

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

supporting EA professionals

May is Mental Health Awareness Month!

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21 years of service!

Compassion Fatigue *Know the Warning Signs*



By Deb Kosmer

When clients become faces, when you no longer feel “connected” to them, when you

find yourself going through the motions on your job, and when you feel like you are losing more and more of yourself to the clients being served, you may be experiencing compassion fatigue. A key warning sign of compassion fatigue is a gradual lessening of the ability to be compassionate with our clients and co-workers. This inability can also begin to affect our personal relationships.

Compassion fatigue has also been referred to as “vicarious traumatization” and “secondary traumatic stress disorder.” Compassion fatigue is similar to critical incident stress, in which the person is traumatized by something he/she has actually experienced or seen. However, an individual experiencing compassion fatigue is absorbing the trauma through the eyes and ears of *someone else* (namely, the EA professional’s clients.)

The term compassion fatigue was first used by a nurse, Carla Johnson

in 1992 as a way of describing nurses who were worn down by daily hospital emergencies. Professionals especially vulnerable to compassion fatigue include, but are not limited to: emergency care workers, counselors, medical and mental health professionals, clergy, advocate volunteers, and human service workers.

Burnout vs. Compassion Fatigue

The term compassion fatigue is often confused and used interchangeably with burnout, but they are not the same. Burnout is associated with stress. It is a *process*, and not a condition. Burnout is cumulative and relatively predictable. However, compassion fatigue is quite different. This type of stress involves a state of tension and preoccupation with *another individual* or the cumulative trauma of *clients* (note the plural reference).

“We are usually not directly exposed to the incident or situation, but we experience ‘their story’,” states Gary Yeast, a specialist in trauma, disaster, terrorism, and mental health services. “We absorb and internalize people’s story and pain until we become supersaturated and begin to leak our stress onto others.”

Karl LaRowe, another noted author on the subject, explains it like this: “Our unique ability to join with our clients that allows us a near firsthand experience of their inner world is perhaps our greatest gift; it is also our greatest challenge.”

Finally, Charles Figley adds: “There is a cost to caring.

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Professionals who listen to clients' stories of fear, pain, and suffering may feel similar fear, pain, and suffering because they care."

There is wisdom in knowing when to give to others and when to commune with one's soul. We all experience those times of drought; times when we seem to have forgotten how to dance, forgotten the rhythm of the music, or perhaps no longer hear the music at all. Compassion fatigue can feel like that.

Signs & Symptoms

Warning signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue include:

- Exhaustion;
- Depression;
- Hopelessness;
- Preoccupation with a client or his/her family;
- Anger or irritability with others;
- Sleep disturbances;
- Working harder but accomplishing less;
- Low self-worth;
- Headaches;
- Disillusionment;
- More prone to accidents and illness;
- Social withdrawal;
- Loss of objectivity or blaming others;
- Missing or late for appointments; and
- Feeling guilty for your loss of compassion.

Some of us as EAP practitioners are tempted to do *more* at this point. We may think that if we just move faster we will once again see the point of it all and our life will be back on track. This may work for a while, but the issue will resurface until we finally... really *stop* ... and really *listen* (to ourselves).

Preventing Compassion Fatigue

In our role as EA professionals it is important to be aware of compassion fatigue and our susceptibility to it. It is crucial to recognize the warning signs listed previously and take steps to prevent it. Some of the methods we can use to prevent or overcome compassion fatigue include:

- Asking for help or support from co-workers or a supervisor;
- Practicing good self-care, such as getting enough sleep, exercise and good nutrition;
- Seeking medical attention for symptoms that are affecting our ability to function;
- Making sure we take time for other interests or hobbies, including taking some time off.

Some people find journaling or another creative endeavor helpful. It can also be beneficial to develop a daily ritual at the end of each work day to transition from your work life to life outside of work. It is important to note areas of your life that are out of balance and learn to set healthy boundaries. In some cases a vacation or sabbatical from the profession may be necessary to achieve and maintain emotional well-being and personal and professional fulfillment.

What I've Learned

In my own work as a full-time bereavement counselor and part-time social worker in hospice for more than 12 years, my days revolved around the pain, struggles and stories of death and dying. Many times people asked how I could do the work that I did. They thought it must be horribly sad and stressful and draining. I would say to the contrary, that it was quite the opposite, a blessing, privilege, and very fulfilling. In other words

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hospice and bereavement work did not empty my well, it *filled* it.

Nonetheless there were two times during those later years when I had to step back and evaluate myself and my profession. I no longer felt like I was giving my best, and I had many of the warning signs of compassion fatigue that I've described in this article. That meant taking many of the steps that I've mentioned – including taking

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some time off to refresh myself and reevaluate my calling.

Those times led to my return to the profession I loved. I cannot overstate it: The very nature of our work as helping professionals makes each of us susceptible to compassion fatigue.

On the other hand, our profession also gives us great pleasure in knowing we have the ability to help others make the changes they are seeking. The key, as in stress and burnout, lies in *balance*: in nutrition, between work and rest, and in vocation and recreation. ■

Deb Kosmer, MSW is a retired social worker. She worked extensively with grieving individuals and hospice patients and their families for many years. She is the author of many published articles on grief and poetry. She was a frequent speaker in her community and a co-creator of a well-attended unique grief support group for men. Currently she enjoys three of her passions, her family, her dog, Penny, and writing.

(Editor's note: Are YOU suffering from compassion fatigue or burnout? Take the quiz on page 5.)



Editor's Notebook

Long-time *EAR* contributor RaeAnn Thomas introduced me to Deb Kosmer some years ago. I was excited to learn of Deb's expertise in the area of compassion fatigue, a topic that reminds in high demand by readers of this newsletter. In fact, compassion fatigue came in #1 in a recent, brief reader survey, so I was thrilled when Deb agreed to take a gander at the article she wrote and provide any necessary updates. Though now retired, Deb's insights on the topic remain highly relevant.

Phil Chard, CEO of Empathia, will also be presenting on this subject matter at the Greater Wisconsin EAPA Conference on April 26-27 in Milwaukee. I hope to report on his thoughts on this important topic in a future newsletter.

Are you, as an EA professional, at risk of compassion fatigue or burnout? I encourage you to take the time to take the quiz on page 5. Taking the proper measures now just might allow you to nip the issue in the bud.

Are you an EA professional looking to expand awareness of online seminars that you offer as part of your EA services? If so, I would love to speak with you about collaborating with *EAR* to pool our resources to offer select *Brown Bagger* inserts online that would align with your areas of expertise. Give me a call or shoot me an email. ■

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On the Job

2018 Salary Guide: Hiring Trends in US

It's a good time to be a job seeker, not as much for a hiring manager. Many office support positions are evolving from a focus on traditional administrative duties to encompassing technology-based tasks and responsibilities. Companies want candidates who are eager to learn new software and support more colleagues. They also want administrative staff who are comfortable having less face-to-face interaction as the people they support increasingly move toward

flexible schedules and remote work arrangements.

At many companies, the hiring process is being drawn out unnecessarily at a time when it needs to be shorter. Candidates are growing impatient with lengthy rounds of interviews and long pauses in communication with hiring managers.

This is evidenced in a Robert Half survey, which found that more than two-thirds of applicants lose interest in a job if there's been no follow-up within two weeks of an interview. Tightening the hiring

timeline is crucial, especially when recruiting candidates might be considering multiple job offers.

In-demand positions include: executive/administrative assistant, customer service representative/manager; receptionist/front desk coordinator; project assistant/coordinator; Human Resources roles; and data entry specialist.

Go to <https://www.roberthalf.com/salary-guide/administrative> for more information about the Salary Guide and to download a copy. ■

Source: Robert Half.

Effectively Leveraging Your Time – Part II

By Jill J. Johnson

Most people manage their time by treating each of their priorities as if they have an equal weight. They do not. When you are developing a time management strategy, you need to break your time down into three different categories. We looked at one strategy last month. In this article, we will examine the remaining strategies.

2. Managing Projects Requires a Precise Plan

The second type of time is project time. Projects are often complex activities with a defined expectation for deliverables or a date of completion such as a major event. With projects, there are many moving parts and multiple deadlines. Projects may also include the involvement of a variety of other team members or vendors.

The challenge with most projects is they often have long time-frames, which allow those involved to push off key responsibilities because the completion date is perceived to be far off into the future. Participants focus on day-to-day fires and do not worry about the project until there is an urgent rush to meet a deadline.

Effectively managing project-oriented time requires developing and following a clearly established plan. There are a variety of formal project management methodologies you can follow. The key is to determine the people who need to be involved and to

clarify the roles and responsibilities of each. Internal deadlines need to be clearly set, while direct responsibilities must be clearly delineated.

Break project activities into smaller components and more manageable parts. Engaging in interim checkpoints on a periodic basis allows you to stay up to date on the progress being made on a project. These checkpoints provide the opportunity to determine if you have adequate resources deployed to the right areas so you can meet the deadline.

3. Expect the Unexpected

The biggest challenge when dealing with a crisis is you often do not have advance warning that something significant will happen. Few organizations adequately prepare for a disaster. Then when something significant hits, everyone scrambles trying to figure out what to do. It is

difficult to think clearly to establish essential priorities when your adrenaline has kicked in and everyone is in a highly emotional or pressurized state of mind. Just make sure you are not treating routine activities or missed project deadlines as a crisis.

Prepare a disaster plan for the types of crisis your enterprise is most likely to experience. When you have the luxury to prepare in advance, you and your team are more likely to have a clearer frame of mind to identify what the focus of your priorities must be to develop a clear framework for rapid action in an emergency. ■

Jill Johnson is the President and Founder of Johnson Consulting Services, a highly accomplished speaker, an award-winning management consultant, and author of the forthcoming book "Compounding Your Confidence." For more information on Jill Johnson, please visit www.jes-usa.com.

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Are YOU Suffering from Compassion Fatigue or Burnout?

The following self-test may help determine if an individual is suffering from, in particular compassion fatigue, but also burnout. However, it is not intended as a substitute for medical advice or diagnosis. Consult a physician or mental health professional to discuss the results. (Write in the number of the best response to each of the following questions using one of the following answers: 1 – rarely or never; 2 – at times; 3 – not sure; 4 – often; 5 – very often.)

1. I force myself to avoid certain thoughts or feelings that remind me of a frightening experience.
2. I avoid certain activities or situations because they remind me of a frightening experience.
3. I have gaps in my memory about frightening events.
4. I feel isolated from others.
5. I have difficulty falling or staying asleep.
6. I have outbursts of anger or irritability with little provocation.
7. I startle easily.
8. While working with a victim I thought about violence against the person(s) who victimized.
9. I am a sensitive person.
10. I've had flashbacks connected to clients and families.
11. I've had first-hand experiences with traumatic events in my adult life.
12. I've had first-hand experiences with traumatic events in my childhood.
13. I've thought that I need to "work through" a traumatic experience in my life.
14. I've thought that I need more close friends.
15. I've thought that there is no one to talk with about highly stressful experiences.

16. I've concluded that I work too hard for my own good.

Items about clients and their families:

17. I'm frightened of things traumatized people and their family have said or done to me.
18. I experience troubling dreams similar to a client of mine and their family.
19. I've experienced intrusive thoughts of sessions with especially difficult clients and their families.
20. I've suddenly recalled a frightening experience while working with a client or their family.
21. I'm preoccupied with more than one client and their family.
22. I'm losing sleep over a client and their family's traumatic experiences.
23. I've thought that I might have been "infected" by the trauma of my clients and their families.
24. I remind myself to be less concerned about the well-being of my clients and their families.
25. I've felt trapped by my work as a helper.
26. I've felt a sense of hopelessness associated with working with clients and their families.
27. I've felt "on edge" about things that I attribute to working with certain clients and their families.
28. I've wished that I could avoid working with some clients and their families.
29. I've been in danger working with some clients and their families.
30. I've felt that some of my clients and their families dislike me personally.

Items about being a helper and your work environment:

31. I've felt weak, tired, and run down as a result of my work as a helper.

32. I've felt depressed as a result of my work as a helper.
33. I am unsuccessful at separating work from personal life.
34. I feel little compassion toward most of my co-workers.
35. I feel I am working more for the money than for personal fulfillment.
36. I find it difficult separating my personal life from my work life.
37. I have a sense of worthlessness, disillusionment, resentment associated with my work.
38. I have thoughts that I'm a "failure" as a helper.
39. I have thoughts that I am not succeeding at achieving my life goals.
40. I have to deal with bureaucratic, unimportant tasks in my work life.

Scoring Instructions:

Make sure you responded to ALL questions. Next, circle the following 23 items: 1-8, 10-13, 17-26 and number 29. Now, ADD the numbers you wrote next to the items circled. Note your risk of compassion fatigue:

- 26 or less – Extremely low risk
- 27 to 30 – Low risk
- 31 to 35 – Moderate risk
- 36 to 40 – High risk

To determine the risk of **burnout**, add the numbers you wrote next to the items NOT circled. Note your risk of burnout:

- 19 or less – Extremely low risk
- 20 to 24 – Low risk
- 25 to 29 – Moderate risk
- 30 to 42 – High risk ■

Sources: Gary Yeast, BA, MS, MS, LMFT, Fellow AAMFT; Ace-Network; National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health; and Florida State University Psychosocial Stress Research Program.

Most Call EAP for Mental Health Help

Nearly three-quarters (70%) of employees have called their organization's employee assistance program (EAP) for help with mental health problems, according to research by Unum.

Unum's analysis of the 12,610 calls made to its EAP service, provided in conjunction with Lifeworks, between December 1, 2016 and November 30, 2017 also found that of the calls relating to mental health problems, 66% were for anxiety and depression, 13%

regarded problems caused by relationship issues and 9% related to bereavement.

The research also found:

- ❖ 60% of employees who phoned the EAP for mental health problems were offered counselling and 97% were offered an initial appointment within five days. In total, 17,335 counselling sessions were provided between 1 December 2016 and 30 November 2017.

- ❖ 92% of employees who were provided with access to counsel-

ling support as a result of calling the EAP service saw their mental health improve.

"EAPs are a first line of defense for employers and line managers in protecting the well-being of their staff," said Ambika Fraser, head of propositions at Unum. "They provide fast, confidential solutions to all kinds of problems from mental health to debt and relationship worries that could otherwise quickly escalate and impact productivity." ■

Mental Health Awareness Month

More Mental Health Care Needed

It is clear that there are many facets to the violence plaguing American society. One of them is undoubtedly the treatment of mental health and mental illness.

The 2016 21st Century Cures Act made mental health services more affordable for families and provided new funding for research programs to develop best practices in mental health treatment. The law also includes key federal grants to increase the number of mental health providers nationwide and dramatically increases funding for suicide prevention programs, Fox News reports.

But it is not enough. According to the *Washington Post*, there is only one psychiatrist per 1,807 children who need mental health services in this country. More than half of the counties nationwide do not have a practicing psychiatrist, psychologist, or social worker.

In addition to increasing the number of qualified mental health professionals to help students, parents, families, and those struggling with addiction or homelessness, funding Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) programs is also important, the Fox News report adds. ■

Mental Health Awareness Month

Mental Health Issues Increasing

A recently released survey from Aon Employee Benefits, the UK health and benefits business of Aon, showed a disturbingly sharp increase in the number of employers reporting employee stress and mental health-related illnesses — from 55 percent last year to 68 percent in 2018.

On a more positive note, the survey also revealed that employers are investing more in proactive initiatives including mental health first aid training which teaches managers and staff how to detect the signs and symptoms of common mental health issues, provide support and guide a person to seek professional help and gain resilience coaching. Employer investment in proactive initiatives to tackle mental health and stress have increased to 42 percent from 36 percent in the previous year.

The survey also showed that more employers are providing health and well-being apps, jumping from 21 percent to 48 percent in the year. ■

Countering Smartphone Addiction

By Larry Rosen

We are living in an era of technology obsession and smartphone addiction. Not surprisingly, research shows that too much technology use diminishes our mental and physical health, our relationships and more. Short of going off the grid, here a few research-backed strategies I recommend you implement at work and at home.

❖ **Use “cc” and “reply all” judiciously.** I encourage anyone initiating a team email to instead think very carefully about who they “cc,” making sure to include only relevant team members. I also recommend avoiding “reply all,” unless your comments are truly meant for—and useful to—all members of the group. The more email you send, after all, the more you will receive.

❖ **Recalibrate response time expectations.** When colleagues email, text, or message us in some other way, no matter the time, an immediate response is, in many cases, the unspoken expectation. My suggested middle ground is a 7am-to-7pm policy: messages can, of course, be sent at any hour, but no one is required to respond earlier than 7am or later than 7pm.

❖ **Take regular, restorative breaks.** The human brain is not designed to work for hours on end. We perform better when we take breaks. In one study of more than

12,000 white-collar employees, those who turned away from work every 90 minutes reported 30% higher level of focus, compared with peers who took no breaks or just one during the workday. But staring into a smartphone or browsing the internet doesn’t really count. Truly restorative breaks instead involve exercise,

❖ **Reclaim friend and family time.** We need to stop letting technology interfere with our most important interpersonal interactions. My advice is to designate areas where, in an effort to facilitate better, more meaningful conversation with friends and family, personal devices simply aren’t allowed. Examples include the



dinner table, the rec or TV room, in the car, or in restaurants. ■

Larry Rosen is a psychology professor at California State University, Dominguez Hills, and author of “iDisorder” and co-author of “The Distracted Mind.” Learn more at drlarryrosen.com.

Quick Ideas

You Know You’re Being Bullied When ...

❖ You attempt the impossible task of doing a new job without training or time to learn new skills, but the work is never good enough to please the boss.

❖ Human Resources inform you that your harassment isn’t illegal, that you have to “work it out between yourselves.”

❖ You firmly confront your tormentor to stop the abusive conduct,

but you are accused of harassment instead.

❖ You are shocked when you’re accused of incompetence despite a history of excellence, typically by someone who cannot do your job.

❖ Your response to transfer to another position under another boss is mysteriously denied. ■

Source: Workplace Bullying Institute.

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Improving the Onboarding Process – Part I

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 succeeds. 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 whether it's directly or indirectly, you *are* involved in the aftermath that results if the new hire wasn't trained properly!

The greatest facet of modern-day training and onboarding options is that companies of all sizes can afford them. Largely software based, they're much more affordable than

ever. Better yet, they're incredibly customizable, as the result of a combination of algorithms and HR analytics. These algorithms dissect a series of analytical points based on employee data and adaptive learning processes to shape content and information for each individual employee. Effective onboarding software will assist HR departments to use HR analytics in a way that positively enhances the onboarding process. Let's look at how that can be accomplished.

The Beginning of the Process

The first step in this onboarding process comes from collecting initial data. This is done for two reasons. The first is to jumpstart the adaptive learning process. Is your new employee, Doug, a customer service superstar already? One way to find out is through collecting data based on initial knowledge tests and surveys. By collecting this analytical data early on, the adaptive learning process can pinpoint which areas should receive a greater level of focus in training and stream content based on such.

The second benefit of this process is for big picture analytics. Initial knowledge tests lay a foundation of where the program is starting, giving a better idea of how the employees progress through the training, how much they learn, what they excel in along the way, measuring how long it takes and determining outcomes. This is excellent for providing feedback to employees later on based on their areas of improvement, as well as

measuring the success of the program on a grander level. ■

NEXT ISSUE: Adaptive training begins.

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

Resources

🔗 **Humm.ly** is a new music app for managing mental health. Learn more at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/geekgirlrising/2018/03/20/move-over-meds-new-music-app-aims-to-reduce-anxiety-depression/#64e4f0807da0>.

🔗 **The Dividends of Decency**, by Donald Lee Sheppard. With rising college tuition costs and no guaranteed job upon graduation, many young people are rethinking the importance of a college degree. And they may be on to something; a recent survey shows that the majority of business owners *didn't* graduate college. Learn more about Don at www.donsheppard.com.

🔗 **Naked Sales: How Design Thinking Reveals Customer Motives and Drives Revenue**, by Ashley Welch and Justin Jones. Co-founders of Somersault Innovation, the authors reveal how you can reinvigorate sales, create new opportunities, and build competition-proof customer relationships when you start thinking like a designer. To learn more, go to www.somersaultinnovation.com. ■