



Repositioning EAPA for the Future

| By Bernie McCann, PhD, CEAP

To ensure it endures and enhances its role as the leading advocate and voice of the EA profession well into the future, in early 2019, EAPA contracted with the Open Minds behavioral healthcare consulting organization to complete an association repositioning research and technical assistance project.

The effort sought through investigations by member surveys, online and social media research, and interviews of EAPA Board members, staff, partner organizations, and representatives of employers, labor unions, behavioral health providers, and benefit consultants to provide a comprehensive, wide ranging view of the EAP-related professional association landscape.

The overall goal of the project was to assist in “*Positioning EAPA as the leading advocate, expert and resource on employee assistance and workforce wellbeing, productivity and engagement for employers, labor organizations, and EA professionals*”.

The repositioning effort had three guiding principles: 1) maintain strong commitment to EA core technology; 2) maintain our values and workplace focus; and 3) be open to new perspectives. The effort incorporated the following objectives:

- To understand EAPA’s market position relative to key competitors;
- To assess EAPA’s product portfolio alignment with the business strategy, financial performance and key constituents’ critical needs and desires;
- To reposition EAPA’s role, product portfolio, and pricing strategy to deliver compelling value to key constituents;
- To create a brand image and marketing approach consistent with positioning; and
- To develop a high-level implementation and tactical plan.

Four Ad-hoc Think Tanks Formed

In August 2019, EAPA’s Board of Directors received the report and after reviewing it at its October 2019 meeting in St. Louis, formed four ad-hoc think tanks (Connect, Advocate, Educate, and Certify), each chaired by a board member and who recruited volunteers from the EAPA membership.

Over the subsequent months, these four groups began brainstorming to identify specific action steps and strategies in each of these areas identified as critical for the Association’s future growth, stability, and vitality. The following are summaries of each task force’s report.

CONNECT THINK TANK

Members: Michele Grow, Starlee Qualter, Jessica Hurwitz, Amy Harting, Renee Wyden, Mike Klaybor (Chair)

Mission Statement: To engage and enable the current and future generation of workplace wellness specialists.

Repositioning Summary: To create a virtual community for idea exchange, enhanced and relevant networking opportunities, engage students, Millennials and Generation X individuals; and rebrand association image to engage professionals who do not currently identify with EAPA.

Specific Goals and Action Steps:

Goal 1. Embrace technology and virtual modalities including social media to maximize reach and participation

Action steps: Create relevant quality content for EAPA members; Increase global promotion of the EAP field; and Initiate social media campaigns to increase membership and participation at chapter and branch levels.

Goal 2. Attract new members to the association and reinvigorate interest from lapsed members

Action steps: Develop a targeted marketing strategy to recent graduates or licensed clinicians demonstrating EAPA's financial incentives and opportunities. Examples include creating a new resources on how to provide EA services and build a professional EAP practice; promoting professional development materials and trainings; and creating social media videos to attract both new members and existing clinicians.

Goal 3. Increase participation of existing members in Chapter, Branch, and Association activities

Action steps: Initiate virtual meetings with chapter and branch leaders to engage in repositioning efforts and obtain input; Encourage creation and enhancement of sub-specialty EAP affinity groups (e.g., EAPs in healthcare, government, and call center staff) on platforms such as LinkedIn and other venues.

Goal 4. Enhance understanding of the value and benefits of active membership and participation to EAPA members and non-members.

Action steps: Creating social media and other promotional materials to attract both new members and existing clinicians.

Goal 5. Engage with a broader audience to share key messaging and understand emerging trends, ideas, and innovation.

Action steps: Raise awareness that workplace wellness matters; enhance visibility within the mental health and clinical environment; Align with major like-minded associations (wellness, occupational medicine, occupational nursing; human resources,

etc.); Identify and promote engagement through pathways such as TED Talks, livestreaming EAPA conference proceedings, etc.

ADVOCATE THINK TANK

Members: Heather Keller, Diane Sanders, Lee Ann Aden, Whitney Stone (Chair)

Repositioning Summary:

EAPA has valuable content to offer to members, potential members, consumers and others; but lacks a consistent or effective communications strategy to disseminate information. EAPA is missing opportunities through a failure to maximize technology to its advantage and thus losing members and stakeholders to other organizations with more accessible platforms.

Specific Goals and Action Steps:

Goal 1. Advocate for member success, retention and advancement in EA employment.

Action steps: Review and assess EAPA Career Central effectiveness in helping EAPA members achieve career goals; Share best practices, technical updates, legislative updates, etc. to members in useful ways; Provide relevant, effective educational resources to EA professionals to identify and address changing and complex issues in the workplace; Develop and offer resources designed for new graduates and professionals regarding how to join and succeed in the EAP industry. Recommended participants: EAPA staff, Member subcommittee, Communications consultant, Board of Directors.

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Goal 2. Advocate for the field of Employee Assistance.

Action steps: Engage a communications consultant with expertise in digital and social media marketing to advise on optimizing messaging to both EA professionals; Create open source, public content designed to distribute itself by way of shares, likes, re-posts, webinars, trainings, podcasts, etc. to create a voice for EAPA that is heard outside our membership. Recommended participants: EAPA staff, Member subcommittee, Communications consultant, Board of Directors.

Goal 3. Enhance information services to providers of and consumers of EAP services.

Action steps: Update EAP purchaser's guides; position EAPA as the independent resource to advise employers, unions and work organizations regarding use and benefit of the services; Promote EA as a resource to workers and family members (For example, when individuals search for counselling resources encourage them to ask if your employer has an EAP); Reduce the stigma associated with accessing EAP and counseling services in the workplace; Increase understanding of the professional standard of EA confidentiality; Encourage inclusion of CEAP requirements in EA contracts by creating and promoting model contractual language for EAP Requests for Proposals. Recommended participants: EAPA staff, Member subcommittee, Communications consultant.

Goal 4. Advocate for EAPA as an organization.

Action steps: Seek partnerships and allies between EAPA and other professional and advocacy groups to identify mutual interests and develop a joint digital strategic approach. Recommended participants: EAPA staff, Board of Directors, Member subcommittee, Communications consultant.

EDUCATE THINK TANK

Members: Daryl Joseph, Connie Galvin, Pat Herlihy, Dan Hughes, Kaoru Ichikawa, Amy Jones, Boyd Scoggins, Dan Boissonneault (Chair)

Present State: EAPA has solid information, support, and connections to its membership and other interested consumers but currently lacks an effective and consistent dissemination strategy.

Specific Strategies and Action Steps:

Strategy 1. Mentoring: Create a system whereby subject matter experts in specific geographic regions, industries or specialties who can advise other EAPA members on issues they may be experiencing. Recommended partners: EAPA Board of Directors, Employee Assistance Certification Commission, Chapter and Branch Leadership.

Strategy 2. Collaboration: EAPA will open official channels and/or collaborate with other recognized organizations engaged in similar work or those that would benefit from an alliance. EASNA, EAEF, APEAR, LAP, SHRM, WFRN, NAADAC, etc., in the private sector and appropriate regulatory agencies within the public sector. Recommended partners: EAPA CEO, EAPA Board of Directors Delegated Committee.

Strategy 3. Global Digital Portal: EAPA will create and maintain, through its website, an interface to an easily accessed repository of EAPA's digital material and links to EA Archive (eaarchive.org) and other relevant databases. This portal would also have a section for questions that could be posted and answered by other members with links to the subject matter experts. It would also offer additional sections for anecdotal EAP success stories, lessons learned and best practices. Recommended partners: EAPA staff, EAPA Board of Directors, Designated Committee, Contributing members.

Strategy 4. Weekly Members' Forum: Based on the participation of the Wednesday Zoom call-in sessions, a recurring weekly forum could be hosted by EAPA, open to all members and other interested parties. Timely subjects could be identified, and a more structured forum could be held in alternating weeks or as needed. Recommended partners: EAPA staff, EAPA CEO, EAPA Board of Directors, Contributing members.

Strategy 5. In-Person Conferences: Maintain annual EAPA Conference and explore regional and co-conference opportunities. Recommended partners: EAPA Board of Directors, EAPA CEO, EAPA staff, Chapter and Branch Leadership.

CERTIFY THINK TANK

Mission: Make the CEAP® certification a cornerstone of EA professional identity, and the de-facto standard for EA practice and service provision.

Members: Bryan McNutt, Daryl Joseph, Patrick Williams, Jodi Frey, Christina Isenhower, Jennifer Shotlander, David Nix, Bernie McCann (Chair)

Specific Goals and Action Steps:

Goal 1: Maintain interest and participation of existing CEAPs in certification.

Action steps: Increase involvement and impact of EAPA Chapters & Branches in support of current CEAPs to maintain and renew certification; Increase collaborative educational and promotional experiences of CEAP-related content with similar professional associations via local, national and global outlets and events; Create an overview of history and value of the CEAP® credential. Recommended partners: EAPA Chapters, Branches, EACC Commissioners. Association staff and EAPA members.

Goal 2: Engage interest and participation of non-CEAP certified employee assistance professionals in obtaining and maintaining certification.

Action steps: Increase involvement and impact of EAPA Chapters & Branches in local promotion of CEAP® credential as a valuable professional development avenue; Outreach to all graduate level counseling, social work, and related graduate students to invite/encourage in-person or virtual chapter meeting; Increase visibility and education of the CEAP® through increased collaboration with various licensed professional associations; Develop a pre-certification and/or mentoring program to partner current CEAP volunteers with those interested in pursuing the CEAP®. Recommended partners: EAPA Chapters and Branches, EACC Commissioners, and Association staff.

Goal 3: Expand organizational and professional group participation with and connection to EACC activities.

Action steps: Increase local and global outreach to like-minded groups to seek synergies with educational and professional development activities; outreach to graduate counseling and other relevant programs to build in greater exposure to information about EAPs and CEAP® certification through insertion in curricula, guest lectures, and internship opportunities; submit certification course for CEU credits via other professional disciplines

and licensing bodies to encourage non-CEAPs to obtain the credential; and exploration of reciprocal professional development credit arrangements with other professional disciplines which complement the EAP content and competency areas. Recommended partners: EAPA Chapters and Branches, EACC Commissioners, Association staff and EAPA members.

Goal 4: Support the ongoing evolution and promotion of the CEAP®— its requirements, training and examination functions designed to improve the relevance and growth of the EACC certification process.

Action steps: Develop and refine a succinct, memorable value statement for the CEAP®; Add regular column about the value of the credential and related current information to the *Journal of Employee Assistance*; and institute regular posting statements about value of CEAP® for EAPA and other organizations on professional and social media platforms, e.g., LinkedIn, other websites, Twitter, etc... Recommended partners: EAPA Chapters and Branches, EACC Commissioners, Association staff and EAPA members.

Summary

Much has changed since the early days of the employee assistance profession, from the establishment of the Association of Labor-Management Administrators and Consultants on Alcoholism to our present-day existence as a professional association known as EAPA. These four reports offer insights into how the various Think Tank members envision taking EAPA into its next level of existence: a future in which EAPs as a profession continue to provide essential services to millions of lives in hundreds of workplaces around the globe.

They provide multiple suggestions for not only how EAPA, its staff, and Board of Directors can begin this effort, but *in particular how each EAPA chapter, branch and individual member* can also participate in repositioning our professional identity and practice. If taken, these and other steps hold great promise for continued growth and lasting relevance to everyone we serve. ❖

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