EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

supporting EA professionals

Bonus! 2017 Article Archive

Volume 21, No. 1
January 2018

21 years of service!

Vegas Tragedy Amplifies the Need for Employers to be Ready

By Nancy S. Shriner

The recent mass shooting that took the lives of 58 people and wounded another 480 country music fans in Las Vegas shook America. Over time, as with all similar tragedies, the repercussions of that horrendous event will create a ripple effect, negatively impacting victims and their families for a long time.

The victims at the southern tip of the Las Vegas strip were mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters. Many, if not most, also were employees. In fact, media reports profiling the innocent victims whose lives were lost in Las Vegas often included comments from employers who stepped up to praise their lost or wounded workers and support their families.

Sadly, the events of Sunday, Oct. 1, drove home the importance of EAPs in helping surviving coworkers and families cope with the aftermath of a horrible tragedy. Of course, it doesn't necessarily take such a dramatic event to require support for employees when a coworker dies. It could be a heart attack at an office desk, cancer, or perhaps a car accident. It could be anywhere at any time, because every day people die, and the odds are high these individuals are in the workforce.

Disruptive Event Management Arrives

In the 1980s, Dr. Jeffery Mitchell and Dr. George Everly coined the term Critical Incident Stress Debriefing. The concept was designed to prevent or reduce post-traumatic stress for police, fire, and other first responders. For many years, EAP staff used that same terminology and applied parts of that same concept to our responses.

Recently, EAPs began using the term disruptive event management (DEM), a term that more broadly encompasses some of the reasons employee assistance professionals are called on-site in a post-trauma situation, such as the death of an employee, serious accident on the job, violent incident or natural disaster.

For example, an EAP could be asked to have a counselor on-site

continued on Page 2

Featured Inside

Vegas Tragedy... cont'd from Page 1

for an incident that occurs out of state, or in a different location other than the company's headquarters. Massively tragic events such as the Las Vegas music festival or Orlando nightclub shootings, for example, also could negatively affect employees in various locations who may have friends or relatives who were injured or killed in these tragedies. EAP clients could request a counselor on-site to support their employees, even in some cases when they may not have been directly impacted other than what they saw through the news media.

DEM entails delivering a customized response to worksites impacted by any event that disrupts employees' ability to work. In the case of an employee death or trauma, the central focus is to provide support to leadership and employees by helping to create a culture of psychological safety, decreasing stress, and acknowledging the employees' reaction to the loss or devastation. This support results in less absenteeism, with a quicker return to the same level of functioning as before the event and continued productivity.

The overriding idea is people have a right to lead productive, meaningful lives, which means providing an objective, timely, and thorough response that helps with the human side of recovery.

Employee Deaths Drive EAP Involvement

It may surprise you that among common disruptive incidents, the biggest reason our firm gets involved is due to employee deaths, which account for 70 percent of clients' requests for help. As we are all aware, not just the elderly or the very ill die; often death is unpredictable.

When an unexpected death occurs, it's important that leadership acknowledge the event and freely share the information that they have with employees. Today's social media can move information quickly, but not always accurately. Experience has proven that facts can reduce fear for employees. Certainly, it makes sense for employers to consult with their EAP regarding next best steps to support their staff through this loss.

Most of all, it's good to remember that these scenarios can be very fluid, there is not necessarily a one-size-fits-all solution or response, or way of presenting the best possible strategy following an employee death. Some employee deaths come after a long illness, and co-workers have had time to grieve this potential loss. Other natural deaths are sudden and unexpected, and some deaths are a result of a tragic accident or situation. The impact to co-workers as well as the organization is likely very different. EAP counselors are able to adjust their strategies to the needs of a client. Flexibility is crucial.

Leadership's Role in Managing through a Disruptive Event

When a tragedy strikes, employees look to leadership for direction. Leaders must present competence and compassion. An empowered leader demonstrates the seriousness of the loss, an awareness of the impact to the organization and its workforce, while also communicating an expectation of recovery.

It is important that whatever loss or trauma has occurred, it is acknowledged by leadership with transparency and accurate facts. The trauma or loss should be named with language that is specific. For example, if there is a fatality, don't be afraid to use the word death. Effective leaders acknowledge the personal impact as well as the effect on the organization, and most importantly, recognize the loss and devastation to the team members. Leadership should communicate an expectation of recovery while recognizing that the workplace will be flexible with reasonable accommodations as people progress back to work as usual.

continued on Page 3

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

Editor/Publisher - Mike Jacquart
Designer - Laura J. Miller

Vegas Tragedy... cont'd from Page 2

Planning, EAP can Help

A critical incident or death of an employee is traumatic on many different levels. Yet, death is a fact of life. With proper planning and a strong EAP-driven program in place, employers can meet the challenge of helping their workers and families deal with their grief and its impact on the workplace.

Most of all, it's important that leadership be prepared and plan for this kind of event. Because if it hasn't happened yet, it certainly will. And at a time when something as traumatic as the death of a co-worker occurs, employees are looking to leadership for direction and support. ■

Nancy Shriner is Training and Critical Incident Coordinator for West's Health Advocate Solutions, a national health and patient assistance company headquartered in Plymouth Meeting, PA. West's Health Advocate Solutions makes healthcare easier for over 12,000 organizations and their members by leveraging a combination of personal support, data and technology to engage people in their health and well-being.

Editor's Notebook

The October 1 mass shooting that took the lives of 58 people and wounded nearly 500 more in Las Vegas rocked the nation. Crisis incident response personnel (which include EA professionals) were quickly on the scene to assist the grieving.

But the fact of the matter is that while it's usually only tragedies like these that get the average person's attention, EA professionals are all too aware that it's the more typical, sudden death of a single individual that they will be more likely to address, rather than something like the tragedy in Vegas.

In fact, Nancy Shriner, author of this month's cover story, points out that, *"the biggest reason our firm gets involved is due to employee deaths, which account for 70 percent of clients' requests for help."*

And yet, death is a fact of life. However, Nancy notes: "*With proper planning and a strong EAP-driven program in place, employers can meet the challenge of helping their workers and families deal with their grief and its impact on the workplace."* As always, the EAP is in a perfect position to help.

*****

EAR regrets an error in a title in an article that appeared on page 8 in the December newsletter. Morneau Shepell won an award from the EAEF (Employee Assistance European Forum), not the EARF as was stated in the headline. Until next time. ■

Mike Jacquart

Mike Jacquart, Editor
(715) 445-4386
mjacquart@writeitrightllc.com

Workplace Survey

Many Employees are Bored

Beating the winter blahs may be a real concern at work. In a survey from OfficeTeam, professionals admit they're bored in the office an average of 10.5 hours per week. That's more than a full day a week, or the equivalent of 68 days a year! And 2 in 5 employees (40%) said it's likely they'd quit their job if they felt bored at work.

While 45% of employees are equally bored throughout the year, another 28% said work is most tedious during the winter.

Employees were also asked what they do when they're bored in the office. In addition to browsing the Internet, checking personal email and social media, and chatting with co-workers, here are some of their more creative activities:

- "Have rubber band battles with co-workers"
- "Pay bills"
- "Watch TV or movies online"
- "Work on the book I'm writing"
- "Play online games"
- "Daydream"
- "Clean my desk"
- "Look for other jobs"

"Let's face it, the workday isn't always filled with excitement. Managers can regularly check in with staff to ensure they're engaged, but the onus is also on employees," said Brandi Britton, a district president for OfficeTeam. "When boredom strikes or there's a lull in activity, individuals should proactively ask to help with projects that challenge and interest them." ■

Source: OfficeTeam, a Robert Half company, www.roberthalf.com/officeteam.

Workplace Outcome Suite Works

A new study by Chestnut Global Partners (CGP) and the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) found that employee health, productivity, and satisfaction improved after EAP counseling. The 2017 Workplace Outcome Suite (WOS) Report evaluated work engagement, absenteeism, workplace distress, and life satisfaction following EAP counseling. Survey results were based on 16,792 completed EAP employee cases worldwide.

The Chestnut Global Partners Division of Commercial Science developed WOS in 2010 to provide a scientific, objective way to measure whether investing in EAPs is a good business decision, according to the report. More than 600 EAPs so far have entered into agreements to use WOS to assess their programs' effectiveness in the workplace.

"Many EAPs still don't know the extent to which their program or interventions actually improve the work performance of employees who use EAP services," said Greg DeLapp, EAPA's CEO. "Employers, purchasers, or other stakeholders wind up focusing on two metrics where information does exist: cost and utilization, versus the most meaningful metric to business: employee workplace outcomes." ■

Tips for Finding Balance

Millennials are seriously stressed at work. New numbers reveal 64% of workers under the age of 34 are overwhelmed on the job daily. We're in the midst of a Millennial meltdown! According to CEO Tim Cole, younger workers are at the greatest risk for burnout, but it's possible to reverse the trend before it's too late.

"Millennials need to realize now—not later—that burnout is a self-inflicted wound," says Cole, author of *The Compass Solution*. "Show me a corporate champion and I will show you someone who recognized that balance in his or her life was the only way to sustain success."

Tips for finding balance for workers of any age include:

- It's crucial for workers in any field to recuperate, rest, and recharge. Hard work must be followed by hard rest.
- Everyone should find hobbies outside of work. ■

Saying 'No' Now to Avoid Resentment Later

By Jenny Mueller

We have all over-committed at one time or another. It can happen by accident, of course. However, if you notice your automatic answer is generally "yes," it might be time to reevaluate your resources before taking on any further commitments. Accurately assessing what you are able to give can allow you to do so generously and with your whole heart. However, giving too much can lead to burnout and resentment.

If you find yourself in situations where you are saying "yes" through clenched teeth and a forced smile, here are some strategies for setting limits with others:

1. Buy time:

When someone directly asks for your commitment, buy some time to make a decision, do not respond immediately. Say something like, "I need some time to consider that, can I get back to you on that by_____?"

2. Evaluate:

Do I have this _____ (time, energy, money etc.) available to give?

How will this impact _____ (me, my family, other commitments I've made, etc.) if I agree to this?

Is this in alignment with any personal goals/values that I have identified (i.e. setting aside time for exercise, meditation, study, sleep, family time, saving money, important project/goal etc.)?

Why would I say "yes" to this request?

How will I feel about this decision tomorrow, in a week, a month, or a year?

Am I being honest with myself and others?

Is there something else that I could offer that would be a better fit for me?

3. Craft the response:

Be honest, considerate, and concise. Avoiding the issue/person or making up a reason that you think would be acceptable is likely to cause more stress and anxiety down the road. If you are straight forward, you won't have to worry about keeping your story straight in the future. If you are dealing with someone that historically does not accept "no" for an answer, be prepared to stand your ground by rehearsing a phrase that summarizes what you have already stated and an exit strategy or a change of topic.

4. Reflect and celebrate:

Setting limits can be hard (I know this firsthand as a recovering people-pleaser), but doing so can be one of the greatest gifts you learn to give to yourself. I found a great deal of wisdom regarding this topic in the book *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*, by Brene Brown. Brown talks about limit-setting as it relates to authenticity, vulnerability, and what she coins "wholehearted living". It really is a great read. You may also be familiar with her well-known TED Talk: https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability

After you have responded to the request, reflect on how you have reaffirmed your commitment to any personal goals or values. If you are able to manage your resources (time, energy, money, etc.), you will be better able to enjoy the activities/commitments that you have thoughtfully selected. You are in control rather than feeling controlled and with all the time you have left over, maybe you can do something nice for yourself or with someone you love! ■

Editor's note: *This is an edited version of a blog that appeared on Empathia's website.*

Jenny Mueller, MA, joined Empathia in 2013 as an EAP Counselor. She has a bachelor's degree in Psychology and a master's degree in Counseling with an emphasis in School Counseling. Prior to joining Empathia, she worked as a School Counselor with children ranging in age from 4-18 years old. Jenny enjoys photography, travel, hiking, reading, adventures with her sons, and spending time with her family.

**Specific LifeMatters® services vary from company to company, so please speak to your company benefits representative or call LifeMatters to determine the specific services that are available to you.*

Effective Conflict Resolvers …

❖ **Understand the individual's needs**. Does the person need to vent? Brainstorm solutions? Be coached? Effective conflict resolvers understand what a person needs by asking questions: *"What are you hoping I will do?" "What do you see as my role in this matter?"*

❖ **Engage in collaborative listening**. Collaborative listening takes active listening one step further by supporting the work of the other person. The speaker's job is to clearly express his or her thoughts, feelings, and goals. Effective conflict resolvers facilitate clarity, make the individual feel heard, and ask questions that probe for deeper understanding: *"When you said X, what did you mean?" "If Y happens, what is significant about that for you?"*

❖ …**Are good communicators**. They pick up on positive messages to spur progress. They paraphrase accurately so words aren't distorted. They ask the listener if this is new information, and if it changes his/her stance.

❖ …**Are optimistic and resilient**. They agree to participate in a negotiation as an act of courage and hope. They inspire by being optimistic, resilient, and they don't let arguments end prematurely – settling for anything just to bring them to a conclusion.

Source: Dina Beach Lynch, former ombudsman for Fleet Bank.

Why Companies Need an 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 need help with caregiving concerns. Caregiving employees take off nearly 19 vacation and sick days each year to deal with personal issues related to caregiving.

❖ Lost productivity due to employee caregiving concerns cost employers at least $11 billion annually.

Substance Abuse

❖ Drug-reliant employees incur 300% higher medical costs compared with non-using co-workers, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Workers at Risk, Drugs and Alcohol on the Job.

❖ 70% of illegal drug users are employed (CSAT).

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; National Family Caregivers Association.

Resource

PsyberGuide, https://psyberguide.org. There are thousands of mental health apps. This site helps users choose the right ones. The site features a product guide. ■

Fixing a Toxic Team

By Abby Curnow-Chavez

In the world of business it's safe to say all work is done in teams. Ask anyone and they'll tell you most of the teams they've been on are average or mediocre, or good but not great. And sadly, many can tell you in dreaded detail about the toxic teams they've been on where gossip, sabotage, and finger-pointing were the norm.

Does this sound anything like the team you're currently on? Here are five steps to get your team out of this highly dysfunctional place:

1. Own it. If you don't take full ownership for fixing your team, it won't get better! Think about what you did to allow for this dynamic and what you didn't do to address it. This could be an excellent time to get 360 feedback to understand others' perceptions of your effectiveness as team leader. Talk openly with your team about your role (good and bad) and set a new standard for how you expect the team to work together.

2. Study the facts and seek out the truth. Use data and feedback to figure out what is really happening on the team. Get others' perspectives. Ask questions, listen, stay curious, and be open to feedback. Be willing to seek the truth, even if it's hard to hear. Team leaders tend to have the perspective of some, but not all, team members and may have a biased view of what's really going on. Stay neutral and listen without judgment to fully understand why your team is struggling.

3. Set new standards of behavior and make tough decisions. As the team leader, it's critical that a new standard for performance and behavior is set. Set a high bar and apply it to ALL team members. You can't have different standards for different team members. Too often the negative behaviors of certain individuals are overlooked or ignored for various reasons. This doesn't help, it hinders. Make sure the team understands the repercussions of their actions and be willing to follow-through. Frequently point out examples where team members are, and are not, living up to the new standards. Remember, you get what you tolerate!

4. Get the team on board. The team needs to meet regularly, and as the team leader, you need to keep everyone committed to the new rules of the road. If you need to, find a strong facilitator to help. That person could be a professional facilitator, an internal HR business partner, or a trusted colleague who has skills and is viewed as being neutral. Involve the team in discussing its challenges and suggesting ways to improve. Don't forget to celebrate the team's progress and successes, even the small ones.

5. Don't give up. Turning around a Saboteur Team may be the hardest work you will do as a team leader. It takes time, courage, and commitment. Keep your vision in front of the team and give team members regular feedback and coaching. Look for and publicize quick wins and reward the right behavior. For many team leaders it's tough to do this, but remove team members who aren't willing or able to change. It only takes one saboteur for the whole team to become toxic – make the tough decisions when you need to. No leader has every regretted getting rid of an underperformer or a saboteur.

Once you begin the process of turning around your team, you are likely to see improvements immediately. Be intentional in your efforts – and persistent – and you'll reap the rewards. ■

Abby Curnow-Chavez is a partner at The Trispective Group and the co-author with Audrey Epstein, Linda Adams and Rebecca Teasdale of "The Loyalist Team: How Trust, Candor, and Authenticity Create Great Organizations". For more information, please visit, www.trispectivegroup.

Employee Assistance Report is published monthly. For subscription information contact: Employee Assistance Report, 395 Grove St., Iola, WI 54945-9644. This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services. If legal advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought. (From a Declaration of Principles jointly adopted by a committee of the American Bar Association and a Committee of Publishers.) *Employee Assistance Report* does not necessarily endorse any products or services mentioned. No part of this newsletter may be reproduced in any form or by any means without written permission from the publisher, except for the inclusion of brief quotations in a review which must credit *Employee Assistance Report* as the source, and include the publisher's phone number, address, and subscription rate.

Understanding of Mental Illness Needs Improving

New research shows that public understanding of what constitutes a mental illness may not be as great as we think, with many participants in a new study unable to identify symptoms and situations which are worthy of psychiatric help.

The survey, conducted by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, found that 86% of people believe they should see a consultant if they have cancer, while the numbers of those who believe specialist treatment is needed for mental illnesses are significantly lower.

For instance, just 42% of people did not know that a psychiatrist is responsible for diagnoses of bipolar disorder.

President Professor Wendy Burn says: "The work done to tackle stigma has been astounding and I could not be prouder of the open culture we're fostering about mental health. But our poll shows that people do not fully appreciate how severe mental illness can be."

Meanwhile, Dr Kate Lovett, Dean of the Royal College of Psychiatrists says: "People with a severe mental illness should expect to see a specialist consultant, just as you would for a severe physical illness.

"We need to raise awareness about the full spectrum of mental health to ensure everyone can get the right care at the right time." ■

Stricter Alcohol Policies Tied to Fewer Homicides

Stricter alcohol policies, including taxes and sales restrictions, help lower the odds of alcohol-related homicides, according to new research at Boston Medical Center and Boston University. The new findings highlight the importance of making tighter alcohol control policies as a way to help reduce violence, including homicide.

Alcohol is a known risk factor for homicide perpetration and victimization. Between 40 and 50 percent of homicides in the United States involve the use of alcohol by either the victim or perpetrator.

Until now, however, it remained unknown exactly how alcohol policies — which include alcohol taxes and the number of places licensed to sell alcohol — relate to alcohol-related homicides.

For the study, the researchers analyzed the association between alcohol policies in place and the likelihood of alcohol involvement (either up to the legal limit of 0.08 or above that limit) among the 27,000 victims of homicide from 17 U.S. states between 2003 and 2012.

The data was taken from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Violent Death Reporting System. State alcohol policies for each year were characterized using the "Alcohol Policy Scale," a measure of the policy "environment" based on 29 separate alcohol control policies.

Tighter, more restrictive state alcohol policies were protective when alcohol was involved in a homicide. In fact, a one percent increase in the restrictiveness of policies corresponded to a one percent lower chance of alcohol being involved among homicide victims.

"Given the risks involved with alcohol use, strengthening effective alcohol policies could help prevent homicides," said Timothy Naimi, M.D., the study's lead author who is a physician in general internal medicine at BMC and researcher at BMC's Grayken Center for Addiction Medicine. ■