

# EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

Mental Health  
Awareness  
Month

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22 years  
of service!

supporting EA professionals

## Implementing a Workplace Mental Health Program

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one in six U.S. adults lives with a mental illness. As a result, employers need a strategy that proactively integrates mental health into their overall wellness plans. EAPs are uniquely positioned to partner with employers in this effort because of the services they provide and the relationship they have with the employee.

But how? In response to this need, this article offers an overview of how Cascade Centers – [www.cascadecenters.com](http://www.cascadecenters.com) – developed one such model, the WholeLife Directions program and Whole Life Scale™.

The program consists of four phases, each of which focuses on a specific topic with a three-month duration. The entire WholeLife program lasts one year, with each year building on previous outcomes and experience.

### Phase 1: Decrease Stigma and Assess Needs of the Work Population

❖ *Consult with the employer* to decide how they can incorporate mental health into their overall wellness plan. Explore how the employer currently encourages people to stay healthy, and what may have worked for them in the past.

❖ *Engage organizational leaders* who are enthused about

communicating their commitment and support for employees with mental health issues.

❖ *Consider a focused anti-stigma campaign.* You might educate employees on ways we've historically treated mental illness differently than physical health issues. For example, if someone breaks their arm they get immediate medical

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attention. However, if someone is depressed they may be told to “cheer up” or “snap out of it.”

❖ *Administer an assessment tool* such as the Whole Life Scale™ – a complete mental health appraisal that measures nine mental health domains: Anger, Stress, Depression, Anxiety, Relationship, Post-Traumatic Stress, Sleep, Substance Abuse, and Work Engagement.

❖ *Follow up the assessment with a robust intervention.* Upon completion, users are given an individual summary of their results. This provides a score, an explanation of the source, and direction to recommended next steps. Those with high distress can be directed to contact the EAP for intervention and counseling. In the case of WholeLife, employees with medium and low scores are guided to specific programs in Phase 2 of WholeLife Directions.

### Phase 2: Self Care

This phase encourages individuals to utilize the EAPs recommended in their WholeLife Scale (WLS) summary report. The employer is also provided with tools that enhance self-care and domain-specific resources. Self-care tools might include:

❖ *Web-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT);*

❖ *Resilience-based* webinars, interactive programs, and program materials to encourage employees to develop personal resilience; and

❖ *Resources provided to employers based on highest needs within the work population.* For instance, if a significant percentage of scores indicated high distress in the depression domain, information would be shared about

apps, podcasts, and treatment resources for depression.

### Phase 3: Care for Others

This phase focuses on skill building for supervisors who are working directly with employees experiencing mental health issues.

❖ *Supervisor support* is crucial as they are sometimes the first in the organization to be aware of employee mental health issues. It is important that they receive training to recognize mental health issues, and connect people with resources and response strategies in times of employee crisis.

❖ *Continued focus on stigma reduction* is important. Employers are provided with a menu of promotional flyers to share, reducing myths associated with mental health treatment. The goal is to communicate treatment effectiveness, minimize shame, and reduce fears around help-seeking behavior.

### Phase 4: Maintaining Health Changes

The fourth and final phase encourages continued healthy behavior change, ways for dealing with setbacks, and ideas for helping the employer in the future.

❖ *Employees are encouraged to maintain improvement.* They are invited to attend a webinar about stages of change and how to cope with obstacles that may arise. For example, people using new skills to manage depression may experience a setback due to life changes, unexpected financial stress, or health issues. The goal is to offer EAP resources when barriers to sustained change occur.

❖ *Population-specific needs continue to be addressed.* For

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instance, if users are not accessing anxiety program tools on an individual level, yet an organizational report shows that anxiety is high within the employee population, it's likely a good idea to implement renewed attention and additional promotional materials on anxiety.

### Designing a Program

Whether EAPs implement a program like WholeLife Directions

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or design one of their own, there are specific elements to analyze for successful implementation.

❖ **Company environment and culture.** What are the business's needs? What are the employee demographics? What are successful communication channels used by the employer? Collecting this information will help prioritize specific areas.

For example, does most of the employee population have access during their work day to a computer? If so, electronic communication will fit nicely within their structure. If not, using other communication channels such as print media (posters, flyers, etc.), staff meetings, and on-site training will be important avenues to consider.

❖ **Overall wellness strategy.** Have you reviewed claims data, absenteeism and presenteeism rates, and current wellness program utilization and outcomes? Is there an issue in your population you are concerned about? What barriers to access exist? What current wellness vendors are you working with?

*How can the EAP partner, supplement or replace what you're currently using?* Helping employers understand their preferences, needs, and goals allows for a holistic approach. Mental health should be prioritized as part of an overall wellness plan.

An assessment such as the WLS provides the employer with thorough baseline data that can identify issues for employer intervention and help inform coordination with wellness and other vendors.

❖ **Organizational support and engagement with leadership is key.**



### Editor's Notebook

May is *Mental Health Awareness Month*, a perfect opportunity for EA professionals to reach out to corporate clients and their employees about this growing problem! There are scores of ideas on how to participate at <https://nami.org> and at [www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net).

This month's cover story details how a specific mental health program works, giving the EAP ideas for implementing it, as well as offering suggestions if the EAP would rather pursue an alternate program of its own. This month's *Brown Bagger* offers practical advice on supporting an employee with mental illness, as well as always-important tips on getting past stigma.

Don't forget to check out the additional mental health articles elsewhere in the main newsletter.

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Finally, in a follow-up to last month's cover story about connecting EAPs with financial resources, we kick off a series that will profile one of the CareConnect USA helplines. This month we will take a look at *Student Loan Relief*. If you are fortunate enough that your college loans are paid off, you might consider how the advice would benefit a troubled employee or loved one. Until next time.

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Is there a personal or organizational connection to this topic? Who can serve as a champion to encourage participation, communicate benefits, and reinforce efforts towards positive change? Leadership buy-in is essential to help decrease stigma *and increase engagement in EA programs*.

Ask a leader in the company if they are willing to lend their endorsement or share why the topic of mental health is important to them. Maybe it is a brief description of their own jour-

ney, how they have supported a friend or family member who has struggled with mental health issues, or simply what motivates them to live a holistic healthy life.

❖ **Provide incentives.** What will motivate your client's employees? In addition to traditional financial incentives, consider intangibles like celebrations, employee recognition, or extra paid time off. The

*continued on Page 8*

# Staff Meetings Matter: Part II

By *Kate Zabriskie*

For a myriad of reasons, many managers don't hold regular staff meetings. Furthermore, most who do don't get the most they could from them, and that's too bad. Good staff meetings can focus a team, energize employees, and engage them in ways ad-hoc interactions don't.

How do you turn a ho-hum approach to staff meetings into a high-functioning management tool? We presented one idea in part one of this three-part article. Additional suggestions appear below.

## Celebrate Successes

In many organizations, there is a huge appreciation shortage. Staff meetings provide managers and employees with regular intervals to practice gratitude.

*"I'd like to thank Tom for staying late last night. Because he did, I was able to attend a parent-teacher conference."*

*"Maryann's work on the PowerPoint presentation was superb. I want to thank her for preparing me with the best slides shown at the conference. The stunning photos outshined the graphics others used. Maryann's work really made our company look good."*

A steady drip of sincere gratitude can drive engagement. Note the word: sincerity. Most people have an amazing capacity to identify a false compliment. Real praise is specific. Well-delivered praise also ties the action to the outcome. Whether it's being able to attend a conference, looking

good in front of others, or some other result, people appreciate praise more when they understand how their actions delivered results. A praise segment in your staff meetings ensures you routinely take the time to recognize efforts.

## Highlight Relevant Metrics

Connecting work to purpose usually works best when a team focuses on both anecdotal and analytical information. If you don't currently track statistics, start. What you track will depend on your industry. However, whatever you decide should have a clear line of sight to the larger goal.

## Follow a Formula and Rotate Responsibility

Successful staff meetings usually follow a pattern, such as looking at weekly metrics, sharing information from the top, highlighting success, a team-building activity, and so forth.

By creating and sticking with a formula, managers help their employees know what to expect. Once employees know the pattern of the meeting, many are capable of running it because they've learned by watching.

Managers then have a natural opportunity to rotate the responsibility of the meeting to different people. By delegating, the manager is able to free up his or her time and provide employees with a chance to develop their skills. ■

**NEXT MONTH:** More tips on staff meetings.

*Kate Zabriskie is the president of Business Training Works, Inc., a Maryland-based talent development firm. She and her team help businesses establish customer service strategies and train their people to live up to what's promised. For more information, visit [www.businesstrainingworks.com](http://www.businesstrainingworks.com)*

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# Student Loan Relief Helpline Offers Options

By David Moakler

**W**hat does student loan relief have to do with employee assistance services? Potentially quite a bit, if the employee is dealing with burdensome student loan debt.

According to *Forbes* magazine, student loan debt in 2019 is at an all-time high. "There are more than 44 million borrowers who collectively owe \$1.5 trillion in student loan debt in the U.S.," *Forbes* states. "Student loan debt is now the second highest consumer debt category - behind only mortgage debt - and higher than both credit cards and auto loans."

If you're trying to pay back a student loan and see no end in sight, the stress can lead to frustration and presenteeism on the job.

*"How can I concentrate at work when I'm always worried how I'm going to make my student loan payment this month? It makes buying a home seem like just a pipe dream."*

## Loan Forgiveness is Real

Whether you call it student loan forgiveness, student loan cancellation, or student loan eradication, in the end it means the same thing: The *elimination* of the obligation to make any payments toward money borrowed for an education.

Have any of your employee clients graduated with a degree in nursing? Social work? Teaching? Are they working as an employee in state or federal government or a nonprofit organization? Some student loan forgiveness programs require that you work in a specific type of job and make a certain number of payments on loans without being late. After that point the Department of Education (DOE) will wipe out (forgive) any remaining balance.

## Don't Bury Your Head in the Sand

Disregarding a student loan obligation means the loan will go into default. No one should do it. Ramifications include an acceleration of the loan (the entire amount becomes due), damage to a credit rating, and some walloping fees and costs.

## Summary

If you have federal student loans (from the Federal Gov't), to learn about loan forgiveness, lowering payments,



or default recovery, call the **Student Loan Relief Helpline** to learn about your options **888-856-2668**.

If you have a Private Student Loan (from a bank), a separate number exists for relief programs (888-669-1064). ■

*David Moakler is the Executive Director of CareConnect USA.*

## In the News

### Read JEA Cover Story, Earn Free PDH!

**E**AR readers who are EAPA members are reminded that starting with the current (2<sup>nd</sup> quarter 2019) *Journal of Employee Assistance* (JEA), EAPA will offer a free PDH for reading the cover story of each issue of the *JEA* and answering a 5-item multiple choice quiz.

Read "*Where Do We Go From Here?*" by David Sharar in this issue and answer the multiple choice questions here [http://bit.ly/PDH\\_Q2JEA2019](http://bit.ly/PDH_Q2JEA2019).

Instructions are provided at the end of the quiz on how to get your free PDH. ■

*Source: Employee Assistance Professionals Association ([www.eapassn.org](http://www.eapassn.org)).*

# HR Disconnect about Mental Health

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, a perfect time to remind corporate clients about the pervasiveness of mental illness in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For younger generations especially, major disorders can co-exist with burnout, a more generalized feeling of anxiety, stress and exhaustion that is prominent in overworked labor forces. Burned out workers can be less productive and less engaged — and their work stress can often catalyze job searches.

Key findings from a recent Unum survey, as reported by HR Dive, included:

- ❖ More than 76% of employees in the Unum survey said they're

confident their managers were properly trained on how to identify employees who may be having a mental health issue, while *only 16% of HR professionals surveyed agreed*. In fact, almost all employees assumed managers were trained on how to refer employees to mental health resources, but just **25%** of HR pros said their managers are provided with that training, survey revealed.

- ❖ The survey also found that a majority of workers with mental health issues believe there is a stigma toward mental illness in their workplaces. And half of these workers believe that prejudice has worsened or stayed the same over the last five years, Unum said.

- ❖ Additionally, 55% of employees said their employer didn't have (or they weren't sure if their

employer had) a specific mental health policy or program in place.

The survey solicited responses from 1,850 workers, including 268 HR professionals and 500 employed adults diagnosed with mental health issues.

*EAR readers are well aware that the EAP is in a position to help.* ■



## Quick Ideas

# Mental Health by the Numbers

Mental Health Awareness Month has been observed in May in the United States since 1949, reaching millions of people in the United States through the media, local events, and screenings. For more information on how you can get involved, go to [www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may).

The following are some important facts:

- One in five people will be affected by mental illness in their lifetime.

- Only 41% of adults in the U.S. with a mental health condition received mental health services in the past year. Among adults with a serious mental illness, 63% received mental health services in the past year.
- Every day, an estimated 18-22 veterans die by suicide.
- Suicide is the 10<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in the U.S., and the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death for people aged 10–34.
- Know an individual in crisis? Call the NAMI helpline, **800-950-6264**.

- Serious mental illness costs America \$193.2 billion in lost earnings per year.
- Mood disorders, including major depression, dysthymic disorder and bipolar disorder, are the third most common cause of hospitalization in the U.S. for both youth and adults aged 18–44. ■

*Sources: National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI); National Institute of Mental Health; SAMHSA; American Journal of Psychiatry; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; Department of Health & Human Services.*

# Why Some Don't Respond to SSRIs

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are the most commonly prescribed medication for major depressive disorder (MDD), yet scientists still do not understand why they don't work in nearly 30 percent of patients.

A new study by researchers at the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California, discovered differences in growth patterns of neurons of SSRI-resistant patients. Published in *Molecular Psychiatry*, the study has implications for depression, as well as other psychiatric conditions, such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia that likely also involve abnormalities of the serotonin system in the brain, according to the researchers.

The cause of depression is still unknown, but scientists believe the disease is partly linked to the serotonergic circuit in the brain,

the researcher explains. This is largely because SSRIs, which increase levels of the neurotransmitter serotonin at neuron connections, help alleviate the symptoms of many people diagnosed with depression.

However, the mechanism of why some people respond to SSRIs, while others do not, remains a mystery.

Solving that mystery has been challenging because it requires studying the 300,000 neurons that use the neurotransmitter serotonin for communication within a brain of 100 billion total neurons, researchers point out.

One way scientists have recently overcome this obstacle is to generate these serotonergic neurons in the lab. "Using neurons derived from actual MDD patients provides a novel representation of how SSRI responders compare to

non-responders." said Dr. Krishna Vadodaria, a Salk staff scientist

The scientists examined serotonin targets in patient serotonergic neurons, including the enzyme that makes serotonin, the protein that transports it, and the enzyme that breaks it down, but found no differences in biochemistry interactions between groups. Instead, the researchers observed a difference in how the neurons responded based on their shape.

Neurons from SSRI non-responders had longer neuron projections than responders, the researchers discovered.

"These results contribute to a new way of examining, understanding, and addressing depression," said Salk Professor Rusty Gage, the study's senior author. ■

Sources: Salk Institute, Psych Central.

## Quick Ideas

# More People Want Mentors

Many successful people attribute part of their professional success to having a mentor. To learn more about why this is, Olivet Nazarene University recently surveyed 3,000 people about professional mentor-mentee relationships to see what they look like in 2019.

Here's what they found:

- 76% of people think mentors are important, however only 37% of people currently have one.
- Most people opt for same sex mentors (69% women, 82% men).
- People with mentors are happier at their current jobs than those without.
- Only 14% of mentor relationships started by asking someone to my mentor – 61% of those relationships developed naturally.

Read the full report at <https://online.olivet.edu/research-statistics-on-professional-mentors>. ■

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# Resources

📖 *Humor That Works: The Missing Skill for Success and Happiness at Work*, by Andrew Tarvin. If you want to increase team productivity, relieve stress, and be happier at work, you could hire a bunch of workplace consultants, invest in scream therapy, or you could just learn from the world's first and only Human Engineer. Learn more here <https://drewtarvin.com>.

🔗 The *EAP CIR Resilience Continuum* recognizes that response is not a singular event. Employees and organizations that place emphasis on elements of resilience prior, during and post incident, optimize their ability to bounce back and sustain new resilient behaviors. The next virtual workshop will be May 3, 1-3 p.m. EST. Two PDHs and CEs are available. For more information and to register, go to [www.eap-rda.com](http://www.eap-rda.com).

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## Quick Ideas

# Always Leave the Office on Time



- Work is a never-ending process. It can never be completed.
- Interest of a client is important, but so is your family.
- Life is not only about work, office, and client. There is more to life. You need time to socialize, entertain, relax, and exercise. Don't let life be meaningless.
- A person who stays late at the office is not a hard-working person. Rather, this individual does not know how to manage his/her work within the stipulated time.
- You did not study hard and struggle in life to become a machine. ■

Source: Christine Desmond on LinkedIn.

## Implementing... cont'd from Page 3

goal is to reach as many employees as possible and incentives help give that extra push to encourage participation. *Cascade has found that providing even small incentives to participants significantly increased utilization of the WLS.*

❖ **Emphasize confidentiality.** A big concern with EAP participation in mental health treatment involves concerns about privacy. *As a result, communicating the steps that are in place to protect personal health information is crucial.* This can include distributing FAQ documents, and educating employees interested in serving as mental health advocates within the employee population.

## Summary

EAPs are in a unique position to help employers implement mental health into workplace wellness programs. Partnering with employers to increase awareness of mental health issues, normalize help-seeking behavior, and reduce stigma is a crucial step improving employee quality of life.

The research is clear that mental health issues are costly to employers. It is important that organizations recognize that *with the involvement of the EAP, support and intervention is available to reduce these costs.* ■

Source: Employee Assistance Professionals Association ([www.eapassn.org](http://www.eapassn.org)). Re-used with permission.