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EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

supporting EAP professionals

When Mental Illness Threatens the Workplace, It's Not Time to Buy a Yugo

By David Fisher

In today's economy, employers reasonably ask what can be done to reduce the cost of psychological fitness for duty and violence risk assessments. Of course, doctors are sometimes willing to reduce their fees, particularly in financially strained geographic areas. But even with concessions, costs can be high – often in excess of $2,000-$3,000.

One solution is to look for budget evaluations. Sometimes these assessments yield solid results. However, all too often, they given the mistaken impression that a thorough assessment was performed by a doctor in medical/legal assessment. Unfortunately, these evaluations can lead employers to make the wrong managerial decisions. Such mistakes often cost valuable employees, result in multi-million dollar lawsuits, decreased workplace productivity, and even death.

Comparing health assessments to automobiles, the author notes that a Yugo (an extremely inexpensive - and some would say poorly made - car) is NOT the type of plan an employer should choose.

Therefore, employers might want to carefully reconsider decisions to give a high priority to cost rather than quality. These inadequate evaluations can be particularly difficult to spot by individuals who do not have advanced training in forensic psychology or psychiatry. Each of the following underlined points in this article can be a cost-saving shortcut that can endanger employers, EAPs, and employees.

❖ **No standardized assessment protocol** – The majority of psychologists and psychiatrists do not routinely use a formalized protocol in their fitness for duty and risk assessments. In the absence of a formal assessment plan, the evaluation can be inadequate, therefore increasing the potential risk to EAPs and employers. Following a structured assessment protocol, which usually takes considerable physician's time, is persuasive evidence that evaluations are performed according to national best practice standards. PsyBar's lengthy proprietary assessment outlines help the doctor collect and document all needed information according to nationally recognized standards. They promote a fair and thorough assessment, which offers confidence their either the EA professional, or the employer, made the right employment decision.

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Featured Inside

❖ **Missing or improper consent and release forms** – Doctors should use specialized employee consent and release forms, designed for fitness for duty and risk assessments. These are the forms that employees sign when they report to doctors' offices. Physicians who do not routinely perform forensic assessments often do not have such forms, which are designed for fitness for duty and risk assessment evaluations. These forms not only cover release of information issues, but also address the nature of the relationship between the doctor and employee, the potential uses of the information, and the potential consequences of completing or refusing to complete the evaluation.

❖ **No objective psychological testing** – The importance of objective psychological testing has increasingly been recognized in the courtroom. By administering these sometimes expensive tests as part of a comprehensive assessment, doctors can utilize objective data related to matters such as truthfulness, the probability of violent behaviors, and the degree of psychological distress.

❖ **No collateral interviews** – Doctors should usually contact individuals who know the employees being evaluated. Most commonly, these include workplace supervisors, spouses, and treating doctors. It is very common for physicians who are unfamiliar with forensic assessments to neglect to pursue critical information that can only be obtained through collateral interviews. Further, in a cost-cutting effort, some employers even discourage them. Not only can these interviews enable forensically skilled doctors to form a solid opinion, but they also demonstrate a good faith effort to obtain all information relevant to an employee.

❖ **Unnecessary personal information not removed from reports** – Many, perhaps most, lower-cost doctors who don't have training in medical/legal assessment, include confidential health care information in reports. To avoid compromising the employee, information such as diagnosis, prescriptions, treatment details, and personal lifestyle information should usually be deleted from reports. First, this is because employees can allege that an employer took action based not on their behavior, but due to a prejudice against people with similar medical problems or personal characteristics. Further, some courts have held that including such information is unnecessarily intrusive, and a violation of employee right to privacy.

❖ **Poor doctor selection** – Improper doctor vetting is likely more common in provider panels that are quickly assembled, perhaps from listings published by certain professional organizations. With PsyBar's 16 years of experience and 1,200 contracted PsyBar psychologists and psychiatrists, we know the right doctors to use with different employee types. Our in-house psychologists, rather than individuals without advanced degrees in psychology or psychiatry, assist in this selection process, helping match the right professionals with employees.

❖ **Assessments not customized for employees whose primary language is not English** – Working with nationally recognized experts in cross-cultural assessment, PsyBar has designed customized procedures for evaluating employees whose primary language is not English. These procedures help employers make fair managerial decisions and protect employee civil rights. And because many psychologists and psychiatrists are unfamiliar with rapidly changing cross-cultural assessment standards, evaluations through other companies might not include these critical measures. Neglecting some of the

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practices outlined in these protocols can have serious consequences for doctors, EAPs, employers, and employees.

Summary

In conclusion, when EAPs and employers refer employees for evaluation, they need the confidence of knowing that a skilled expert will perform a thorough assessment. A formalized protocol ensures the quality of the assessment by:

❖ *Outlining* a broad range of questions to be addressed in the interview;

❖ *Defining* objective psychological testing to be administered;

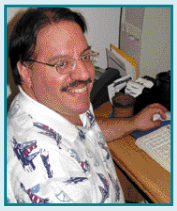
❖ *Encouraging* doctors to perform collateral interviews; and

❖ *Identifying* the type of information to be excluded from the evaluation report.

Professional consultation is provided to our doctors, which serves to decrease the potential for critical errors during the assessment, and on the evaluation report. The use of carefully constructed consent and release forms not only addresses release of information issues, but also the nature of the evaluation, potential uses of the information obtained, and possible consequences to the employee.

Moreover, the selection of well-credentialed forensic experts further serves to ensure quality. Collectively, although sometimes more expensive, these measures increase the value of assessments while minimizing the risk for *all* parties. ■

David Fisher, Ph.D., L.P., ABPP, has served as president of PsyBar, LLC since 1995. Dr. Fisher oversees psychological and psychiatric Fitness for Duty Evaluations (FFDEs). He also publishes, lectures, and consults nationwide on psychiatric and psychological assessments. For more information, visit wwww.psybar.com.



Editor's Notebook

Welcome to Volume 15 of *Employee Assistance Report*. YOU, the reader, are the only reason we've been around for 15 years, and we will continue to do our best to meet your needs in 2012. We think we have an interesting assortment of articles on tap for the new year, including this month's cover article by David Fisher, whom I had the pleasure of meeting at the World EAP Conference (Oct. 26-29) in Denver.

Other articles tentatively planned for 2012 include workplace bullying, cancer in the workplace, an update on the effect of recent parity legislation on EA practitioners, and more on the impact of technology on EAP.

Some of the insights I gained from the World EAP Conference are shared in an article elsewhere in this month's newsletter. Additional information is posted on the Impact blog at http://impactpublishing.wordpress.com.

Finally, I direct your attention to this month's *Brown Bagger* insert, which I believe offers some useful observations for EA professionals about the impact that negativity can have on productivity and morale in the workplace. I spent 10 years as a newspaper reporter, and they were often some of the most negative work environments imaginable – so much so that it was the main reason I left a particular newspaper for a different avenue of publishing, even though I greatly enjoyed my education beat! I'll bet this overlooked area affects some of your corporate clients as well – quite possibly without managers even realizing it. Until next time.

Mike Jacquart

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Quick Ideas

Action Steps for 2012

❖ *Attitude is critical*. Focus on what's working and what your corporate client can be grateful for.

❖ *Take time every day to acknowledge people*. People will give their best when they feel appreciated.

❖ *Stop complaining*. It doesn't lead anywhere. Complaints bring more things to complain about.

❖ *Create a picture of where you (or your client) want business to be in five years*. Then, act as if you (or they) are already there. When the focus is on the future and not on present problems, you'd be surprised at how this approach can help an organization get where it wants to be.

❖ *Have faith*. Trust that everything will work out. We worry too much about things that never happen. ■

Source: Scott Hunter, author of Unshackled Leadership (www.unshackledleadership.com).

More Cancer Survivors Returning to Work

With more people living and working longer, and medical treatments becoming even more effective, an increasing number of cancer patients are returning to work after taking long-term-disability leaves for treatment.

"Years ago, if you had cancer, you very likely weren't coming back to work," says Robert Jacob, a director of health and productivity for Chattanooga, Tenn.-based Unum, a disability-benefit provider. "Now, with baby boomers [staying in the workforce] longer and with advances in treatment and early detection, the questions surrounding cancer and the workplace have evolved."

"Cancer is a disease of the 21st century," says Helen Darling, president and CEO of the Washington-based NBGH. "It is important that employers educate their beneficiaries about preventable forms of cancer. Moreover, employers need to implement strategies to manage and support employees who are diagnosed with cancer and also provide programs and services aimed at employee caregivers."

One huge challenge facing HR and benefits professionals is how best to implement the different types of leave needed to keep cancer patients as productive as possible for as long as possible.

Already, cancer is the second-leading cause of long-term disability and the sixth-leading cause of short-term disability in the United States, according to the American Cancer Society. At Unum, cancer has been the leading cause of long-term disability claims for a decade, according to its latest data from 2010.

But with more cancer survivors wanting to return to work, intermittent leave becomes far more crucial for their mental and psychological health, as well as physical, says Darling. "Say a patient has breast cancer and has extensive treatment in a short amount of time. She'll be out for many months to recuperate. Then she gets better and can return, but only for awhile [until chemotherapy or radiation ensues] because the treatment is so toxic."

According to Jacob, the key is to remain flexible yet consistent in how intermittent leave is handled, and to make sure the psychological impact of the disease is being treated as well. (According to numerous sources, depression and cancer often occur simultaneously.)

Return-to-work programs, handled correctly, taking into account a company's demographics and all other trends and costs, can actually boost the bottom line in terms of productivity, absenteeism, presenteeism and more, he says. ■

Sources: Human Resource Executive Online, Employee Assistance Professionals Association.

Resources

📖 ***The Seed: Finding Purpose and Happiness in Life and Work,*** by Jon Gordon (Wiley, 2011, www.jongordon.com). Since a "perfect" world of work and home balance generally does not exist, the author claims the key is to love what you do — "you'll thrive during the busy seasons and fully appreciate the down time," Gordon says. ■

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Accountability Increases Ability – *Part I*

By Diane Ciotta

"Are you working hard or hardly working?" This question often gets a chuckle. Unfortunately, it's less humorous as it has become increasingly difficult for managers to find hard-working help. Many employers are challenged daily by the frustration of lackadaisical attitudes of their personnel, which is seemingly contagious and complicated by the expense of constant turnover. It's also an issue that affects employee assistance professionals, who are often called in to resolve employee performance problems.

Can accountability really be taught? Effectively motivating employees to be more accountable stimulates an optimistic focus on both results and attitude. There are several ways to establish a comfortable, non-complacent environment. Several of these recommendations appear in this article – the remainder will be presented in part II of this two-part article.

❖ **Focus on coaching as opposed to managing**. Too often management operates by means of intimidation rather than motivation. Just as customers are more inclined to buy from people they like, employees will typically work harder for a boss they respect more than fear. Coaching is the art of *showing*, not just telling. In addition to building better employer/employee relationships, learned skills encourage a more committed focus than just dictated tasks.

❖ **Set challenging, yet attainable expectations**. Being stretched promotes growth but being overwhelmed causes anxiety. Finding a balance between requiring responsibilities that are progressive without being incredulous will enhance accountability and confidence. ■

NEXT MONTH: Providing incentives and dedicating time to recognize excellence.

Diane Ciotta is the founder of The Keynote Effect, where she presents a passionate message of accountability and encourages activities to conquer complacency. For more information, visit www.thekeynoteeffect.com.

Workplace Survey

Managers' Meeting Pet Peeves

Planning a meeting? Better start on time – and have a good reason for scheduling it. Nearly one-third (31%) of managers interviewed for an Accountemps survey said beginning or ending late tops their list of meeting pet peeves. Getting the group together unnecessarily was the second most common complaint, cited by 27% of respondents.

"With so many people already stretched for time, it's important to only call staff together when a physical gathering or conference call is the best way to communicate," said Max Messmer, chairman of Accountemps and author of *Human Resources Kit For Dummies*®, 2nd Edition (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.). "Long-standing meetings, in particular, should be continually reassessed, because groups often meet out of habit rather than due to a compelling need."

Messmer added, "Short, focused meetings are often the most productive. Organizers and participants both play a role in keeping these gatherings in check."

Accountemps identifies five signs that your meeting could be a time waster – and how to correct it:

❖ **You've left nothing out**. While you should have an agenda, it shouldn't look like a follow-up to *War and Peace*. The onus is on the organizer to determine what must be covered and what can be left out.

❖ **Everyone's invited**. Scan your list of attendees to determine who really needs to be included in the discussion. People are often invited as a courtesy rather than necessity. A lengthy participant list also may indicate you are trying to accomplish too much in a single meeting.

❖ **It will run longer than an hour**. It's hard to keep an audience's attention for an extended period of time. If you must schedule a meeting for more than an hour, try to get people to interact, offer them snacks or vary the speakers to help everyone stay engaged.

❖ **There are too many visual elements**. Visuals such as PowerPoint presentations can be

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Prescription Drug Abuse is Posing Huge Problem

Is prescription drug abuse a problem among the employees of your corporate clients? What about the *children* of employees? If it isn't a problem as yet, this issue may, unfortunately surface in the near future – given the fact that the prescription drug abuse epidemic is resulting in some stark statistics. According to government data, drug overdose has overtaken auto crashes as the nation's leading cause of accidental death.

"This is the first time that drugs have killed more people than car wrecks since the government began tracking drug-related fatalities in 1979," as written by Maia Szalavitz for *Time Heartland*.

A consistent rise in prescription drug abuse has resulted in an overall increase in overdoses. As Szalavitz writes, deaths involving painkillers have more than tripled between 1999 and 2006. Additionally, the drug death rate rose 63% between 1999 and 2004, and another 27% between 2007 and 2009.

Prescription drug abuse also carries other grim repercussions. Research indicates that accidental poisonings of *children* have increased.

The research on child poisonings illustrates yet another dangerous side effect of prescription drug abuse. Politicians, government organizations and law enforcement agencies are continuing to crack down on the various causes and sources of prescription drug abuse, including in Florida, which has one of the nation's higher rates of abuse and drug availability. ■

Editor's note: *This article was originally posted on our blog (http://impactpublishing.wordpress.com) on Oct. 11.*

Take these Tips to the Bank in 2012!

❖ *Enroll in your company 401(k)*. If they have a matching program, you're throwing away free money by not using it.

❖ *Review your credit report*. You may find inaccurate information that is causing you to pay higher interest rates or insurance premiums. This is an also an important measure to guard against identity theft.

❖ *Track your monthly spending*. Pay close attention to areas where you are being nickeled and dimed to death, and work to reduce or eliminate those items. Awareness is the first step towards financial control! ■

Source: Family Credit Management (www.familycredit.org).

Definitely a Rocky Mountain High!

By Mike Jacquart

With scores of conference sessions and plenty of networking opportunities, there was never a lack of things to do at EAPA's annual World EAP Conference, held Oct. 26-29 in Denver, CO. (It was EAPA's 40th birthday to boot!)

It was a great pleasure to meet with a number of *Employee Assistance Report* (*EAR*) and *Journal of Employee Assistance Report* (*JEA)* supporters and contributors that I normally only get to correspond with via email. In an electronic world that's increasingly too impersonal in my view, there's nothing quite like face-to-face contact!

In addition, while everyone enjoys renewing old acquaintances, I also had the opportunity to meet some *new* EA professionals as well. They included David Fisher, author of this month's cover article; Patricia Herlihy with Rocky Mountain Research; and Eric Kung with Human Dynamic in Hong Kong.

The training sessions I attended included, "Online Innovations for a New Treatment of Clients" by Lyle Labardee and DeeAnna Nagel, a noted authority on this topic; "Supporting Employment Success for Veterans and Other Employees with Disabilities" by Michael Reardon and Elena Carr; and "Helping the EA Professional Address Cybersex: Definition, Assessment, and Treatment" by Weston Edwards.

In terms of EAP trends, compared to last year's event in Tampa, I noticed a definite increase in the number of breakouts on two specific areas: *the impact of technology* on the EAP field, and the *effect that soldiers returning from the battlefield to the workplace*, is having on the EAP profession.

Certainly, there were plenty of sessions on other important areas, but those were two topics that jumped out at me the most. More importantly, these sessions and contacts provided a wealth of information that I plan to translate into a number of stories in *EAR* and the *JEA* this year.

Kudos goes out to the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) on another world conference well done! The only bummer was the SNOW that fell on the 26th – oh well no event is perfect! ■

EAPA Names Award Winners

The Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) recognized a number of individuals and organizations for their contributions to the field, at the annual awards luncheon during the Annual World EAP Conference in Denver. They were as follows:

Member of the Year – Dave Sharar; *Lifetime Achievement Award* – Brenda Blair; *John J. Hennessey Award* – Steve Garnham; *EAP Quality Award* – Caterpillar EAP; *Outstanding Chapter Award* – Northern Illinois; and *Emeritus Member Status* – Tom Delaney and Bruce Prevatt. ■

Source: EAPA.

Pet Peeves.. *cont'd from Page 5*

effective for simplifying complex ideas, but they also can bog down the discussion. Instead, distribute the slides to attendees before you meet to give them a chance to review and prepare comments in advance.

❖ **It's routine**. If you have regularly scheduled meetings, you may want to determine if they are still necessary. For instance, if it's difficult to come up with enough agenda items for each gathering or the meetings are getting progressively shorter; you may need to adjust the frequency. ■

Source: Accountemps. Follow Accountemps for workplace news at twitter.com/accountemps.

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Implementing a Sales Culture within the EAP – Part II

By Shelley Plemons

As discussed last month, selling can no longer be the function of one person or one department, all individual business functions need to support the company mission by embedding a sales culture within your organization. In summary, it is about creating a sales culture that permeates every layer and aspect of the business operation – from product development to customer service. We looked at two of these functions in part I of this article; the following are the remaining five functions.

❖ **Proposals**: Understanding prospects' specific needs and tailoring your proposal responses to address those needs is sure to set you apart. The proposal must incorporate your specific knowledge and experience in working with the potential client's industry. There's no better source of information than a professional who has devoted time and resources to determine exactly what these needs are.

❖ **Pricing**: The objective here is to set pricing that will meet the demands of the marketplace while also ensuring that the company realizes a profit. To make sure the numbers work, the pricing or underwriting function will account for all expenses – from product development to marketing to sales. Underwriting then communicates those details to explain ranges and price points. These numbers provide guidelines that assist in any pricing negotiations with individual customers.

❖ **Lead Generation**: It is common for organizations to assume that generation of sales leads simply happens and so they do not assign resources or define a process. While companies can select any number of ways to handle lead generation – outsourcing to telemarketers, purchasing lists of qualified leads or conducting cold calling in-house – the truth is that lead generation is everyone's responsibility. All functions need to have a firm understanding of the company's target market to ensure that leads are qualified.

❖ **Sales**: At its most basic level, sales means making contacts and following up. Of course, there are numerous steps in this process. The important question is to determine – how will you bring new customers to your organization if the sales function is not functioning? Any organization would be wise to understand sales as it relates to the other entities within the business development cycle and to ensure collaboration among all the functions.

❖ **Account Management/ Customer Service**: This function carries out the process of keeping customers satisfied while simultaneously up-selling customers. Because they continue to service accounts after the initial sale is closed, they are the best source of client feedback that can be passed onto other team members or other areas within the organization. Positive feedback can be turned into testimonials that can be used in sales kits or be printed in a trade publication. Negative feedback can actually be constructive and used to make changes in the next product release.

Sales Culture as an Organizational Objective

To develop a sales culture as an organizational objective, companies need to assess current processes, identify areas for improvement, and implement a strategic business process. This course of action can be challenging – it requires that management be open to feedback on long-standing procedures and in which they may be personally vested.

However, change should be viewed as an opportunity not a threat. Objectivity is the key to ensure that any changes are smooth and seamless. The payoff is that infusing a sales culture across your organization can keep the sales pipeline filled, shorten the sales cycle, and increase revenue. ■

Shelley Plemons has more than 25 years' experience in the behavioral health industry. During that time she worked for several successful companies such as Charter Medical, MHN and Life Care. She founded Strategic Sales Solutions in 2003, and assists clients with strategy and training. Her website can be found at www.strategicsalessolutions.com.

Editor's note: *This story is the third in a series that will discuss business solutions for EAPs. If you have a topic you would like covered send an email to Shelley@strategicsalessolutions.com or call (817) 946-5334.*