

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

Volume 23, No. 7
July 2020

23 years
of service!

supporting EA professionals

Managing Critical Incidents amid a Pandemic: Part I

By *Tim Hobart*



The COVID-19 pandemic has brought an entirely new and never before dealt with crisis to the workplace. This is a CIR (critical incident response) like never before. But the pandemic and subsequent sequestration provided me with several opportunities that I wouldn't have had otherwise.

First, I participated in an online course developed and presented by George Everly, PhD, past president and co-founder of the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF). Dr. Everly also serves on the faculty of Johns Hopkins University Medical School.

In Dr. Everly's course: "Pandemic, Bioterrorism, Radiation, Pollution and other Disasters of Uncertainty" I learned that the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) model is definitely scalable to the current pandemic from a typical single client critical incident and response.

In other words, the CIR model was fashioned for a local (smaller) incident, however, it has scalability to be adapted to a larger incident such as a pandemic, which has amplified demands. Thus, the CIR model is flexible to the challenges of a larger incident. Being scalable, the model is able to handle a growing amount of work by adding resources to the incident.

Further, the Everly course demonstrated that responses to the pandemic from CIR specialists, employee assistance practitioners, and C-level leaders must address the toxic issues of uncertainty along with the consequences of economic calamity. In addition, like any critical incident, CISM (critical incident stress management) bridges the valley of disillusionment to the fostering of hope and the move to recovery.

Grant Documentary

I also learned more about CIR and CISM from watching "Grant", a PBS documentary on the life of Ulysses S. Grant, our 18th president and general in the American Civil War. I also had an interest in "Grant" because his wife, Julia Dent was from St. Louis, where I live. In fact, Julia and Ulysses built a cabin on land given to them by her father, which sits just a mile from my home.

Both opportunities gave me new perspectives in leadership, resiliency, and the application of CISM to

continued on Page 2

FEATURED INSIDE

- ▶ Mental Health Finally Turning a Corner? (Part I)
- ▶ Digital EA Archive Expands; Includes 'EAR'
- ▶ EAPA Postpones 2020 Conference
- ▶ Academy Offering Police Empathy Training
- ▶ 'Checked Out' when you're 'Checked In'
- ▶ Maintaining Corporate Culture in the Post-Pandemic Office
- ▶ Resources
- ▶ Traditional Paid Leave Still Popular
- ▶ Mindfulness, Meditation Apps are Increasing

INSERTS

- ▶ *Brown Bagger*: In-Person Still Matters
- ▶ *Payroll Stuffers*
- ▶ *Lifestyle TIPS*®

our current pandemic. As for the Grant documentary, I was profoundly struck by Grant's many failures, especially as a general and that indeed leaders can and do recover from setbacks to become great leaders. His examples of failed leadership offer hope and support to contemporary leaders who fall short.

C-Level Executive Responses

For the C-level executive the 10 Essential Messages for C-Level Critical Incident Responses within this article are vital in leading a workforce. (*See the table at the end of this article for details.*)

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 coping with quarantine, fear of the unknown, financial loss, eldercare concerns, grief and even health concerns about returning to or already being at work.

The pandemic requires long-term thoughtful C-level guidance, and not just for the next month. The coronavirus will be with us in waves, ups and downs and ongoing for some time. Therefore, it's paramount for corporate leaders to keep messages *unified, consistent, and current*.

Is *your* organization prepared for the next critical incident that may be just around the corner? Your response will determine whether the critical incident will help or hurt your organization.

Certainly critical incidents demand a plan that underscores the urgency to protect the organization's reputation, employees, brand, and finances. But a plan also needs to include:

- ❖ An assessment of the critical incident's impact on employees and;
- ❖ An action plan to reassure employees that they are valued. Indeed, response to the critical incident may be the ideal time to express a clear, empathic message of trust and gratitude to employees.

Critical Incident Response (CIR) Mistakes

It's discouraging to construct a well-planned and impactful critical incident response for a client organization and then have it completely undermined by a lack of support or worse, no response at all from leadership.

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,

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

Editor/Publisher - Mike Jacquart

Designer - Laura J. Miller

COPYRIGHT © Write it Right LLC 2020. *Employee Assistance Report* (ISSN 1097-6221) is published monthly by Write it Right LLC, 395 Grove St., Iola, WI 54945-9644, Phone: 715-445-4386. e-mail: mjacquart@writeitrightllc.com. POSTMASTER: Send address corrections to *Employee Assistance Report*, 395 Grove St., Iola, WI 54945-9644. 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. Yearly subscription rate is \$99.00. Material accepted for publication is subject to such revision as is necessary in our discretion to meet the requirements of the publication. The information presented in *EAR* is from many sources for which there can be no warranty or responsibility as to accuracy, originality or completeness. The publication is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering product endorsements or providing instructions as a substitute for appropriate training by qualified sources. Therefore, *EAR* and Write it Right LLC. will not assume responsibility for any actions arising from any information published in *EAR*. We invite constructive criticism and welcome any report of inferior information so that corrective action may be taken.

but rather more down the road in terms of turnover, absenteeism, and reduced productivity.

10 Essential Messages for C-Level Critical Incident Responses

While there are any number of ways a CIR might play out, the actual messages and the way they are communicated by a C-Level executive will leave a lasting impression on employees and others involved in organizational leadership. The acronym on page 3 —**C-Level Critical Incident Responses**—spells out the 10 essential points to remember.

Summary

In conclusion, whether you are an employee assistance or HR professional, CEO, small business owner, or serve some other role, investing in the human side of any organization will always pay big dividends. Stepping up and stepping out ahead of a critical incident with empathic and compassionate words and actions focused on employees will always be a good move.

continued on Page 3



Editor's Notebook

Whatever you think about the coronavirus pandemic personally (have the numbers been overblown by the sensationalistic media?) there is certainly **no** debate that March 2020 was one of those “seminal moments in time,” one that all of us will mark our lives by; not unlike the 9/11 tragedy in 2001.

Bryan McNutt, an EA professional in San Diego, summed up the matter nicely: “People will not be *returning to* work. Rather, they will likely begin an entirely *new experience of* work.”

The bright spot in all of this chaos lies in the vast opportunities for EAPs to help make sense of this brave new post-COVID world in supporting employee, family, and organizational health and resilience. *As is so often the case, the EAP is perfectly positioned to be powerful agents for change.*

I wish to thank **Tim Hobart**, author of this month’s two-part cover story, and **Josh Delahan**, who penned the June *EAR* cover article, for their insights. Through their help, and others, *EAR* has strived to offer practical ideas during this tough period of adjustment, and we will continue to do so.

Of course, the transition to a post-COVID society isn’t the only issue facing busy EAPs. You are well aware that personal finances, family caregiving, racial injustice, and emerging best practices like “ATIP” (presented by Paula Harry in the February and March *EARs*) are all “newsworthy” as well.

What topics haven’t we been covering? I am ALWAYS interested in readers’ story ideas for this newsletter, so send me an email or give me a quick call with your suggestions any time! I hope you are all still having a pleasant summer during this challenging time.

Mike Jacquart

Mike Jacquart, Editor

(715) 445-4386

mjacquart@writeitrightllc.com

Critical Incidents...cont'd from Page 2

C	Construct a meeting with all stakeholders prior to any critical incident, including managers/supervisors, legal, HR, and EAP to develop a plan and make sure all are on the same page.
L	Lead the first conversations following a critical incident needs to include HR and EAP to address the plan for this situation, including pre- and post-CIR.
E	Engage and communicate quickly, to prevent rumors spread by word-of-mouth and social media.
V	Visit with employees affected by the critical incident early and often. Ensure that others in leadership are observable and accessible as well.
E	Enlist & encourage all top managers, especially the C-level executive to be the first to speak to employees and be physically onsite, if possible as the seriousness of the incident increases.
L	Level with the employee with as much information as permissible. Provide regular updates as needed.
C	Communicate clearly concern for the safety and well-being of employees, both initially and repeatedly as needed.
I	Inspire employees and express empathy for their concerns. Encourage employees to look after their co-workers’ well-being.
R	Reassure and remind everyone of the support available for employees, leadership, and family members through the EAP. Share EAP contact information throughout the process.
S	Sustain and support the leadership team and HR as well as the affected employees. Thank them for their help and support throughout this process.

NEXT MONTH: Examples, lessons learned, and how to involve C-Level executives in CIR planning. ■

Tim Hobart, CEAP, is CEO of H&H Health Associates, Inc. in St. Louis, MO. He can be reached at timh@hhhealthassociates.com.

Mental Health Finally Turning a Corner? (Part I)

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a spotlight on mental health like never before, as a majority of employees say they are dealing with some type of mental health issue as a result of the pandemic. Many are scared about their physical health, childcare responsibilities, and the new realities of social distancing and remote work. In addition, financial concerns are sky-high, with employees worried about losing their jobs, having less money, or seeing their 401(k) balances decline, reports *Human Resource Executive*.

While mental health has been gaining employer attention in recent years, with more noticing its effects on employees and broadening their views of workplace well-being as a result, the changes were not widespread before the pandemic hit.

“We already had high rates of depression and anxiety, as well as stigma and access problems that prevented many from getting care,” says LuAnn Heinen, vice president of well-being and workforce strategy at the Business Group on Health. “And now all that’s compounded.”

Mental health coverage has been a rising employee benefit in recent years. But despite a rallying cry from many experts—and employees who increasingly asked employers for help—many companies have been slow to make it a priority.

While nearly all employers believe improving mental health in the workplace is good for their business, 17% acknowledge not offering any resources at all, according to a survey of 1,379 U.S. business decision-makers, including HR and benefits leaders. Transamerica Center for Health Studies released the results in December.

At a striking rate, employees, too, feel coverage is missing: 65% of workers say they don’t feel their employer offers benefits or programs that help support or improve their mental well-being, according to MetLife research just released in April.

In addition, only 13% of companies provide on-site stress-management programs, and just 11% provide mindfulness or meditation benefits, according to the Society for Human Resource Management. And *while*

EAPs have largely been the mental health benefit of choice for employers, only 79% of companies offer them. Utilization is often low: Usually less than 10% of employees use EAPs, according to SHRM.

Communication has been, and remains, a major source of the problem.

“We have not created an environment where we talk about this openly,” states Kathie Patterson, CHRO at Ally Financial, adding that employee mental health has long been “one of the most undiscussable items” for employers. “When you look at the statistics of employees who have some type of challenge, whether anxiety or depression, it was just something people don’t discuss.” ■

NEXT MONTH: Pandemic driving urgency; what’s next?

Additional source: Kathryn Mayer, HRE benefits editor and chair of the Health & Benefits Leadership Conference.

“I Need to Make a Change to My Subscription!”

Hey, we know things change. You move. You land a new job. You decide to sail off to Tahiti. Whatever, the change, you’ll want to contact us today so that we can update our records accordingly.

Contact us anytime you want to:

- Change the name and email address of the individual receiving *EAR*.
- Change or add phone number or email.
- Renew, start, or cancel a subscription.
- Check the status of your subscription.
- We appreciate any ideas or suggestions you may have.

Thank you for your time and staying in touch!

715-445-4386 or
mjacquart@writeitrightllc.com

**EMPLOYEE
ASSISTANCE
REPORT**

Digital EA Archive Expands; Includes 'EAR'

The *International Digital Employee Assistance Archive: A Knowledge Hub* at www.EAArchive.org continues to add to its impressive resources for EA professionals, including free access to interesting and TIMELY articles and blog posts, informative tip sheets, and other engaging presentations about important issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic and social injustice and unrest, stemming from the recent murder of George Floyd.

For example, below are several new submissions on these two important topics:

- 1) EAP and COVID-19: The Psychology of Pandemics: <http://hdl.handle.net/10713/12920>
- 2) Why EAPS are Valuable During and After COVID-19: <http://hdl.handle.net/10713/12703>
- 3) How U.S. Companies Can Support Employees of Color Through the Pandemic: <http://hdl.handle.net/10713/12940>

To access materials focused on COVID-19 in the Archive, follow these simple steps:

- 1) Go to EA Archive website: www.EAArchive.org
- 2) Click on "Enter the Archive Here" at the top of your screen; and
- 3) Type "**EAP and COVID 19**" into the search bar to pull up COVID-19 related materials.

Back Copies of EAR Available

The Digital EA Archive at www.EAArchive.org is also a great resource for back copies of the *Employee Assistance Report* newsletter. Search by using the year after the title, for example "Employee Assistance Report 2020" or "Employee Assistance Report 2018", etc. Once you find the year you want, if you are looking for a specific one, click on the title. If you want to share *that specific year*, copy and paste the handle that appears under "Identifier to cite or link to this item".

In the case of the EA Report 2020, the handle is <http://hdl.handle.net/10713/11575>

To see all of the issues/numbers in a volume/year make sure to click on "View more files" in red at the left of the page. (Editor's note: Past issues of *EAR* from 2020-2019 are available on the *EAR* site at www.writeitrightllc.com but they are NOT offered before that time like they are on the Archive site.)

More Info

If you cannot find what you are looking for, or for additional information about the *International Digital Employee Assistance Archive*, contact Jodi Frey at JFREY@ssw.umaryland.edu or Patricia Herlihy at pherlihy@rockymountainresearch.us ■

EAPA Postpones 2020 Conference

Due to the global pandemic, health risks to EAPA members, volunteers, and staff remain both high and unpredictable. Additionally, increased spiking of infections and related health complications in Houston, Texas, continue daily. Planning through such uncertainty is nearly impossible.

As a result, the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) has notified the Hilton Americas that it is cancelling the current hotel contract and will reschedule the annual conference to fall 2021. It is the desire of EAPA to continue to work with the Hilton

organization and EAPA's commitment to have a conference in Houston. EAPA anticipates completing negotiations with Hilton on new conference dates and terms by July 15th.

EAPA members who had reservations at the Hilton Americas-Houston may begin to receive hotel room cancellation notices. Exhibitors committed to the EXPO in Houston will be contacted individually to discuss next steps. ■

Source: EAPA (www.eapassn.org).

Academy Offering Police Empathy Training

Editor's note: Does your EAP work with police departments or do you know someone who does? If so, they will be interested in spreading the word about this article.

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

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

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

With the current state of unrest across the country due to the George Floyd protests against police brutality, many are touting this measure as a necessity for all police departments to begin implementing immediately.

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

For further information visit www.PoliceEmpathyTraining.com. ■

Source: PR Newswire.

Workplace Survey

'Checked Out' when you're 'Checked In'

The saying goes that a company is only as good as the people it keeps. But what if those people aren't fully engaged in their duties? According to research from staffing firm Accountemps, workers are disengaged at their jobs more than one-quarter (26 percent) of the time, on average, leaving the door open to lost productivity, low morale, and turnover.

When professionals were asked what would make them more engaged at work, the responses included:

- Better perks (on-site gyms, nap rooms, free food), 37% of respondents;
- More challenging work, 31%;
- Less bureaucracy/red tape, 31%; and
- Lighter workload, 22%.

"Employers shouldn't take a one-size-fits-all approach to improving employee engagement," said Michael Steinitz, executive director of Accountemps. "Each worker and office environment are unique."

Steinitz noted, "Managers should continually check in with their staff to gauge satisfaction levels and learn what motivates or potentially disengages them."

He added that anonymous employee surveys could help unearth issues, particularly if workers feel uncomfortable offering candid feedback to their boss. "Employee engagement surveys are most effective when managers share the results and communicate how they plan to make improvements." ■

Source: Accountemps, a Robert Half company. Learn more at roberthalf.com/accountemps.

Maintaining Corporate Culture in the Post-Pandemic Office

As companies transition back to working in an office – likely with masks, increased social distancing, and many other new policies in place, how might company culture be impacted? The following are some suggestions for the EAP in working with managers, supervisors, and other business leaders.

Problem: The client company is transitioning back to the office and needs to find a way to communicate so employees aren't worried about risks to their health.

Solution:

- Work with the client leader and stress his/her role in setting the right tone.
- Messaging should be around what steps he/she is taking to ensure the safety and health of employees as the company's top priority.
- If workers do not feel comfortable returning to work, the business leader needs to respect that and let them continue remotely.
- Either way, how the client handles the transition will do wonders for company culture – or sabotage it!

Problem: Increased social distancing and persistence of remote workers could impede lines of communication among teams.

Solution:

- Work with the client leader to be as strategic about who goes back and when as possible, while also keeping in mind employees' *mental health needs*. For instance, a worker with an anxiety disorder should not be made to come back too soon.
- Staff likely just went through a complete disruption in how they work, so the client leader should encourage the same persistent spirit and dedication exhibited a few months ago.

Problem: Without people feeling safe enough to participate in company sponsored social events, lunch breaks or after-work happy hours, they're not connecting

with their peers as much as before the pandemic, and it's showing in their work.

Solution:

- Work with HR to build company-wide or team-specific opportunities to connect into the work-day, and make sure they are activities that everyone, even those still working remotely can participate in. In addition, business leader should:
- Schedule 15 minutes each week for the whole office to connect via Zoom and share wins or updates, work related or in their personal lives.
- Encourage everyone to pick up the phone/Zoom to contact peers instead of writing a lengthy email or message.
- Grab a co-worker to get outside for a walk during lunch. ■

Sources: Employee Assistance Report; Ed Mitzen (www.edmitzen.com), Forbes book author of "More Than a Number: The Power of Empathy and Philanthropy in Driving Ad Agency Performance" and the founder of Fingerpaint, an independent advertising agency grossing \$60 million in revenue.

Resources

📱 **The Social Safety App** is a unique, easy-to-use, secure social distancing app that helps employees keep their distance at work. Applications can be accessed at <http://SocialSafety.app>.

📱 **A State-by-State List of Coronavirus Hotlines** is available from CareConnect USA. Go to <https://careconnectusa.org/coronavirus-hotlines-usa/>

📖 **Vibrant Community: How Citizen-Powered Change is Reshaping America**, by Quint Studer, \$24.95, Be the Bulb Publishing. For more information, visit www.vibrantcommunityblueprint.com or www.thebusyleadershandbook.com. ■

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.

Traditional Paid Leave Still Popular

Traditional paid leave plans (where all leave is in separate categories, such as sick and vacation) maintain a strong presence in the workplace, as 49% of employers responding to XpertHR's 2020 Employee Benefits Survey noted they have this type of plan, compared with 44% who offer a paid time off (PTO) plan (where all or most leave is in a single PTO bank).

The survey also covered a variety of health insurance plans and found that preferred provider organization (PPO) plans are the most popular option, with 69% of employers providing this type of plan, followed by high deductible health plans (HDHPs) (46%).

In addition, the survey report covers over a dozen miscellaneous benefits aside from the main

pillars of leave, health care, and retirement. Among these other benefits, *employee assistance programs (EAPs) are the most popular*, as they are offered by 65% of organizations.

Notably, while 41% of organizations provide some form of tuition reimbursement or assistance, only 3% provide student loan repayment.

“While student loan repayment has been a hot topic in the benefits world for the past few years,” states Andrew Hellwege, Surveys Editor XpertHR, “employers are clearly not yet sold on the idea, and continue to prefer to provide assistance for education sought during employment, rather than for debt incurred before the new hire walked through the door.” ■

In the News

Mindfulness, Meditation Apps are Increasing

Mindfulness and meditation apps are increasing and nearly every (virtual) social interaction is preceded with an emotional well-being check-in. In terms of eroding stigma and normalizing conversations about mental health, this change in behavior and expectations bodes extremely well for the new, post COVID-19 world, reports *Forbes* magazine. That's the good part.

Even before the COVID-19 outbreak, roughly 7% of Americans had experienced a major depressive episode; additionally there were 48,344 suicide deaths in 2018 and 20 times that number of suicide attempts. The National Institute of Mental Health defines a major depressive episode as “a period of at least two weeks when a person experienced a depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure in daily activities.”

While maintaining connections, healthy habits, and virtual psychotherapy appointments can help ward off blues related to the pandemic, a perfect storm of stressors, including the economic downturn and shocking rate of unemployment is likely to cause a spike in rates of major depression and, sadly, suicide.

A survey conducted in Wuhan in late March painted a clear picture of the mental burden the pandemic will have (and is already having) on frontline healthcare workers in the US. It is not too late to develop a comprehensive mental health policy at a national level to cope with what will be a long-lasting aftermath of anxiety, depression and PTS that result from COVID-19. ■