

# EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

Volume 24, No. 3  
June/July 2021

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of service!

supporting EA professionals

## Tips for EAPs Working With Law Enforcement

**Editor's note:** Law enforcement has long been a challenging and stressful occupation that has come under immense pressure due to civil unrest stemming from recent police shootings and related events. **James Rascati**, MSW, LCSW, is the Director of Organizational Services at Behavioral Health Consultants, LLC, which provides EAP services for 145 organizations including 54 police and 28 fire departments. *Employee Assistance Report (EAR)* had the opportunity to speak with Jim about the challenges facing EAPs who count municipal unions (including police officers and firefighters) among their clients.



**EAR:** *Why is it so important for EA professionals to better understand the subculture of law enforcement in the United States?*

**JR:** Law enforcement has been under attack in our country for a while and it appears to be getting worse. The fact is there have been some

terrible police shootings that should have never happened in the first place. It is also true in my experience that by far the vast number of men and women who protect and serve our communities are professionals who truly care about the work they do. What other profession, outside of the military, leaves their home in the morning and may not return home to their families?

Many progressive police departments are attempting to change the old school culture in which seeking

behavioral health care makes someone “less of a cop.” As a result, under President Obama’s Justice Department, a document known as 21st Century Policing was drafted. It stressed the importance of conducting annual wellness checks for law enforcement.

There is now a general understanding by police staff that the stress of law enforcement is taking its toll – in divorces, domestic violence, increase in alcohol or substance abuse as well as depression and suicide. As agencies begin instituting annual wellness

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checks, develop police peer support teams, and acknowledge that utilizing behavioral health services will NOT negatively impact an officer's career, *this is an opportunity for EA professionals to enter into a "new" market, so to speak.* However, to enter into this new market requires that EA professionals understand that working with police officers is unlike any other professional group they may have treated in the past.

If EA professionals do not know or appreciate the unique cultural issues of being a police officer their efforts in all probability will fail. Law enforcement already believes (correctly in my opinion) that society does not understand them nor appreciate the difficult job they do on a daily basis.

**EAR:** *Do you think flagrant racism plays a role in these incidents? And if it does, how can the EAP help reduce prejudice and racism?*

**JR:** My guess is that in some of these shooting incidents racism did indeed play a role. But let's also be clear, the issue of structural racism exists in almost every aspect of our society, not just law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Structural racism impacts education, housing, finance, employment, religion, and health care.

It is my opinion, however, that training plays a much larger role than racism. How many departments have trained their officers in de-escalation methods? In Crisis Intervention Training? What other non-lethal tools do officers use? How often do they go to the firing range and requalify?

One of the most frightening and ill-conceived responses to these bad shooting incidents is the cry to "defund" the police. If I am correct that one answer to the problem involves more training opportunities, then now is not the time to defund police departments. In my opinion, we should be **increasing** funding for training on use of force including more focus on de-escalation, diversity, implicit bias training, and in mental health issues.

**EAR:** *This is a two-part question: What other factors are leading to the number of police-related shootings we are seeing today? Again, how can the EAP assist?*

**JR:** My guess is all of my EA colleagues have heard the term "deaths of despair." We know that since the pandemic began there has been an increase

## EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

Editor/Publisher - Mike Jacquart

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in divorce, domestic violence, drug overdoses, and suicides. We are also seeing an uptick in crime. Approximately 40% of Americans are one paycheck away from bankruptcy. These continue to be challenging times for all of us. Also, we have spent almost an entire year in either complete or semi-isolation. We are social animals and need social contacts. Many of us our stressed to the max.

In addition to the pandemic there are other issues that may increase shootings. For one thing, there seems to be much less respect for authority, especially police. It seems to me that our criminal justice system also plays a role here. There are some situations where people are not held accountable for their illegal behavior. When meaningful consequences for illegal behavior are lacking, then people will continue to break the law and act out.

I think EAPs can assist by making their presence known to the organizations they serve. It continues to trouble me to this day that so many employees within

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their organizations do NOT know that their company provides an Employee Assistance Program. It is incumbent on our field to make sure that the organizations we contract with are in fact “marketing” EA services to their employees.

EAPs can also help by taking the time to understand the police agencies in their communities and in better publicizing their services.

**EAR:** *When a mass shooting or other mass casualty occurs, why is it so important for everyone involved to be debriefed by the EAP?*

**JR:** As these horrific mass casualty events continue to occur in our society, we need to find a better way to engage the EA and mental health field in response, especially with law enforcement. Many times, in my experience, some officers may not have an immediate response to the event. Or when asked by command staff how they are doing and if they want to meet with an EA professional, most of the time police will decline and say that they are “ok.” We know that strong cultural beliefs still exist that officers should “suck it up,” that the carnage they see is “what they signed up for.”

But we know that stress builds up over time. Denial is also a huge psychological defense that many people utilize. One of the protocols we use for major critical incidents is that attendance is mandatory, but participation is voluntary. In fact, when I respond to a major critical incident I will say, “I know you are ordered to be here, but you do not need to talk.” The reality is I have never done a debriefing where the majority of attendees do talk.

Some people may not have an immediate reaction because horrendous events may seem surreal. Others have learned how to “keep their emotions in check” so they can continue to focus on the crime scene and do their job. One of the key things we do is offer education about possible reactions that law enforcement may experience over the next few days, weeks, and even months.

The other benefit of involving everyone in a debriefing is to remind them that their job is not just about them. The work they do daily, let alone when responding to a major and horrific critical incident, also has the potential to impact their family. We always make sure that the officers we met

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## Editor's Notebook

Cries of racism. Police shootings. Riots. Unsettling civil unrest. And just where does EAP fit in?

The November 2020 *EAR* discussed, “Understanding and Dealing with Racial Trauma,” while that month’s *Brown Bagger* insert explained how “microaggressions” contribute to racial misunderstandings.

Important reading, but what about the police’s point of view? Since many EAPs work with municipal unions, including police and fire departments, either your particular EAP, or that of a colleague, is likely to benefit from **James Rascati**’s insightful views in this issue how EAPs can better work with law enforcement.

No one is making excuses for bad police behavior, but the fact remains: “*What other profession, outside of the military, leaves their home in the morning and may not return home to their families?*”

“Many progressive police departments are attempting to change the old school culture in which seeking behavioral health care makes someone ‘less of a cop,’” James continues. *The EAP is in a perfect position to help, but it’s necessary to understand this subculture FIRST.* Thanks, James, for sharing your expertise.

\*\*\*\*\*

On the heels of a lengthy pandemic that forced folks inside and shuttered vacation plans, I can’t think of a summer I’ve looked forward to more than this one! In fact, sunshine plays a key role in mental health, as explained in an article on **page 7**.

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This issue’s *Brown Bagger* examines how the EAP can assist management in making a referral – must reading for those unfamiliar with EAP and how it works.

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In the last *Lifestyle Tips*, I delved into the (unfortunate) role that bosses can play in tasks not getting done due to a lack of follow through. Certainly, a subpar supervisor isn’t the only culprit. The manner in which meetings are conducted also contributes to an unproductive work environment. See this issue’s *LT*. ■

*Mike Jacquart*

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# You are the Sheriff – YOU Have the Power!

**W**ith colorful analogies that harken readers back to the simpler days of the Old West, author Julia Bain, CEAP, and retired EAP Manager for the city of Albuquerque, takes readers on a journey of empowerment in which they have all the power as the sheriff of “Me Town.”

*You Are the Sheriff of Me Town, Where You Have All the Power*, illustrates how amazing our lives can become once we take the lead and lay down the laws of “Me Town.” Dr. Bain explains how we need to learn to take full responsibility in our own “towns,” discovering our lost voice, taking back our power, and earning our Power Badge.

This handbook is a groundbreaking guide to help readers understand that they have all the power necessary to effectively run their lives. It introduces the joys and benefits of living in “Me Town” and provides the tools to confidently navigate choices, fears, beliefs, and values. The author adds that, ultimately, we are responsible for our own happiness.

“With practical steps for how to achieve this end, many, many people’s lives could be turned around by taking her straight-shooting advice to heart,” writes James Porter, CEO of StressStop and author of *Stop Stress this Minute*. ■

*You Are the Sheriff of Me Town* is available wherever books are sold, at Me Enterprises (<https://www.metown.com>) or on Amazon.



## Quick Ideas

### Four Important Truths

- ✓ When someone is broken, don't try to fix them. (*You can't.*)
- ✓ When someone is hurting, don't attempt to take away their pain. (*You can't.*)
- ✓ Instead, love them by walking beside them in the hurt. (*You can.*)
- ✓ Sometimes, what people need is simply to know they're not alone. ■

## Tell a Friend about EAR!

*Employee Assistance Report (EAR)* has been contacting readers about renewing their subscription to this newsletter. We are GRATEFUL to those of you who gave us such a ringing endorsement!

That said, we remain on the financial cusp of whether we will be continuing to publish *EAR*, and NEW subscribers will likely be the determining factor. While some of this always falls “on us” in terms of outreach, there is also nothing quite like word of mouth. **So, if you enjoy reading the *EAR*, why not tell colleagues about it?!** This could be either someone else with your particular EAP or a peer who works elsewhere.

It's as simple as a quick call (715-445-4386) with pertinent CC info. But they need to call **NOW!** (I also email invoices.) Any questions, let me know.

In the meantime, we hope everyone is safe and healthy!

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## DOJ Releases Crucial ‘Officer Suicide’ Report

The Department of Justice’s Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) recently released, “[Law Enforcement Officer Suicide: 2020 Report to Congress](#).” The report is a result of a request from Congress, driven by the increase in suicides by current and former law enforcement officers, to review the availability of existing mental health resources for law enforcement agencies.

The report also offers recommendations for establishing evidence-based behavioral health and suicide prevention efforts for both law enforcement and other first responders.

### Peer Support, Training Critical

The report found that “Training is also critically important to supporting officer mental health and suicide prevention. Colleagues, supervisors, and managers are all important players in suicide prevention efforts, as they are the ones who may see the signs that an individual is struggling.”

The report points out that the departments that have been successful in lowering their suicide rates are the ones that have *continued to focus* on the education and training of individuals in this area, as well as creating *support networks* such as peer-to-peer programs.

### Culture Remains Barrier

But the report also stresses that one of the biggest challenges to suicide prevention programs in agencies continues to be the law enforcement “culture,” and that too many officers still fear both the stigma and the possible consequences of asking for help. \*

The report provides a number of recommendations for moving forward, such as enhancing peer-led prevention programs, strengthening laws so that officers seeking help are protected, and improving confidentiality within agencies. ■

*Additional source: Lee’s Summit Tribune. \* Editor’s note: This topic is also addressed in this issue’s cover story.*

## Academy Offers Empathy Training

The Police Empathy Academy (based in Denver) is offering empathy training and racial bias certification for police officers, precincts, academies, and police departments across the country. The long-term goal of the organization is to push for politicians to make empathy training a requirement to becoming a police officer.

The goal of the training is to appeal to the human nature of its participants through structured sessions led by industry leading and qualified professionals. Once the course is completed, successful candidates are presented with a Police Empathy Academy – Continuing Education certificate and are able to affix the academy’s logo to their websites and resumes.

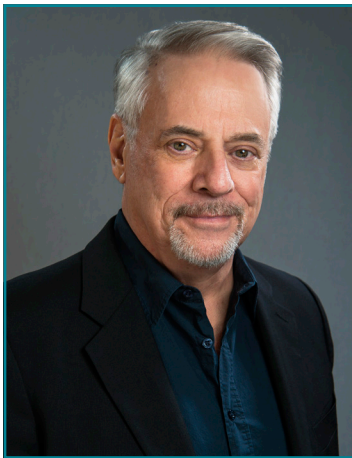
The academy is operated nationwide and open to all police personnel who would like to improve their empathetic and communication skills, improve their mental health, learn personal life skills, and manage their emotions during tense situations.

Learning to de-escalate confrontation between an officer and a civilian is a key component of this important job. This tactic can help both police officers and civilians feel safer and help heal the divide.

For further information, email [support@policeempathy.com](mailto:support@policeempathy.com) or phone Brianna Hatcher, (720) 262-4077. ■

*Source: PR Newswire.*

# Rules to Being a Lousy Leader



By Mark Oristano

**B**ad leaders have something over the good ones: *better job security*. Why? They run off anybody who is a threat to them before any damage can be done. Bad leadership is an art form. Ask yourself if you know

anyone who fits any of the following rules for lousy leadership.

**What's right is what I say is right!** A very simple way to let everybody know, right out of the gate, that you're the boss is to tell employees that there is only one person at the top, and that person is you. Your genius, organization skills, foresight and intelligence will take the company to new heights, despite the team's ineptitude. From the start, the lousy leader makes it clear that, *"It's simple. I speak. You agree."*

**Keep great plans to yourself!** Somewhere deep in a desk drawer is a copy of the master plan drawn up for the company. It's probably a pretty good plan. Take the company forward, get everyone on the same page. But to implement the plan, one department must know what another department is doing. And you can't have that! So, when asked about the plan the lousy leader says, *"Yeah, we have a plan. What great business doesn't?"*

**It's not a lie if you believe it.** Employees trust the lousy leader because, to a large degree, there's never any interaction, so this boss must be doing a good job. Right? On those rare occasions when this leader is forced to mingle, whether at a staff meeting or other company function, the lousy leader tends to fake a sincere smile and makes it look like compassion rules. Then it's a quick about face and back to the office, door closed as always.

**It's very simple – it's all about the boss.** Many unknowing people think that leadership is a terribly difficult task to master. To get to that seven-figure salary must take years of climbing the ladder, finding a mentor, and so on. However, while the lousy leader knows others assisted along the way, they convince themselves the climb to the top was largely made on their own. Because there's no one to thank, all the admiration is aimed at the lousy leader when *Forbes* or *Fortune* come calling for an interview. At the top, the lousy leader passes along this key piece of "wisdom" to employees: *"I gave you your orders. Now carry them out."* The great thing is, if the orders are lousy, and they're followed... then it's *their* fault for doing a lousy job!

**Make sure everybody is scared.** The greatest motivator of all is fear. Everything else is small potatoes next to this rule. This boss believes that if staff wants a friend, they should get a dog. Nothing succeeds like FEAR. In a number of work situations, the boss isn't really so much "feared" as simply not respected. It's not as if the boss is always supposed to know how to do everybody else's job. That's not practical. But if the boss throws orders around like he knows what he's doing when, in reality he's not making much sense at all, employees will simply not respect him. It's a good example of the wise saying that the quickest path to wisdom is uttering the phrase, *"I don't know."*

## Summary

Nobody sets out to be a lousy leader. Some people fail because the training they got was woefully inadequate. Whatever the case, there are too many lousy leaders and not enough good ones. Take heed and strive to be the latter, and not the former. ■

*Mark Oristano has distilled the lessons he learned from his years in the front office of the Dallas Cowboys into compelling, yet easy to implement, rules for solid leadership. For more, visit: <https://markoristano.com>.*

# Summer Sun: Now More than Ever!

While overexposure to the sun is never a good idea, between Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), and Pandemic Affective Disorder (PAD) – what psychologist Martin Klein refers to as “*SAD on steroids*” – in coming out of a period of depression and anxiety brought on by the coronavirus, it would appear that *exposure* to the sun is vital to many Americans this year!

In terms of SAD, it's important to point out that it's not the lack of sunlight that's the problem – it's the lack of *vitamin D*. So, although the shortest day of the year is in late December, vitamin D levels don't actually bottom out until March, after which time the body starts making it again.

Studies confirm that vitamin D replacement relieves symptoms of SAD. Moreover, increasing intakes of certain foods – fish, fruits and vegetables – can also enhance the power of vitamin D to elevate mood. The good news is that making simple lifestyle changes this summer can boost vitamin D. The following are a few ideas:

❖ **Start a no-SAD diet.** With the arrival of summer's fresh seafood and produce, it's a great time to make dietary changes to vitamin D and nutrient-packed foods that anyone who suffers from SAD should start eating now.

❖ **Become “sun-savvy.”** Sunlight is a primary source of vitamin D, but most of us don't get enough of it. Chronic underexposure can actually be more dangerous than overexposure. You need to use a sunscreen and avoid overexposure to be sure, but you also need enough sun to increase vitamin D levels.

❖ **Consider vitamin D supplements.** Supplements are often necessary, but do you know which one to buy? What dosage to take? Take the time to investigate. ■

*Sources: James E. Dowd, M.D., author of “The Vitamin D Cure,”; Marin Klein, clinical psychologist in Connecticut; and Employee Assistance Report.*

## Quick Ideas

# There are MANY Benefits to EAP!

When trying to attract new clients, do they have difficulty believing that EAPs are truly cost-effective? Ask prospective clients to consider the following statistics and the impact they might have on their workforce.

### Work/Life Issues

❖ Child care referral programs can reduce employee absenteeism due to child care problems by 40%.

❖ Workers also need help with *adult caregiving* concerns. The combined cost of absenteeism, job turnover, work day interruptions, and supervisor time is calculated at \$2,100 per caregiving employee annually.

### Substance Use

❖ Drug-reliant employees incur 300% higher medical costs than their non-using co-workers (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Works at Risk, Drugs and Alcohol on the Job).

### Benefits of an EAP

❖ 66% decline in absenteeism after alcohol abusers have been identified and treated.

❖ 33% decline in utilization of sickness benefits; 65% decline in work-related accidents; and 30% decline in workers' compensation claims. ■

*Additional sources: Interface EAP, Family Caregiver Alliance.*

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# Employees Need a Communication Break!

For management, staying in touch with their workforce has become a critical part to making remote work run smoothly. But there's a fine line between helpful and harmful outreach.

Twenty-two percent of employees want to leave their current job because of the volume of email they receive, according to a productivity survey conducted by Superhuman, an email platform. A third of employees say that too many video calls make them want to quit.

Managers feel the need to overcompensate for the lack of in-person connectivity — firing off endless messages and responding without delay. But those work communications are a major source of distraction and stress for their teams:

- 44% of employees dream of a workday without video calls;
- Nearly one-third want a break from email; and
- 25% crave a notification-free day.

To avoid the onslaught of online messaging, nearly two in three remote workers would rather return to *commuting* if they could be unburdened from escalating emails and notifications, the survey found. More than three in five remote workers say they're more likely to reply immediately to an email from their boss or team than to a text or other message from friends or family.



The pressure is disproportionately affecting female workers. Sixty-four percent of women say they have to deal with a notification in 5 minutes or less — significantly more than the 56% of men who say the same, the survey found. While 30% of women respond to a notification within a minute, fewer than a quarter of men do so.

“There’s just a huge need to take a step back and really think, ‘How do we get outside of this constant need for communication?’ and instead get more lasting communication practices in place,” states Kristin Hayward with Superhuman. ■

Source: *Employee Benefit News*.

## Tips for EAPs... cont'd from Page 3

with know that the EAP services are for their immediate family, too.

**EAR:** *What other advice would you have for EA professionals who provide services for law enforcement?*

**JR:** You need to be truly committed to working with this very deserving population. Law enforcement needs EA services today more than ever before. There is no question that working with police can be extremely challenging and frankly, at times frustrating.

However, the award is well worth the effort. Once officers commit to treatment, they almost always work hard to figure it out.

EA professionals enter the field to help individuals and organizations. This is also true for law enforcement. By far the majority of police enter the profession to give back, protect, and serve their communities. They and their families need and deserve EAP services more than ever during these unprecedented and stressful times. ■