www.colleenrickenbacher.com](http://www.colleenrickenbacher.com).*

# Study Reiterates EAP Benefits

According to a four-year study recently completed by the Hartford Financial Services Group, employers who offer EAPs can not only help workers get well but, in the process, can blunt the impact of mental health issues on employee productivity.

The study, which involved 11 companies with a combined 94,000 employees, indicated that EAPs are worth promoting and can provide meaningful results.

“While EAPs do not necessarily reduce the incidence of disability claims, they can help reduce the duration of claims and help people return to work. Employers who promote the use of EAPs can realize real benefits,” said Carol Harnett, assistant vice president for Hartford’s group benefits division.

Harnett said that Hartford’s research provided three key insights:

- **EAPs can help shorten the duration of short-term disability (STD) claims.** Disabilities sustained by employees who had access to EAP services lasted 14.5 days *less* on average than disabilities sustained by employees who did not have access to these services. The study also showed that simply having an EAP in place reduced the duration of STD claims, regardless of whether employees actually made use of the programs.
- **The use of EAPs can increase the number of employees who return to work at the end of short-term disabilities.** A third of employees who took advantage of the services returned to work, compared with only one in five co-workers who did not use EAP

services. Of those workers who did *not* have access to EAPs, only 16% returned to work immediately after their short-term disability claim ended.

— **EAPs do not appear to affect the incidence of short-term disability claims.** Approximately 6% of workers were approved for STD whether or not an EAP was available through their employer.

However, Harnett said the utilization rate of an EAP may impact the incidence of claims. On average, the EAP utilization rate by employees of companies participating in the study was 5%. When the utilization rate rose above 10%, employers saw the number of disability claims filed decline noticeably. ■

Source: Reprinted with permission from the Employee Assistance Professionals Association ([www.eapassn.org](http://www.eapassn.org)). Additional source: Hartford Financial Services Group, Inc.

## Resources

📖 *Never Hire a Bad Salesperson Again: Selecting Candidates Who Are Absolutely Driven to Succeed*, by Dr. Christopher Croner and Richard Abraham, \$19.95, Richard Abraham Company, ISBN 13: 978-0-9741996-1-0. The authors describe how to zero in on those rare people who are born to sell.

📖 *The Performance Power Grid: The Proven Method to Create and Sustain Superior Organizational Performance*, by David Giannetto, \$27.95, Wiley, (800) 225-5945, ISBN: 0-470-05144-2. Efficiency and quality continually improve in products — so why not in management methodologies? The author

explains six ways to make an impact on your organization’s performance.

🔗 [www.seniordecision.com](http://www.seniordecision.com) features independent consumer reviews of more than 65,000 nursing homes, assisted living facilities, retirement communities, and home health care agencies throughout the U.S.

📖 *What Color is Your Brain?* by Sheila Glazov, \$16.95, SLACK, Inc., ISBN-13: 978-1-55642-807-4. This book explores who we are, why others see us the way they do, and how the four “brain colors” (e.g. personality types) play a role in our everyday lives.

📖 *How to Say It, Business Writing that Works*, by Adina Rische Gewirtz, \$16.95, ISBN: 978-0-7352-0425-6, Penguin Group,

[www.penguin.com](http://www.penguin.com). The author analyzes effective business writing, and provides samples.

📖 *The Power of the Possible: A Book of Hope and Inspiration*, by Auriela McCarthy, \$23, Beaufort Books, [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), others. The author demonstrates how couples can keep themselves from decimating their relationships over mundane issues.

📖 *The Rise of the Project Workforce: Managing People and Projects in a Flat World*, by Rudolf Melik, \$34.95, Wiley, ISBN: 978-0-470-12430-7. According to the author, most organizations are data-rich, but decision-poor. This book explains how this gap can be bridged. ■

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# E-Counseling Predictions



By Michael Cohn

Imagine the following scenario — you roll out of bed to start your day. The first thing you do is go to your computer to check your schedule for the next few hours. You notice that all of your appointments today are via videocam.

After getting dressed, you return to the computer for your first sessions. You set the security parameters for total confidentiality. The client's face shows up on your screen, and you carry on the sessions with the individual who is at home talking to you via computer. The session ends, and the client thanks you for being so accessible and responsive by being able to see her via videocam instead of having to drive to your office.

If this scenario results in uncomfortable feelings, start adjusting. Predictions are that in three-to-five years, 90% of home computer users will have videocams. A paradigm shift in the delivery of services will be required, driven not by demands from insurers, but by demands from the *consumers* of services. As the population becomes increasingly technologically advanced, people will demand that EAP services be delivered in ways that reduce time utilization. EAPs, as well as behavioral health providers, will be forced to respond to this demand.

A recent study of psychiatric services delivered via videocam found no significant differences in outcomes between the videocam patients and the in-person group. However, in the study the videocam

patients were more likely to attend sessions than in-person patients.

The most significant objection raised by opponents usually centers on confidentiality. In my opinion, continual technological improvements to security will make this a non-issue.

Your provider panel will also be required to provide services electronically. Managed care entities are already demanding that providers have electronic billing capability. Managed care companies are customer-service oriented. If they can offer electronic services, they will have a competitive edge when trying to gain contracts by selling convenience and efficiency to executives.

Computer-related pathologies can be expected to increase. Internet affairs, Internet gambling, and online pornography will increasingly be subjects of concern for EAPs.

In short, it is essential, in my opinion, that EAPs prepare themselves for the paradigm shift that is occurring, and that will eventually replace the service delivery model we are currently using. If you are computer literate, obtain a videocam and become familiar with its use, and with security protocols. If you're not computer literate, take classes, including learning videocam applications.

These changes will be upon us before we know it. Prepare yourselves, so you are able to respond rapidly as you need to. ■

*Michael Cohn, Ed.D., P.C., is the co-author of "TECHNOSHOCK: Combating Stress at Work and Home in the 90s and Beyond." Editor's note: This article originally appeared in the November 1999 EAR.*

## Editor's Notebook

As 2007 draws to a close, I wish to thank everyone who took the time out of their busy schedules this year to write an article for *EAR*. Space limitations keep me from getting carried away, so I'll just mention a few people in this space — but rest assured, *each and every person* is appreciated.



First, kudos to Karen Hagen, who summarizes the effects of the Minneapolis bridge collapse in this month's cover article. (She also co-wrote an article on mentoring that appeared in October.) I'd also like to thank Allie Libby and Will Prest for their help in compiling a Brown Bagger training on retirement.

I also want to thank Marina London with EAPA. We've worked out a story-swap arrangement in which we've run some EAPA stories in this newsletter, while numerous *EAR* articles have appeared on the EAPA website at [www.eapassn.org](http://www.eapassn.org). It's been a real win-win for all involved.

Many people are trying to make lifestyle changes this time of year. Wendy Betterini offers advice to get past procrastination problems in this month's *LifestyleTIPS*®.

Finally, we have been examining reader surveys to see what you like about this newsletter, where you think we can improve, and what story ideas you have for 2008. While space and time limitations will make it difficult to address all of them in 2008, we will do our best to include as many of your suggestions as possible — after all, *EAR* is about YOU. We wish you a joyous holiday season. Until next year! ■

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