

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

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21 years
of service!

supporting EA professionals

Military Culture: A Primer for EAPs

By Gregory Burek, MD



Regardless of a veteran's individual experience, there are many things that all service members have in common. Sacrifice. Time away from family and loved ones, long hours and hard work are just a few of the tremendous sacrifices that veterans have made in service. In joining the military, service members give up many of the freedoms that they fight to protect.

They give up a piece of their individuality to be part of something larger than themselves. While on active duty uniformity is the rule: dressing the same, speaking the same, and acting the same. Despite what veterans give up, working as part of a team and being able to rely on those around them inspire a sense of pride,

belonging, loyalty and brotherhood known as *Esprit de corps*.

This feeling is not reserved for those whom they served with, but generalized to all those whom served. This is why many veterans feel a sense of comfort and connection with other veterans, even with those from different branches or different eras.

Officially each branch holds its own core values (see graphic on page 3). However, despite differences in verbiage, the values shared are honor, courage, duty and service above self. These values epitomize holding oneself to a higher standard. Invoking these values, much like the oath, inspire a sense of pride, reminding the veteran of their cultural identity. These values remain with the veteran long after taking off the uniform.

How to Approach Veterans

The themes discussed in this article are merely the tip of the iceberg, intended to give the EA professional a glimpse into military culture. Being aware of them is the first step in better serving the veteran population.

❖ **Ask questions.** Be humble and don't pretend that you know everything they are saying. The military has a tremendous number of abbreviations and acronyms, not to mention the jar-

gon and slang. In fact, veterans will often use jargon to challenge the clinician or assess the clinician's knowledge and interest. It can also be used as a defense, to guard themselves when they are feeling vulnerable. Asking the veteran to explain terminology will show interest. It can help build rapport and lessen resistance.

❖ **Listen.** Each veteran has a unique story about why they joined,

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what they did, and how they feel about it. If you do not take the time to listen, you risk alienating the veteran and closing any chance you had of truly helping them. This is particularly important during the first encounter. Veterans often have a lot of resistance to seeing clinicians, especially for mental health. They may be looking for a reason to walk out and never come back. It is crucial that their first experience with a clinician is a positive and welcoming one, even at the expense of having to schedule a follow-up appointment to address all of their concerns.

❖ **“I’m fine”** does not mean they’re not suffering. Most of military training taught the veteran how to suppress. Basic training, with its repeated food deprivation, sleep deprivation, working through pain and discomfort, and constant pushing past your limits, is a prolonged exercise of suppression and denial. “Suck it up” and “rub some dirt in it” are common responses to complaints about discomfort, illness or injury.

If he or she was ever sick or hurt enough to go to *sick call* (the medical clinic), they would often be rebuffed by their peers. When a service member is injured or ill, his or her weight is carried by the rest of the team. This leaves the veteran with feelings they are letting others down and being a burden. When the veteran says “I’m fine”, they often are having difficulty admitting that they are suffering. This is an opportunity to show empathy and concern.

❖ **Don’t say “I understand”**. As much as you know, you cannot fully understand or appreciate their feelings and their situation. This phrase, even if said with empathy, may backfire and cause a veteran to close up or become angry. Substituting other empathetic statements or

questions such as “how was that for you?” or “I can’t imagine what that was like for you.” will elicit much better responses and build respect and trust.

❖ **Don’t assume they regret serving**. When a veteran is seeking medical or mental health care, many may have had bad experiences, traumatic or otherwise, while they served or after they returned home. Many veterans, especially those who were recently discharged, may temporarily reject their military identity.

This is a common part of “re-integration”. It does not mean that they regret serving, regardless of being drafted or volunteering. Despite what they’ve been through, most veterans are proud of their service. Most maintain high regard and respect for the military, especially for their brothers and sisters still in uniform.

❖ **Not all trauma is deployment related**. Service members continue to carry the wounds and traumas of their former lives with them into the military. Getting out of a difficult home environment may be one of the reasons that they joined. The stresses and hurt of childhood do not evaporate after leaving home, though they are frequently ignored and suppressed while serving.

Moreover, stress is an everyday part of military life long before deployment. Traumatic events, including military sexual trauma and losses can occur on base, just as easily as on the battlefield.

However, these wounds are often inflicted by one’s peers or superiors. These traumas can be deeper and more difficult to absorb, because they are so unexpected. Ask about painful experiences the veteran may have had apart from deployment or before enlisting.

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❖ **Do not judge**. These men and women served their country and put themselves in harm’s way to protect others. They have been put in situations where split-second decisions dictate dying verses going home to their families. They were not given the time to wrestle with the morality in the moment.

But after returning home, these decisions often weigh heavily

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upon their mind and their conscious. This is known as *Moral Injury*. It is not helpful for the clinician to express their views or opinions. The clinician should be supportive and empathetic while the veteran works through these issues for himself or herself.

❖ **Asking for help is difficult.**

Veterans have many concerns about seeking care. They are trained to be tough, to suppress the pain and discomfort. Veterans may feel like they are the only one suffering. They may be concerned that others will see them as weak or it would harm their career to seek mental health. It may have taken weeks or months for a veteran to muster the nerve to walk through that door and ask for help. Even then, they may be holding onto much ambivalence about accepting it.

Because of this, a veteran may be looking for a way out and be especially sensitive to perceived judgment or insincerity. Every effort should be made by the clinician to make the veteran feel safe, welcome, and respected. This



Editor's Notebook

Compassion fatigue. Suicide. And to a lesser degree, veterans. These were all stories *EAR* readers

wanted to see who responded to a brief online poll I conducted prior to the Greater Wisconsin EAPA Chapter conference in Milwaukee. As a result, compassion fatigue was featured as last month's cover story and *Brown Bagger* insert.

Similarly, the topic of suicide is addressed in this month's *Brown Bagger*. Next month, the important subjects of compassion fatigue and (teen) suicide will again be addressed in a wrap-up article about the previously mentioned conference.

In *this* issue of *EAR*, Gregory Burek, MD, explains how veterans

are unique compared to other employee clients, and as a result, how EA professionals need to approach this population differently. Greg's article offers an excellent glimpse into military culture. Since veterans are among those most at risk of completing suicide, the *Brown Bagger* includes info for this population on page 4.

The online poll I mentioned included other topics readers wish to see covered in *EAR*. We will do our best to address those as time and space permit. Until next time.

Mike Jacquart

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includes clinicians being willing to apologize or telling the veteran that they are free to change providers, to find one that they may feel more comfortable with.

clinicians should try for something more spontaneous and less automatic. "Welcome back" or "Welcome home" or even just plain "Thank you" can give the intended message without ringing hollow.

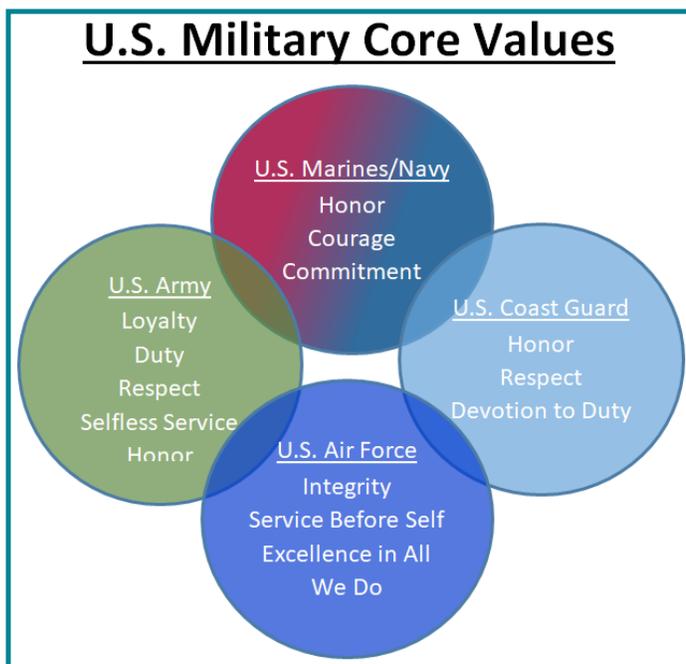
❖ **"Thank you for your service".**

Although well intended, this phrase has been overused. Even when said with sincerity, it can sound shallow and contrived. It's often stated as a reflex by those who do not know what else to say. Instead,

Summary

Veterans make up a large percentage of the United States population. Therefore, having at least a cursory understanding of military culture will help most clinicians feel more comfortable and competent in treating this population. ■

*Dr. Burek is currently the VA Chief Resident of Psychiatry with the Medical College of Wisconsin and a former U.S. Marine. Prior to his medical training, Dr. Burek served as an infantryman with the 2nd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion. In 2003, he was deployed to Iraq and served in combat as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Editor's note: For more on what to say to a vet, see this month's Resources section. See also page 4 of this month's *Brown Bagger* insert.*



'Detoxing' from Your Smartphone

If you're thinking about a detox to give your health a boost, don't forget your mental health. Many studies have shown how an increasing use of smartphones and social media can distract us from family, friends, and work, amplify feelings of anxiety and depression, and even make us unhappy.

So if you want to reduce your smartphone use, read on for five expert tips to help you take a break from your phone and avoid addiction.

❖ **Schedule your time to avoid smartphone addiction.** There *are* ways to limit smartphone use, according to Steven Sussman, a professor at USC. He suggests setting a schedule with times for when you are allowed to use certain websites or apps, or limiting how many times you check your phone to once every 15 minutes, then once every 30 minutes, and so on.

❖ **Turn off notifications.** San Francisco State University Professor of Health Education Erik Peper suggests turning off notifications so you can focus on daily tasks rather than being constantly interrupted by your phone.

❖ **Don't use your phone at mealtimes.** This is one way to easily and quickly cut down your phone use, and it comes with other benefits, according to Julie Albright, a psychology lecturer at USC. "Keeping them out of sight during family dinners lets you focus on the people around you and be present," she said.

Sierra Hinkle, a Holistic Health minor and student of Peper has another trick to avoid phones when eating – when out with friends, they all put their phones in the center of the table, and the first one to touch theirs buys the drinks.

❖ **Quit social media.** Khari

McKendell, also a student of Peper, has tried to reduce phone use by closing his social media accounts. "I still call and text people but I want to make sure that a majority of the time I'm talking to my friends in person," he said. The fewer social media accounts you have the less likely you are to be constantly on your phone, and, according to various studies, the more likely you are to feel happier.



❖ **Charge your phone in another room.** Albright suggests charging your phone in another room in the evening. "This is a way to reconnect with body, mind, and self and not be in constant state of over-stimulation of the mind," Albright said. "We all need that quiet time to be able to think again and refocus." ■

Source: Star2.com.

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Using PR to Communicate Value of EAPs

Providers of employee assistance services help employees, families, employers, unions and organizations become healthier, happier and more productive. So how do you get your good story and positive message known to others? EAPA members can take advantage of the PR/

media/communications/strategy services available through BackBone Inc., a 20-percent discount off the normal rates.

For additional information, visit www.backboneinc.com or email che@backboneinc.com. In addition, Charles Epstein of BackBone Inc., has written a useful white

paper: *How EAPs Can Use Public Relations to Communicate Value.*

Learn more at http://www.backboneinc.com/pr_for_eap/ ■

Source: *Employee Assistance Professionals Association* (www.eapassn.org).

On the Job

Ideas for Better Utilizing Your EAP

By Brian Taylor

Many employers would be amazed at the hidden treasures of EAPs and the wonders that they can do for staff well-being, morale and productivity. Your EAP should be at the very heart of their operation, the lifeblood keeping it thriving and developing. Here are my constant themes:

❖ **Integrate your EAP as part of your day-to-day practice.**

Make sure that you include EAPs in return-to-work discussions, disciplinary meetings and appraisals. This means that the service is embedded into the business and that staff know where to turn should they need any help or advice. Important information can also be shared through records of meetings and EAP data.

❖ **Look for telltale signs and make management referrals.** Be proactive – manager referral is one of the key tools of an EAP. A line

manager notices that a staff member needs support and takes the initiative with early intervention. He or she flags the concern to HR, and then HR formally refers the team member to the EAP instead of waiting for them to call for help. Encourage managers to keep an eye out for behavioral change within their respective teams and to look for signs of stress and mental health problems. Examples could include work that is unexpectedly slipping, individuals going back to smoking after giving up, snapping at people, or becoming withdrawn.

❖ **Use the data goldmine.** EAPs can work for companies on many different levels; including supporting staff in overcoming challenges of work and life, while also providing important anonymous data for employers. Employers can make good use of statistics and information collected confidentially by EAPs. Reports are fed back to the business to flag concerns and show what areas could be improved. The

data remains anonymous, but it can reveal crucial information about a particular department or area of the business. The feedback from the EAP gives corporate clients the chance to see what is going on and plan how to make improvements.

❖ **Involve the CEO.** Remind clients that EAP is for everyone – the CEO, directors and senior management, who are just as likely to need to make that call. High-stress atmospheres can be challenging, especially if difficult decisions are on the horizon. I cannot think of a better way for the board to fully appreciate an EAP than when they have personally used the service. Employers, staff and their immediate family can call a free helpline any time of the day or night and be put through to counselors and advisers, trained to give medical, mental health and stress, legal and financial support. ■

Source: Brian Taylor, "Four tips to make your employee assistance programme work harder," *Personnel Today*.

NC EAPA Chapter Holds Magical Event

The North Carolina EAPA Chapter held its annual conference in Winston-Salem, where a lot of fun stuff happened! The theme was *Client, Company, Self: The Magical Balance of EAP*. And MAGICAL it was! **Paul Turney** really pulled a rabbit out of the hat as Conference Chair and put on a great conference

Lib Edwards, as she has done so well in the past, took care of all of the hotel details, while **Gina Penland**, **Eileen Hodiak**, and **Mariano Raigo** took great care of the exhibitors.

Diversity Chair **Liz Danielian** received the *Outstanding Member of the Year* award for her work in diversity planning, Board and con-



Liz Danielian, left, was named this year's Outstanding Member of the Year. Presenting her with the award was Judah Segal, last year's recipient and current chapter treasurer.

ference involvement and social media expertise.

The newly named *President's Achievement Award* was presented to **Dawn Klug**, who has been rep-

resenting the EA profession on the state level for years (she has held about every NC EAPA Board position possible) and is now involved on the national/international level as an EAPA Director At Large Board Member.

The reason the President's Achievement Award is "newly named"...is to honor **John Burke!** We surprised John at the March Conference Opening Luncheon and Awards Banquet (where he happened to be the Keynote Speaker) by presenting him with a beautiful award that recognized his hard work and dedication to the NC chapter and the EA field. We proudly will annually present the *John Burke President's Achievement Award*. ■

Marijuana: A Changing Conversation

As marijuana legalization continues to expand rapidly, many employers are grappling with how to update their drug policies without employee privacy going up in smoke.

As the legalization and use of marijuana increases, HR leaders across the country are assessing their current policies. Employers in safety-sensitive industries such as transportation and construction continue to maintain and clarify their strict testing, but others have quietly ceased pre-screen and random testing

because too many people are turning up positive.

Adult-use "recreational" marijuana is now legal in nine states—Alaska, California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, Oregon, Vermont and Washington—and the District of Columbia. Medical marijuana is also legal in 29 states and D.C., and more states are expected to put marijuana-legalization initiatives to vote this year. While federal law has yet to change, experts say employers must determine how the mainstreaming of the drug will impact the workplace.

While marijuana remains illegal under federal law, employers retain the right to test for it, discipline those who test positive and retain a drug-free workplace policy. Experts say that, until there's more legal clarification and better testing methods, drug policies in the U.S. workforce will only become hazier.

Read more at <http://hrexecutive.com/cannabis-a-changing-conversation/> ■

Source: Human Resource Executive.

‘Checked Out’ when you’re ‘Checked In’

The saying goes that a company is only as good as the people it keeps. But what if those people aren’t fully engaged in their duties? According to research from staffing firm Accountemps, workers are disengaged at their jobs more than one-quarter (26 percent) of the time, on average, leaving the door open to lost productivity, low morale, and turnover.

When professionals were asked what would make them more engaged at work, the responses included:

- Better perks (on-site gyms, nap rooms, free food), 37% of respondents;
- More challenging work, 31%;
- Less bureaucracy/red tape, 31%; and
- Lighter workload, 22%.

“Employers shouldn’t take a one-size-fits-all approach to improving employee engagement,” said Michael Steinitz, executive director of Accountemps. “Each worker and office environment are unique.”

Steinitz noted, “Managers should continually check in with

their staff to gauge satisfaction levels and learn what motivates or potentially disengages them.”

He added that anonymous employee surveys could help unearth issues, particularly if workers feel uncomfortable offering candid feedback to their boss. “Employee engagement surveys are most effective when managers share the results and communicate how they plan to make improvements.” ■

Source: Accountemps, a Robert Half company. Learn more at roberthalf.com/accountemps.

Book Review

Addressing Abrasive Leaders

Today’s workforce is filled with abrasive leaders and ugly workplace cultures. However, only in rare instances are these leaders coached to change this abrasive approach. Instead, one of two things happen: the abrasive leader is either fired, or they continue to put up with his or her behavior as it eats away at their employee morale and their overall bottom-line. The problem with these approaches is that neither one of them solves the actual problem.

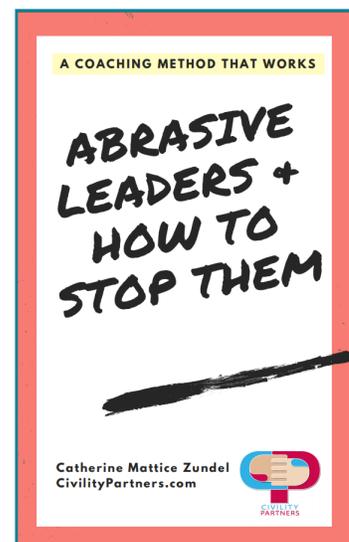
In her latest book, *Abrasive Leaders and How to Stop Them*, Catherine Mattice-Zundel takes a unique approach to this matter. Through five case studies from her

own coaching practice, she offers great insight as to why abrasive leaders act the way they do (spoiler: they *aren’t* psychopaths!), and how to stop them. Download a free copy at <https://civilitypartners.com/pages/why-abrasive-leaders-act-the-way-they-do-and-how-to-stop-them/>

Another New Book

The latest book in partnership with the National Workplace Bullying Coalition is heading to print. The book, *Stand up, Speak Out against Workplace Bullying*, includes 23 true stories about extraordinary experiences with workplace bullying and how bullying targets navigated through it

and ultimately overcame it. To learn more or pre-order check out <https://www.workplacebullyingcoalition.org/book>. ■



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Improving the Onboarding Process – Part II

By Sean Gordon

Whether you're running a Fortune 500 company with locations across the globe or a six-person startup, onboarding new employees is a critical factor in whether or not a business will succeed. All too often, businesses devote weeks and months to hiring the perfect candidate, screening countless applicants, contacting references, sifting through piles of resumes and applications, and setting aside precious workday time for team interviews. What follows? Making up for that lost time by launching the new hire straight into the lion's den.

If employees don't fully comprehend how to properly fulfill their duties at their position, it is going to be nearly impossible for them to perform at their optimum potential. Besides that, it's likely their morale and self-esteem will take a hit as they navigate the confusion and mistakes they'll inevitably make en masse. This can lead to a sour work environment and negatively impact retention rates, costing the company more money in the long run than it could ever make up in the interim.

You may be thinking to yourself, "Okay, but I'm an EAP practitioner, I'm not involved in the hiring process." Perhaps so, but you are involved in the aftermath that results if the new hire wasn't trained properly!

In Part I, we took a look at the affordability of onboarding software, how it enhances the

onboarding process, and the first step in onboarding (collecting data). We conclude this two-part series by examining adaptive training.

Adaptive Training Commences

The best onboarding programs will make ample use of video training, not to mention freeing up access using mobile-capable software and a cloud-based training so that workers may learn through the manner in which they feel most comfortable and motivated. Once training is completed, feedback is given both to the employee and their supervisors. HR analytics isn't just about, "You got 9 out of 12 questions correct". Instead, data points and breakdowns based on how information pertains to specifically-recognized job duties is the key.

This is, of course, a two-way street. You want to use HR analytics to strengthen the program. This can be accomplished through post-training surveys. The analytical points will demonstrate how a user thinks specific information was relative to actual on-the-job experiences, what new skills were learned, instructor performance and courseware performance, and duration of time expected for new skills and knowledge to be implemented into a position.

The latter is excellent because it can be measured in a loop, as supervisors can then take averages and determine how long it's *actually* taking for new skills to come into play, determining effectiveness of the onboarding process.

Summary

Setting checkpoints along the way is further critical to the success of the program: 30, 60 and 90 day increments to reevaluate skills and further training are generally accepted intervals. The onboarding process evolves into ongoing training, and as we know, learning never stops. HR analytics absorbs raw talent data and provides commentary that has the potential to greatly shape the success of the company. ■

Sean Gordon is the CEO of HireNami (<https://hirenami.com>).

Resources

🔗 *The Wounded Warrior Project* helps veterans reclaim their lives. Helpful links include "Warriors & Families," "How We Help," "Get Involved" and more. Go to <https://www.wounded-warriorproject.org/>

🔗 *Things To Say And Not To Say To A Vet*. Jason Moon, an Iraq War vet, talks to guest host Sean Cole about the seven things people say to veterans that alienate and anger them. His essay appears here <http://www.thestory.org/things-say-and-not-say-vet>.

🔗 *The National Veterans Foundation Lifeline* is staffed by veterans for veterans. Call 1-888-777-4443 or check out <https://nvf.org/lifeline-for-vets/>. ■