

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

supporting EAP professionals

Promoting Diversity:

Creating a Respectful Workplace

By David Worster

We have all heard about the need for workplaces to embrace diversity. This is becoming increasingly important. Last year, Hispanics surpassed African-Americans as the largest minority group. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, women and members of minority groups now outnumber white males in the workplace.

Moreover, the workforce is aging as many baby boomers are working well into their 60s. Nowhere is this more evident than in healthcare, where the average age of nurses is now in the late 40s.

Today's workplaces are built on teams, which means that managers need to get a variety of employees to effectively work together to accomplish the task at hand. However, failure to adequately address diversity issues impacts more than productivity. Diminished morale may erode commitment to the organization and result in higher rates of turnover or absenteeism. It may also leave the company at a disadvantage when attempting to attract capable and innovative new employees.

Absence of diversity may lead to loss of creativity and innovation that can adversely affect product quality and, ultimately, the company's market share. Today's workplace needs

"...it is important for them to remember that the views of others are seldom 'wrong,' they're just different."

more than a mere appreciation of diversity, it needs a "respectful" approach on day-to-day operations. EAPs are in a prime position to assist in this effort.

What is Diversity?

Just what is diversity? Certain aspects of diversity are protected under law including age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs. Failure to address these elements of diversity in the workplace can result in serious legal and financial repercussions.

The "MacDonnell-Douglas Test" outlines questions used in determining discrimination. Are you a member of a protected class? (e.g. age discrimination for those over 40) Were you qualified for the position? Did the employer take adverse action against you? Did an individual not in your protected class replace you?

A New Hampshire firm recently paid a \$780,000 judgment to settle a sexual harassment case. A quick review of case law would indicate that plaintiffs in such cases almost

always win in this type of legal review.

Loden and Rosener (1991) suggest other possible elements of diversity that may be equally important in the workforce: education, work background, income, marital status, military service, and where you were born and raised.

Respect and Communication

In order to create a respectful workplace, we need to understand where other people are coming from. This is crucial, but it requires constant attention and support. The pain and anger of disrespect runs deep and often stays with us a long time, even a lifetime.

What is respect? How do we get others to practice respect? Self-awareness is an important element. Everyone needs to feel heard. Literature on workplace violence suggests that people who cause violence did not feel anyone was listening to them.

continued on Page 2

FEATURED INSIDE

- ▶ Building an Engaging Brand
- ▶ Interpreting Background Checks
- ▶ Conflict Resolution: Part II
- ▶ Hurricane Katrina Aftermath
- ▶ Survey: Fewer Business Trips
- ▶ Survey: 'Putting Out Fires'
- ▶ Etiquette of Sympathy

INSERTS

- ▶ *Brown Bagger*: Building an Effective Diversity Program
- ▶ *Payroll Stuffers*

Therefore, taking the time to listen with genuine concern, compassion, and caring is an important first step. Seeking understanding is a second. To approach communication with curiosity about the other person's point of view helps them to feel valued, even if you don't agree with them.

Communications is an interesting issue. Culture affects most verbal communication. A group's culture is defined by beliefs, values, and knowledge, and it becomes a way to express meaning. Culture describes a specific group's preferences or assumptions about what is right or wrong. Culture may be expressed in terms of behaviors or symbols, and it includes boundaries, which are different for everyone. We don't usually think about personal boundaries until they have been "crossed." Even then, we usually don't say anything to avoid appearing rude or because we're caught "off guard." As a society, we generally are not comfortable discussing boundaries about language, touching, physical proximity, or clothing — yet these areas may profoundly impact the workplace.

The messages we send about our cultural background can also influence our interactions. Keeping in mind that we see things as **WE** are, not as **THEY ARE** can help us with our perceptions — since perceptions become judgments and eventually, action.

Non-verbal elements of communication are also important. Research has indicated that some elements of non-verbal communication, such as anger, sadness, and happiness, are universally understood by different cultures.

Managers' Role in Diversity

As managers look to create a respectful workplace, it is important

for them to remember that the views of others are seldom "wrong," they're just different. Managers need to talk about boundaries with their employees. Learning to respect the boundaries of others will help prevent potential conflicts and other problems.

Managers should strive to create a "safe" environment in which all kinds of workplace problems are discussed — not just diversity issues. Silence perpetuates problems and may be viewed as a signal of approval.

What are some practical examples of developing a diverse workforce? In nursing, for example, employing minority nurses may aid in community outreach as well as facilitating communication with minority patients. Healthcare organizations and other resources have established numerous scholarship programs to help educate new minority nurses with the goals of increasing the number of qualified nurses *and* improving the quality of healthcare delivery.

Teachers are another good example. National Education Association (NEA) studies suggest that greater diversity among teachers promotes student achievement as well as improving school-parent communication and parental involvement. Recruiting a diverse faculty has become a primary aim of many educational institutions.

EAP's Role in Promoting Diversity

EAPs can play a major role in promoting workplace diversity and creating respectful workplaces. Developing seminars or workshops, newsletters, posters, or other resources that increase self-awareness and cultural awareness may be useful. Promoting effective communication through skill training or development of other communication tools is another option that may address a number of issues simultaneously.

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For example, EAPs may partner with HR to deliver required sexual harassment trainings or presentations about diversity at company new hire orientations or department meetings. Important offshoots are the affirmation that company clients have effective discrimination policies and the opportunity to encourage that they are routinely enforced.

David Worster, LICSW, CEAP, is Director of EAP services for Concord Hospital in Concord, N.H. For a complete list of references used in this article, contact the author at dworster@crhc.org.

UPCOMING EAR FEATURES...

- Identity Theft Services an Emerging Benefit
- Religion in the Workplace
- Give Feedback When It's Needed


Consultation and Collaboration


Consultation and collaboration with managers is a major function of most EAPs. The EAP may assist managers by discussing the following steps to consider when dealing with diversity:

- 1) **Inquire.** Clarify what the person meant and their view of the situation.
- 2) **Show empathy.** Acknowledge emotions, and demonstrate acceptance and understanding of the feelings.
- 3) **Educate.** Help others understand the value of diversity.
- 4) **State your needs and expectations** as it relates to employee's workplace behavior.
- 5) **Don't allow entrenched positions to develop** in which employees will need to "pick sides." This can create long-term havoc.
- 6) **Be future-oriented and solution-focused.**
- 7) **Express your feelings honestly**, but thoughtfully, when you are involved — arguing and defending are generally not helpful.
- 8) **Be responsible for your own actions** and choices and be willing to change your behavior as needed.


— David Worster, LICSW, CEAP


Resources

 *The Trainer's Diversity Source Book: 50 Ready-to-use Activities from Icebreakers through Wrap-Ups*, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD). This book guides facilitators in confronting tough problems, such as handling openly skeptical or hostile participants and managing facilitators' own diversity issues. Call (800)-444-5006, option #1 or visit www.shrm.org/shrmstore.

 *Mars & Venus in the Workplace* outlines how each gender communicates and solves problems differently. Training can be customized to fit the particular needs of your organization. For more information, call (800)-637-1434, email marsvenusatwork@aol.com

@aol.com or log on to www.marsvenusatwork.com.

 *A Workplace Divided: How Americans View Discrimination and Race on the Job*, suggests sharply differing views regarding how minorities are treated on the job. According to the research, 46% of African-Americans believe they will be treated unfairly by their employers, compared with 10% of whites. For more information, log on to www.diversitytraining.com/art8.html.

 *The 2-Second Commute*, by Christine Durst and Michael Haaren, Career Press. Virtual assistants, offices, and teams set their own hours, and provide everything from administrative support to high-end consulting via email, phone, and fax. This book explains how to establish a home-based virtual business. ■

Marketing Matters

Building an Engaging Brand

By Kristie Tamesevicius

Today's customers are more concerned with doing business on *their* time. That means buying products and service at *their* convenience, *their* way.

For marketers and business owners that means being prepared to create a brand that influences their decision so that the product or service is at the top of the consumer's mind.

To build a brand that stands out from the competition, there must be creativity and imagination in the message. The most powerful brand experience usually stands out because of the "fun" factor —

a unique or imaginative way of grabbing attention and keeping the audience interested.

There are four ways to create an unforgettable brand:

- Tell a unique brand story.
- Coin a term that will make one's brand a household name.
- Add a unique brand of humor.
- Create a catchphrase or quote.

These techniques will help transform a product or service into a one-of-a-kind brand experience. ■

Kristie is the author of three books including, "I LOVE MY LIFE: A Mom's Guide to Working from Home" (Wyatt-MacKenzie Publishing 2003).

Interpreting Background Checks

By John Rossheim

Conducting background checks on prospective employees is one thing, but knowing what to do with the results is something else.

Consider the differences between Candidate A and Candidate B. Candidate A's criminal record check reveals she just got out of prison for assaulting her last supervisor. Candidate B's pre-employment screening shows not the faintest mark against her: She has the degree from the college cited on her résumé, her credit cards are always paid off on time and in full, and she's never even been written up by a meter maid. Welcome aboard, Candidate B.

But when a human resources manager or hiring supervisor sits down to review pre-employment checks on half a dozen finalists — with each dossier running several pages — shades of gray are inevitable: A CPA with a sterling record has maxed out three personal credit cards, although he's always made the minimum payments. A janitor who receives great references from three employers has exchanged legal blows with landlords over unrefunded security deposits.

Who should be hired? How should employers act upon the findings of background investigations, while keeping the hiring process ethical, legal, and, lest we forget, focused on identifying and closing a deal with the best candidate?

The Proper Scope of Checks is Debatable

Employers must decide whether to gather as much information as possible on the finalists, or tailor the screening to the position at hand.

The choice isn't easy.

"It's better to get only what's truly relevant to the job," says Louis Maltby, president of the National Workrights Institute in Princeton, New Jersey. The problem is that once a potentially negative finding is in hand, it's difficult to set the result aside even if it isn't important to the responsibilities of the job.

"The law requires that employers take reasonable steps to see that the employee won't harm others in the future," notes Douglas Towns, a partner in the Jones Day law firm. "It doesn't require the employer to look in every nook and cranny of a person's background." Still, given the strong motivation to avoid future claims of negligent hiring, "employers are somewhat between a rock and a hard place about how far to go in checking."

To get the best information, HR departments have to ask the right questions as early as possible in the hiring process.

"What's important is the application: what you ask and how you ask it," says Tim Mohr, a senior manager at the New York consulting firm BDO Seidman LLP. For example, an application shouldn't ask only, "Have you ever committed a felony?" if the employer also wants to test candidates' honesty regarding *any* record of misdemeanors or other lesser violations.

Screening Results Need to Be Categorized

Unless everything in a screening comes up squeaky clean, the results need to be organized for interpretation. One method involves triage: Finding A passes muster; Finding B requires clarification by the candidate, the screening provider or the source documents behind database

searches; and Finding C requires consultation with legal counsel or other specialists.

"Where serious issues have been identified, it's very important for employers to make sure they consult with legal counsel," says Wendy Schmidt, a principal in forensic and investigative services with Deloitte & Touche LLP in New York City.

Employers Must Make Tough Choices

Employers must often make a difficult choice when one candidate stands head-and-shoulders above the rest — except when his integrity is taken into account.

"I've seen situations where a candidate has falsified the education record and the employer decided to go ahead and hire," Schmidt states. It's difficult for employers to face the music and reject such candidates, given that 10% or more of résumés contain lies about educational achievement, according to a number of studies.

Finally, HR executives must also balance the need to deepen the investigation in particular cases against the imperative to snag the best candidate while he's still on the market. "You do have a chance of losing your No. 1 or No. 2 candidate if you extend the process too long," Mohr says.

What if a top candidate has one serious strike against him, but it was an honest mistake? "If an employer restricts itself to hiring people who never made a significant mistake, they often won't hire the strongest candidate," Maltby notes. ■

John Rossheim, a journalist in Providence, R.I., writes about workplace issues, employment trends, and changing relationships between employers and workers. John regularly contributes to Workforce Insights, an online resource about emerging labor trends and issues produced by Veritude, a provider of strategic human resources and a subsidiary of Fidelity Investments. ©2004, 2005 Veritude, LLC. Reprinted with permission.

Habits of Effective Conflict Resolvers: Part II

By Dina Beach Lynch

Last month, we examined the difference between being “pretty good” at resolving conflicts to someone who is *highly effective at it*. This month, we’ll take a look at the remainder of these points.

BE A GOOD TRANSMITTER

Messages transmitted from one person to another are very powerful. Sometimes people have to hear it “from the horse’s mouth”. Other times, you’ll have to be the transmitter of good thoughts and feelings. Pick up those “gems”, those positive messages that flow when clients feel safe and heard in mediation, and present them to the other client. Your progress will improve.

We’re all human. You know how easy it is to hold a grudge or assign blame. Sharing gems appropriately can help each client begin to shift their perceptions of the sit-

uation, and more importantly, of each other. To deliver polished gems, try to:

- Act soon after hearing the gem.
- Paraphrase accurately so words aren’t distorted.
- Ask the listener if this is new information and if it changes his/her stance.
- Avoid expecting the individual to visibly demonstrate a “shift in stance” (it happens internally and on their timetable, not ours).

RECOGNIZE POWER

Power is a dominant factor in mediation that raises many questions: What is it? Who has it? How do you balance power?

Assumptions about who has power are easy to make and sometimes wrong. Skillful conflict resolvers recognize dynamics in conflicts and are mindful about how to authentically manage them.

BE OPTIMISTIC, RESILIENT

Agreeing to participate in mediation is an act of courage and hope. By participating, clients are conveying their belief in the value of the relationship. They are also expressing their trust in you to be responsive to and supportive of efforts in mediation.

But clients may first communicate their anger, frustration, suffering, righteousness, and regret. You can inspire them to continue by being optimistic.

Be resilient. Remember the last time you were stuck in a conflict? You probably replayed the conversation over and over in your mind, thinking about different possible endings. Clients get stuck, too. In fact, clients can become so worn down and apathetic about their conflict, especially a long-standing dispute; they’d do anything to end it. Don’t let them settle. Mediation is about clients getting their interests met. Be resilient:

- Move yourself and the client though the different cycles of mediation.
- Help clients visualize their progress.
- Be mindful and appreciative of the hard work you are all doing

Hopefully, you’ve discovered that these are your own habits in one form or another and that your organization is benefiting from your knowledge. ■

Dina Beach Lynch was formerly the Ombudsman for Fleet Bank and is currently CEO of WorkWellTogether.com, an online conflict management toolkit. Dina can be reached at Dina@workwelltogether.com.

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We're pleased that subscribers who completed surveys said they enjoy receiving this newsletter, but survey results also led to several big changes we'll be making to *EAR* in 2006!



First, we plan on continuing the poster insert — but as a quarterly **CAT-ALOG** that will allow you to choose from **32, full-color** posters, on a variety of topics.

Second, we will be **ADDING** a monthly insert on lifestyle and fitness tips. Watch for more on these changes in the January *EAR*.

Several of you asked for survey results, so with 5 best and 1 worst..:

*How satisfied are you with *EAR*?* 4.5.
Would you prefer that articles... 5 said shorter articles, 21 said keep as is.

*Would you like us to continue the *Brown Bagger*?* 26 said yes, one said no.
*The *Payroll Stuffers*?* 17 said yes, 4 said no.
Posters? 13 yes, 14 said no.

*How useful are the following sections in *EAR*?* Web Watch at Work, 3.7; *Brown Bagger*, 4.4; *Payroll Stuffers*, 3.5; *Posters*, 2.6; *Legal Lines*, 3.6; *Editor's Notebook*, 3.5; *Workplace Trends*, 4.3; *Marketing*, 4.0; and *Cover Story*, 4.2.

What is the biggest problem you face in your job? Time; money; inter-department communication; adequate staffing, competition from national EAPs; large caseload; ongoing concerns about confidentiality; and getting people to see value of EAPs. (Multiple responses underlined.)

*What articles or topics would you like to see in future *EARs*?* Health and fitness; stress reduction strategies; sandwich generation; quality vs. "fake" EAPs; technology; debt management; reference hotlines; anger; change; recovery & substance abuse; confidentiality. (Multiple responses underlined.)

*Which group of professionals at your agency read *EAR*?* Counselors, 19; administrators, 15; CEAPs, 14; consultants, 7.

Thank you for taking the time to complete a survey. Until next time.

Sincerely,
Mike Jacquart, Editor
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The Lost Art of Schmoozing

Cell phones. Email. Virtual meetings. While these tools have made it easier to instantly connect with prospects and colleagues, they've made it harder to, well, connect.

That's why sales consultant Richard Abraham wants to bring back the lost art of schmoozing. That's right. Schmoozing.

While Abraham's new book on this subject is aimed at salespeople, its principles apply to almost anyone who communicates with prospects or current clients. (We all "sell" in some capacity — therefore we should all "shmooze," Abraham says.)

- **Figure out what really matters to the prospect.** (Hint: It usually has nothing to do with the business at hand.) Mr. Shmooze helps his client see that his prospect's passion in life is his son, a talented golfer. Rather than simply inviting the prospect to play golf, he should also invite the prospect's son. "The point is that by paying close attention to your prospects and clients, you can figure out what really drives them," Abraham says. Office photos or subjects brought up in conversation offer clues — the key is to be alert.
- **Practice the art of elevation.** Elevate the prospect's experience to a memorable level that goes above and beyond the ordinary. While inviting a prospect to a round of golf isn't unique, Mr.

Shmooze's version that includes inviting the client's son and personalizing golf balls, turns the outing into an exhilarating new level.

- **Do follow-up schmoozing immediately.** The minute Mr. Shmooze leaves a meeting, he's on his cell phone with his assistant asking to send things to his clients and prospects, such as baseball tickets, articles from the Internet, and so forth. Within a week a potential client has forgotten 90% of what has been shown. But if you send someone a book or a tie the next day, you go a long way toward overcoming that effect.
- **Don't limit schmoozing to "people who matter."** Everyone matters. You can't build goodwill with too many people.

Is schmoozing manipulative? That's the wrong question, according to Abraham. "You're going to be interacting with these people anyway, so why not do it in a manner that makes their lives a little better? What's not to like about accentuating the positive? The best news of all is that, in a time when so many people suffer from the all-work-and-no-play syndrome, schmoozing is a form of play. It's as fun for the schmooz-er as it is for the shmooz-ee." ■

Abraham is the author of "Mr. Shmooze: The Art and Science of Selling Through Relationships," \$19.95. The Richard Abraham Company, ISBN: 0-9741996-0-5.

Fewer Business Trips Still the Norm

A new survey suggests that the bleary-eyed business traveler is becoming a less frequent sight in airports and hotels across the country.

Nearly half (48%) of employees polled said they travel for work less frequently compared to five years ago.

Twenty-seven percent of respondents said they're traveling much less frequently, and 21% reported somewhat less frequent travel, (which, combined, total 48%). Only 15% of workers polled said they're traveling much more frequently than five years ago.

Companies that scaled back

“But while virtual interaction might save time and money, it still cannot replace the value of a handshake.”

— Paul McDonald,
Executive Dir. of Robert Half
Management Resources

travel allowances in recent years continue to monitor expenses by capitalizing on less-costly webcasts and videoconferences.

“But while virtual interaction might save time and money, it still

cannot replace the value of a handshake,” cautions Paul McDonald, executive director of Robert Half Management Resources, which conducted the survey.

“Meeting with clients or vendors in person, even if it requires occasional travel, strengthens business relationships by encouraging open dialogue on critical issues,” McDonald says. “Face-to-face discussions allow for more direct communications, enable participants to pick up on each other’s nonverbal cues and replace the potential for misunderstandings.” ■

‘Putting Out Fires’

Keeping cool in a crisis is a must-skill for managers, a new survey suggests. According to those polled, 33% of an executive’s time is spent responding to crises or problems.

While spending one-third of one’s time troubleshooting may seem extreme, that figure is actually down from a 2001 poll in which respondents said that 43% of an executive’s time is spent addressing critical matters.

Tracey Fuller, executive director of The Creative Group, notes that nipping problems in the bud is the key to reducing time spent dealing with crises:

- **Don’t shoot the messenger.** Nobody wants to be the bear-

er of bad news. Encourage employees to approach you with problems by maintaining your composure, thanking them for bringing items to your attention and working with them to identify solutions.

- **Lead by example.** Glossing over errors promotes a cover-up culture. Admit your mistakes and discuss the measures you’re taking to correct them. Letting staff know when you’ve made a decision you regret encourages them to be upfront, too.
- **Give them leverage.** Give employees enough autonomy

to troubleshoot client and customer service issues and reward them for doing so successfully.

- **Use a patch kit.** If you don’t know how to respond to a situation right away, take temporary steps to the problem while you consider a long-term solution.
- **Speak up.** Concerns about a vendor’s services should be addressed swiftly to keep problems from recurring. ■

Source: The Creative Group
(www.creativegroup.com)

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Etiquette of Sympathy

By Lydia Ramsey

Last April, within a three-week period, I became both a grandmother and a widow, but grief is an issue that confronts everyone at some point.

It is often difficult to know what to say or do when someone dies, so I want to share what I have learned that may help when someone you know — whether client, colleague, or friend — loses a loved one.

First, it is important to do *something*. Many of us are so uncomfortable with death that we don't do anything. Don't make that mistake. Any gesture is comforting.

- **Attend the funeral or the memorial service if possible.** Your presence is a sign of support. Even if you can't speak directly to the family, you can sign the guest book, and they will know you cared enough to be there.
- **Write a personal note of condolence as soon as possible.** Such notes are a source of great comfort. Some people simply acknowledged their sorrow for my loss. Others described what my late husband, Hank, meant to them personally. Commercial sympathy cards are equally cherished, but be sure to add a short personal note.
- **Send flowers unless the family specifies otherwise.** Flowers add warmth and are visual reminders of support. Flowers and personal gifts continued to arrive in my home weeks later to confirm that neither my pain nor I had been forgotten.
- **Offer food and other daily living items.** The last thing a grieving family wants to worry

about is grocery shopping and making meals. A thoughtful neighbor called me and said, "I am going to the grocery store. What do you need?" My response was a baffled, "I have no idea." Undaunted, this kind, generous person filled her car with everything from fresh fruit and vegetables to paper towels and toilet tissue — even pet food!

- **Make a contribution to charities indicated by the family.** Honor the wishes of the deceased. If you missed the funeral notice, call the funeral home. They will have a record.
- **Be specific when you offer to help.** Most people say, "If there is anything you need, call." While their intentions were genuine, I didn't always know what to say. One neighbor offered to walk the dog. Another proclaimed to be handy with household repairs if anything broke. Once people were clear on what they could do, I knew where to turn for what I needed.
- **Make a note of the date of the death.** Honor the anniversary with a note or a phone call that says you haven't forgotten.

Sometimes people search for just the right words to say, but there really aren't any. Sometimes the best you can offer is an, "I'm sorry."

I hope that what I have learned will help you the next time someone close to you suffers a loss. ■

Lydia Ramsey is a business etiquette expert and the author of "Manners that Sell- Adding the Polish that Builds Profits." For more information, visit www.manners-thatsell.com or phone (912) 588-9812.

Hurricane Katrina Aftermath

Is your EAP directly or indirectly involved in Hurricane Katrina relief efforts — and what does this have to do with employee retention?

RaeAnn Thomas, CEAP and Executive Director of Associated Employee Assistance Services, notes that because employees want to work for organizations that "have a heart," community service initiatives can be a way to retain employees and improve their corporate image.

"EAP can help with this by organizing and coordinating efforts in the organization, and even promote the involvement of employees," Thomas states.

Ceridian and ComPsych Corporation are among the many organizations providing crisis counseling to areas affected by Hurricane Katrina, including mental health professionals who will conduct critical incident stress debriefings (CISDs) for thousands of displaced workers. ComPsych's services include a dedicated 800 line to receive calls from displaced employees; logistical information, including status of co-workers and loved ones; and training for managers in emergency response and trauma recovery.

Ceridian's recommendations for employees and family dealing with the aftermath of the hurricane include writing down your thoughts. Many people find it reduces anxiety to keep a journal of their feelings. Other recommendations included getting plenty of rest and spending time with others.

These are only examples. These organizations are but a few of those involved in the monumental job of rebuilding the lives of those affected by this catastrophe. Remind business clients that EAPs are there for help and referrals. ■

Sources: ComPsych, Ceridian, and RaeAnn Thomas, former EAR contributing editor.