

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

supporting EA professionals

Bonus! Are YOU suffering from compassion fatigue? See page 7.

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23 years of service!

Managing Critical Incidents amid a Pandemic: Part II

By Tim Hobart



The COVID-19 pandemic has brought an entirely new and never before dealt with crisis to the workplace. This is a critical incident response (CIR) like never before. During these times of tension, trouble, and transition C-level leadership has a vital

role to play in this crisis. Employees require clear direction and helpful resources.

The issues are wide and varied, from fear of the unknown, financial loss, grief and even health concerns about returning to or already being at work. The pandemic requires long-term thoughtful C-level (e.g. C-suite) guidance. Messages must be kept *unified*, *consistent*, and *current*.

Critical Incident Response (CIR) Mistakes

As I noted last month, from small organizations to large corporations what leadership says, does or fails to do following a disruptive critical incident will leave a lasting impression on employees. The consequences of not following a well-crafted CIR plan are not seen immediately, but they ARE viewed down the road in terms of turnover, absenteeism, and reduced productivity!

A number of years ago I managed a critical incident response at one of our corporate clients. Our therapists were busy seeing employees individually following a group debriefing. One of the corporate execs popped his head in on a session and asked them to hurry it up because there was an activity

planned for that space soon. One employee got up, immediately left the building, and tendered her resignation the next day.

In another incident a regional bank manager passed out fast food gift cards to the employees at a branch bank that had just experienced a traumatic robbery, with the intended message of “get back to work”. The employee’s reactions (anger, upset and frustration) were swift and not forgotten. In his attempt to “do something good” for the branch employees, he made a troubling incident even more upsetting, which eroded respect and credibility.

Another recent example came from one of our country’s largest and most admired corporations. Boeing’s failure to step out in front of the 737 MAX

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crisis cost them profoundly in the loss of revenues, respect and results.

Kelli Matthews wrote in Quartz March 26, 2019
“A crisis creates a vacuum, an informational void that gets filled one way or another. The longer a company or other organization at the center of the crisis waits to communicate, the more likely that void will be filled by critics. The key problem with Boeing’s approach is that its response was initially too defensive, slow, and passive, suggesting a lack of openness and accountability. Boeing could have adopted a proactive approach, such as by taking the initiative to ground its own planes.”

Paul Cahill, founder & CEO of Byte Media Group wrote in PR lessons from Boeing’s poor handling of the 737 MAX crisis, “Boeing may not be at blame here, there’s still an investigation going on, but that doesn’t explain how it came to pull what seems to be one of the costliest PR mistakes in aviation history.”

How to Involve C-Level Executives in CIR Planning

The legacy of managing a critical incident will leave an indelible impression on employees. Undeniably, the current global pandemic provides a critical opportunity for C-level executives to lead well in a time of crisis.

Their leadership will be evaluated when employees look back and consider the question: “*In the tough times, did leadership step up and allow us to feel important and respected. Or did they put the bottom line of the company over the well-being of employees?*”

If an executive wants to leave a positive legacy, he or she must hit the vital or sweet spot notes between empathy and economics. These include:

- ❖ Speak **first** about the concern for employees. Speak *secondly* to the action plan to return to “business as normal.”
- ❖ Speak *later* in the process about strategic business concerns such as steadiness, reputation, and legal matters.

Initially, the focus needs to be clearly on employees’ needs and concerns. Issues related to productivity must remain secondary in the beginning; there will be time to address this issue later on. ■

—Tim Hobart

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Cahill suggested that Boeing re-visit its corporate vision statement:

To Connect, Protect, Explore and Inspire the World through Aerospace Innovation.

“But you don’t need to incur an expensive mistake to understand what not to do with PR. As we continue to move forward into our hyper-connected world, stepping ahead of any problem, taking extreme ownership, and leveraging your vision is the only way to get your PR and your message off the ground.”

Lack of a Plan

Both of these examples point to the acute need to have a well-defined CIR plan.

Leadership faces a minefield of potential costly missteps in navigating a critical incident, large or small. Typically, Human Resources are the point people managing an initial crisis. All too often leadership steps back trusting that HR has the CIR under control. However, it’s crucial to impress upon leadership that employees want

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to and deserve to hear from them regarding the incident.

The message needs to be swift, empathic, and compassionate. Depending on the seriousness of the incident, this can be done by a brief visit to the site of the event, a direct tech outreach to impacted employees, and/or assurances to follow up with timely updates.

Leadership must articulate high regard for their employees, the people who help the organization grow and prosper. Most often this regard is expressed in an organization's mission statement that "*employees are our most important asset.*" Unfortunately, leadership often inadvertently conveys a profit before people attitude in their CIR statements, which communicates a detached and smug attitude.

One Dramatic Lesson

One of the most dramatic and atypical lessons regarding the idea of balancing economics with empathic concern for employees happened 33 years ago when Paul O'Neill was appointed CEO at Alcoa. O'Neill had been Secretary of the Treasury, Chairman at the Rand Corporation and a native of my hometown St. Louis. His actions are forever burned into my mental hard drive, and I admire O'Neill greatly.

Here's the story as told by Drake Baer in the April 9, 2014 *Business Insider*:

"Back in October 1987, Paul O'Neill gave his first speech as CEO of Alcoa. Investors were nervous since Alcoa had faltered with failed product lines. But O'Neill didn't talk about profit margins, revenue projections, or anything else that would be comforting to Wall Street ears."

"I want to talk to you about worker safety," he began. The room went silent.

"Every year, numerous Alcoa workers are injured so badly that they miss a day of work."

"I intend to make Alcoa the safest company in America. I intend to go for zero injuries."

"I'm not certain you heard me," O'Neill continued. "If you want to understand how Alcoa is doing, you need to look at our workplace safety figures."

For the new CEO, safety trumped profits.

Investors ran out of the room as soon as the New York-based presentation finished. One sprinted to a payphone and called his 20 largest clients. "The board put a crazy hippie in charge, and he's going to kill the

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Editor's Notebook

To say that 2020 has been a difficult year for most of us would be an understatement. Coping with a pandemic has been a new experience, and *EAR* has focused on various aspects of addressing this workplace challenge. Even if we haven't lost a loved one due to COVID *all of us* have experienced grief and loss during this unprecedented time. The "loss" of the work environment as we knew it. The "loss" of family milestones that have been either cancelled or postponed. And so on. As a result, grief in the workplace is addressed in this month's *Brown Bagger* insert. This is an important topic because as therapist Ronne Rabinowitz points out, *there will be some sort of loss that will impact each and every one of the clients* that EAP serves.

Elsewhere this issue, in the conclusion of a two-part cover story, **Tim Hobart** points out the crucial role that C-level (otherwise known as C-suite) leadership plays in this time of workplace "tension, trouble, and transition." Whether it's financial loss, grief, or fear and anxiety about returning to work, the pandemic requires insightful C-level guidance, *and the EAP is positioned to assist.*

That's not all. What about the impact the pandemic is having on YOU as an EA professional? As the saying goes, it's difficult, if not impossible, to help others when you are suffering emotionally yourself, and so *EAR* offers an important questionnaire to help readers determine where they may stand in terms of not only compassion fatigue, but also job burnout. **See page 7.** While not a substitute for medical advice or diagnosis, this 40-question self-test is important to gauge where you are at. I encourage you to take it. ■

Mike Jacquart

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Tips and Trends in Post-COVID World

After sweeping changes to the business world as a result of COVID-19, many employees feel less productive than they did before the pandemic, according to new data from Clutch, a leading B2B ratings and reviews firm.

About 4 in 10 employees (39%) say they feel less productive during the COVID-19 pandemic. Connectivity and support are important to maintaining productivity, which is why some managers are prioritizing one-on-one interactions, sometimes as many as three times a week.

“I listen, empathize, and offer solutions,” said David Morneau, co-founder of inBeat, a marketing agency. “Motivated employees are always more productive.”

Mental Health Support Leads to Changes

The pandemic has taken a toll on workers. To keep employees healthy and strong, more than half of businesses (57%) are offering some form of mental or emotional support such as access to counseling or therapy, increased paid time off or sick leave, and virtual social events.

Demand for virtual mental health care is also rising during the pandemic. Platforms such as Ginger, which provides virtual therapy and psychiatry to workers, have seen a 50% increase in the number of users compared to the end of 2019.

Ty Stewart, president and CEO of Simple Life Insure, is exploring sponsoring company accounts on mindfulness apps and websites. Stewart believes mindfulness apps are particularly valuable because they are an approachable, daily resource for employees.

Employees' Plans Have Stayed the Same

Despite massive shifts in personal and professional lives due to the COVID-19 pandemic, workers' perspectives on their employment hasn't changed. Four months into the pandemic, more than one-half of employees (51%) say their outlook about their future at the company where they work remains unchanged.

Read the full report at <https://clutch.co/hr/resources/employee-health-affected-by-covid-19>. ■

Additional source: PR Newswire.

In 2020, EAR Needs Your Help!

In August 2017, I bought the *Employee Assistance Report (EAR)* from Impact Publications, Inc., and one of the first things I did was to eliminate our printed version that cost subscribers \$229.00 annually. (It had still been available digitally.) With no mailing or printing costs, we were able to offer our digital version to every paid reader for just \$99.00 annually!

Recognizing that nearly all businesses have been negatively impacted by the unprecedented circumstances of 2020, we recently slashed our annual subscription to **\$89.00**. But industries like digital publishing remain challenged. While people are used to accessing many online articles for free, our costs do not go away. We have two opportunities to earn the money that sustains our operations: 1. Subscriber renewals. 2. Money from NEW subscribers. Both revenue sources are down, which has made publishing this newsletter very difficult.

If you are a paid subscriber, I encourage you to check your email inbox to see if you have received a notice about your subscription coming due. Could it have gone into a spam folder? If you are unsure about the status of your subscription, email or call me and I'll check on it for you. *NEW readers are also welcome. If you enjoy reading EAR, help us spread the word about its usefulness to your peers in EA and also HR who aren't currently receiving it.* Please consider supporting *EAR* in whatever way you can.

Sincerely,

Mike Jacquart, Editor and Publisher
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How to be an Empathetic Leader without being a Pushover

By Angela Civitella

In these difficult times, we look to business leaders to take the helm of their company with confidence and authority. However, now is not the time to rule with an iron fist. It would not be a good way to invigorate a team to come back to work, and more importantly, to perform at their best. That said, having the right balance between demonstrating authority while still showing empathy is not so obvious. *The following are some helpful points for the EAP and HR to keep in mind when working with managers, supervisors, or others in charge in the workplace setting.*

Be Likeable as a Leader

To please is a natural instinct. A team that likes their leader tends to push toward higher levels of productivity and commitment. It's a win-win, but how can it be accomplished?

❖ **Honesty is key.** If the business leader wants honesty, he/she has to be ready to offer it first. Show the opposite and the leader shouldn't be surprised if he/she has to deal with dishonest team members. You get what you give.

❖ **LISTEN before speaking.** Listening is a skill that needs to be practiced often. The leader must focus with the intention of truly *listening* to employees and take notes because they may have the next creative idea. If they're taking the time to offer ideas, chances are they care about the business and its goals.

❖ **Get in the trenches.** A good business leader must be willing to do whatever needs to get done. Barking orders doesn't get anyone anywhere. The team needs to see that the leader is capable of doing their job if they can't. However, it's also important to know when to pull back, when things are going well and allow for normal activity to resume.

❖ **Delegate and trust.** That said, doing *everything* is counterproductive. The team needs to be shown how to handle additional responsibilities. This is crucial in discovering and developing new ways of generating revenue.

❖ **Practice fairness.** Never play favorites. Know employees well enough to recognize what motivates them and also what discourages them. Understand how to handle both ends of the spectrum.

Don't be a Pushover Either

Being liked doesn't mean being a doormat. Catering to needs, solving problems, and letting workers do whatever they want is not beneficial for anyone. To avoid being a pushover:

❖ **Don't carry the lion's share of the work.** Sharing is caring, but there's a limit. A leader should never finish what someone else started. A deadline is a deadline, is a deadline no matter what.

❖ **Employees need to correct mistakes.** When the business leader does the correcting, the team member's learning curve is tampered with. Show and tell, but the *employee(s)* needs to do the dirty work. Otherwise the lesson is not learned, and mistakes will continue.

❖ **Rules are rules.** They are set in place to be followed and respected for a reason. There is no option.

❖ **Make time for feedback.** People learn and grow from feedback. If unhappy with an employee's performance, set up a meeting and review the issues with the employee. If a leader says nothing, then most likely nothing will change. Nip the issue in the bud – don't wait until it festers. *The EAP is in a perfect position to help.*

❖ **The white elephant in the room: conflict.** It cannot be overstated: If there is a situation that needs attention, it's best if to deal with it swiftly. Letting it fester not only makes the matter worse, it also gives additional employees the opportunity to get involved.

The ultimate goal isn't to be liked, it's to be respected as a leader and as a visionary of the business. Earn a team's respect, and the rest will follow. ■

Angela Civitella is founder of Intinde and a certified business leadership coach. www.intinde.com

Mental Health Finally Turning a Corner? (Part II)

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a spotlight on mental health like never before. Many companies have quickly pivoted to adding resources. Roughly 53% of 256 employers surveyed by the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions reported providing special emotional and mental health programs for their workforce because of the pandemic, with offerings including virtual care, apps, and EAPs.

While workers at retail giant Target already had access to five counseling sessions in their EAP, employees now are getting a year of access to resources from provider Big Health. Professional-services firm PwC introduced well-being coaching sessions where employees can reach out to a professional coach to discuss anything that may be causing them stress.

Meanwhile, Headspace says it's seen a 400%-plus increase in requests from companies seeking support for their employees' mental health since mid-March. Big Health cites that same triple-digit increase in employer interest in the same timeframe. Both firms are offering their products free to employers for a limited time to help during the pandemic.

Many experts predict that a majority of employers that add or make changes to resources in response to COVID-19 will likely do so long-term. That especially might occur if employers get positive feedback from employees who stay healthy, more productive and tend to have better morale as a result. Increasing communication about available benefits offerings also stands to be a permanent move.

But perhaps the biggest change that may become permanent is simply making it OK to address the issue, industry experts say. Many employers that had unspoken policies to not talk about or address employee struggles—with the exception of pointing them to an EAP—are now changing their tune. Compelled to support employees who have been struggling during the pandemic—on top of the employees who *already* had mental health issues—they're encouraging openness and asking managers to lead with empathy.

Kathie Patterson of Ally Financial, says that while her company offered mental health resources, the pandemic caused her – and other company leaders – not only to talk about employees' problems and stresses more, but to think about how to help in a new fashion. *Part of it involves being more open*, Patterson states.

In summary: Mental health issues were already on the rise among employees before the pandemic, and they certainly won't just disappear post-pandemic, according to experts. ■

Additional sources: Human Resource Executive; Kathryn Mayer, HRE benefits editor and chair of the Health & Benefits Leadership Conference.

Quick Ideas

What Employees are Saying about the 'New Normal'

- ❖ **Many like remote work.** More than half (60%) of employees are confident they can do their job efficiently while working remotely. (Glassdoor)
- ❖ **But they worry about money.** Nearly half (41%) of Americans say not having enough emergency savings is their top financial concern right now. (National Endowment for Financial Education)
- ❖ **Most are very stressed.** Nearly three quarters (69%) of employees say the current pandemic is the most stressful time of their careers. (Ginger)
- ❖ **An increasing number are concerned about their mental health.** An estimated 32% of employees surveyed in March said COVID-19 had harmed their mental health; 45% said so just two weeks later. (Kaiser Family Foundation) ■

Could you be Suffering from Compassion Fatigue or Burnout?

The following self-test may help determine if an individual is suffering, in particular from compassion fatigue, but also burnout. However, it is not intended as a substitute for medical advice or diagnosis. (Write in the number of the best response to each of the following questions using one of the following answers: 1 – rarely or never; 2 – at times; 3 – not sure; 4 – often; 5 – very often.)

1. I force myself to avoid certain thoughts or feelings that remind me of a frightening experience.
2. I avoid certain activities or situations because they remind me of a frightening experience.
3. I have gaps in my memory about frightening events.
4. I feel isolated from others.
5. I have difficulty falling or staying asleep.
6. I have outbursts of anger or irritability with little provocation.
7. I startle easily.
8. While working with a victim I thought about violence against the person(s) who victimized.
9. I am a sensitive person.
10. I've had flashbacks connected to clients and families.
11. I've had first-hand experiences with traumatic events in my adult life.
12. I've had first-hand experiences with traumatic events in my childhood.
13. I've thought that I need to "work through" a traumatic experience in my life.
14. I've thought that I need more close friends.
15. I've thought that there is no one to talk with about highly stressful experiences.
16. I've concluded that I work too hard for my own good.

Items about clients and their families:

17. I'm frightened about things traumatized people and their family have said or done to me.
18. I experience troubling dreams similar to a client of mine and their family.
19. I've experienced intrusive thoughts about sessions with especially difficult clients and their families.
20. I've suddenly recalled a frightening experience while working with a client or their family.
21. I'm preoccupied with more than one client and their family.
22. I'm losing sleep over a client and their family's traumatic experiences.
23. I've thought that I might have been "infected" by the trauma of my clients and their families.
24. I remind myself to be less concerned about the well-being of my clients and their families.
25. I've felt trapped by my work as a helper.
26. I've felt a sense of hopelessness associated with working with clients and their families.
27. I've felt "on edge" about things that I attribute to working with certain clients and their families.
28. I've wished that I could avoid working with some clients and their families.
29. I've been in danger working with some clients and their families.
30. I've felt that some of my clients and their families dislike me personally.

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Compassion Fatigue...cont'd from Page 7

Items about being a helper and your work environment:

31. I've felt weak, tired, and run down as a result of my work as a helper.
32. I've felt depressed as a result of my work as a helper.
33. I am unsuccessful at separating work from personal life.
34. I feel little compassion toward most of my co-workers.
35. I feel I am working more for the money than for personal fulfillment.
36. I find it difficult separating my personal life from my work life.
37. I have a sense of worthlessness, disillusionment, resentment associated with my work.
38. I have thoughts that I'm a "failure" as a helper.
39. I have thoughts that I am not succeeding at achieving my life goals.
40. I have to deal with bureaucratic, unimportant tasks in my work life.

Scoring Instructions:

Make sure you responded to ALL questions. Next, circle the following 23 items: 1-8, 10-13, 17-26 and number 29. Now, ADD the numbers you wrote next to items circled. Note your risk of compassion fatigue:

- 26 or less – Extremely low risk
- 27 to 30 – Low risk
- 31 to 35 – Moderate risk
- 36 to 40 – High risk

To determine the risk of burnout, add the numbers you wrote next to the items NOT circled.

Note your risk of burnout:

- 19 or less – Extremely low risk
- 20 to 24 – Low risk
- 25 to 29 – Moderate risk
- 30 to 42 – High risk ■

Sources: Gary Yeast, BA, MS, LMFT, Fellow AAMFT; Ace Network; National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health; and Florida State University Psychosocial Stress Research Program.

Critical Incidents...cont'd from Page 3

company, I ordered them to sell their stock immediately, before everyone else in the room started calling their clients and telling them the same thing.”

The emphasis on safety made an impact. Over O'Neill's tenure, Alcoa dropped from 1.86 lost workdays to injury per 100 workers to 0.2. By 2012, the rate had fallen to 0.125. Surprisingly, that impact extended beyond worker health. One year after O'Neill's speech, company profits hit a record high.

Lessons Learned

The worlds of first responders, uniformed personnel, EA professionals and organizational leaders are exceptionally demanding and competitive. The key is to strike the right balance between economics and

empathy to construct a win-win result.

Leaders like Paul O'Neill shouldn't come along only once in a generation. The leadership necessary to successfully navigate a critical incident is potentially already present in every organization. Put CIR on the best possible footing that leads to the best solution.

Summary

In conclusion, stepping up and stepping out ahead of a critical incident with empathic and compassionate words and actions focused on employees will always reap big dividends. ■

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