EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

supporting EAP professionals

Offering Online Interventions to Victims of Domestic Violence

By DeeAnna Merz Nagel and Kate Anthony

Keeping victims of domestic violence safe from further abuse is paramount, and yet it is easy to underestimate the potential for ill-treatment of victims who are seeking online help and resources. This article is aimed at increasing awareness for EA professionals about Internet and computer safety so that victims who reach out for help electronically can remain safe from any additional threat of physical abuse.

> *"With new technologies readily available, digital stalking creates a host of new concerns."*

When victims of domestic violence (DV) utilize resources online, concerns exist about safety and privacy just as they do when victims seek out resources and intervention face-to-face. Therefore, ensuring digital privacy and safety is crucial. Even before mobile devices and the Internet, domestic violence victims were often followed, spied upon, and

harassed at work by their perpetrators, especially after any attempt to leave. With new technologies readily available, digital stalking creates a host of new concerns. Major DV websites such as www.domesticviolence.org and www.ncadv.org have strategies and features in place to protect the victim who is seeking information online.

Warnings or 'Escape this Site' Icons or Links

If a victim is in danger, use a safer computer, call 911, a local hotline, or the U.S. National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 and TTY 1-800-787-3224. See more technology safety tips **here**. There is always a computer trail, but you can **leave this site quickly**. (The bold type indicates where a hyperlink would appear.)

When the link or icon is clicked, a new website appears. The trail of visited websites remains in the browser history on the hard drive, but by clicking to escape, the victim can avoid immediate repercussions if the abuser comes into the room. Many DV websites offer this option on their home page because they realize that many women who search the Internet for the first time may be searching for

immediate intervention due to a recent violent episode and the batterer may be lingering close by. Clicking the link or the icon will lead to either the computer's preset home page or to an innocuous website. EAP providers that offer information about domestic violence might consider a similar escape route for victims.

FEATURED INSIDE

Clearing Web Browser History

It is also beneficial to offer specific safety information about how to clear the web browser's history. The website, www.new-hope.org offers an excellent page titled, *Clear Your Browser for Safety* and can be accessed at http://www.new-hope.org/clear-browser.html. This information is featured on the home page with the words INTERNET WARNING in bold red letters and a message that reads: "Your abuser may monitor your Internet use and may be able to view your computer activity. Click here to learn how to CLEAR your browser."

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Understanding Privacy

The EAP provider should engage in an informed consent and screening process with the client with the expectation that the person seeking services will use a computer and mobile devices that are safe. If the victim does not have a dedicated computer or mobile device that can be password protected, a friend's computer may be a viable alternative. A local library may offer computers that may also be an option for victims who are seeking information. However, keeping victims safe is important because the library is usually the first place a victim goes to research public documents. Engaging in interactive support or interventions from a library, or other public or work computer is ill-advised because someone in the vicinity may be able to view the computer screen and therefore possibly compromise confidentiality and/or safety. Even passing by, one might gain a glimpse of the page content and if that person knows the victim's partner, the victim may be placed at risk.

Keylogging Programs

A keylogger is a hardware device or software program that records the real time activity of a computer user including the keyboard keys they press. Many organizations utilize keyloggers as part of their risk management plan, including monitoring employees for non-sanctioned use of the Internet, sharing proprietary company information or even auditing employees. Consequently, work supervisors or public library staff may unwittingly have access to information about the victim's circumstances and/or may know the perpetrator.

In addition, the perpetrator can easily obtain keylogger software/hardware and, with access to the victim's computer, download it onto the victim's computer. These programs are generally undetectable and easy to install. Once installed, the perpetrator can monitor every keystroke from a different remote computer. Similar software can be installed on mobile devices and even serve as a covert listening device. This is also a relatively simple process with instructions and more sophisticated options easily accessible and available on the web. Likewise, the victim's moves may be tracked by GPS devices placed on the car or by GPS tracking applications downloaded to a mobile device. *Educating your clients about the availability of software and applications that may compromise the victim's safety is extremely important*.

Social Networking

Other areas of concern include social networks such as Facebook. Even though the victim may have taken measures to lock down

privacy settings, anyone can copy and paste information from a website onto another website or document. Online discussion forums are a great place to garner support, but if the forum is open and anyone can join, it is possible for information that is seemingly confidential to be shared with others outside the forum. Depending on the motives of the forum members, if the victim's identity is revealed because of a false sense of security, the victim may be in danger. *Educating your client about the use of the Internet in light of safety concerns can also aid in protecting your client from further violence.*

Using Encryption

Even with a dedicated computer that is password protected and without risk of a keylogger installed, victims should still consider additional protection of documents. For instance, if the victim is using a word processing program to journal or keep a diary, or if the victim has downloaded reading material or a workbook, keeping those documents on an encrypted drive or flashdrive further ensures safety. Free downloads are available from www.cryptainer.com. Encryption means that the message is scrambled so that if anyone intercepts the message, it will not be readable. All health and wellness information that is communicated between the client and the therapist, coach or peer advocate as well as among group members should be encrypted.

Verbatim Transcripts and Screening

It is possible to provide EAP intervention with proper screening by taking all of these considerations into account. Moreover, knowing how your potential client uses technology, combined with due diligence to ensure your client is properly informed about how and

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when to access services online, is an essential part of screening.

In addition, it is wise to assess, to the fullest extent possible, the nature of the domestic violence relationship. For the EAP provider this includes assessment for signs that the victim is bonded to the perpetrator despite statements to the contrary. This cognitive dissonance is often part of the perpetrator-victim relationship and resembles characteristics of Stockholm syndrome and Complex PTSD. Keep in mind the volatility of the relationship as you assess how to intervene. If the abuse is ongoing and the victim is in fear of his or her physical safety, consider that many online methods such as email, discussion boards and text chat leave a verbatim transcript behind. While the client may indicate no desire to share the private verbatim conversations with the perpetrator, characteristics of Stockholm syndrome and complex

PTSD may cause the victim to share information in an effort to appease the perpetrator.

Screening for domestic violence relationship factors is essential prior to beginning online EAP services. In addition to the aforementioned screening concerns, the practitioner should be aware that the online disinhibition effect may serve to magnify the victim's self-disclosure regarding the abuse and feelings about the perpetrator. This magnified catharsis, if discovered by or shared with the perpetrator, could serve as ammunition for further abuse, placing the victim at risk. Domestic violence victims living with their perpetrators may be viewed as at-risk or in-crisis and appropriate referrals to in-person services may be the best option to keep the victim safe from physical harm. Some therapists do not offer domestic violence services online if the person has been a victim of domestic violence in the past 3 months.

Poor 'Gadget' Manners Increasing

The use of electronic "gadgets" such as smartphones and other handheld devices may make employees more productive, but they haven't made the workplace more polite, a survey suggests.

More than half (51%) of chief information officers (CIOs) interviewed have seen increased instances of poor workplace etiquette resulting from frequent use of mobile electronic devices.

Robert Half Technology, which conducted the survey, identifies five types of tech-etiquette offenders, and offers tips for making sure that you (or someone you know) aren't one of them!

❖ **The misguided multi-tasker** – This person thinks that emailing or texting during a meeting of conversation demonstrates efficiency. But others may regard it as a sign that they prize their BlackBerry more than the company they keep. Unless you want to create potential animosity at work, use your handheld device only in an urgent situation and even then, step out of the room to reply.

❖ **The email addict** – If you've ever played email tag with a colleague, you've likely encountered this person. He or she relies on a constant stream of emails or texts to communicate all of his/her needs, often thinking it will save time. But excessive messaging, particularly regarding trivial things, can be inefficient and disruptive. A phone call or in-person discussion can often resolve issues more quickly.

❖ **The broadcaster** – This person has no shame when it comes to using his/her cell phone anytime, anywhere – including hallways and restrooms – to discuss anything. It's disrespectful. Limit private conversations to private places.

❖ **The cyborg** – It's rare that you will see this person without the blinking glow of a Bluetooth headset or iPod earbud nestled in his/her ear. Keeping a wireless earpiece or headphones constantly plugged in signals to others who

may not need to speak to you that you're not available. Show that you *are* accessible to colleagues by using earpieces in the office with discretion and consideration for those around you.

❖ **The distractor** – This person may have good intentions in setting his/her phone to vibrate rather than torturing colleagues with a cheesy ringtone, but hearing it repeatedly buzz loudly on a desktop or during a meeting can be just as distracting. A better solution: Set the phone to silent or keep it in your pocket. ■

Source: Robert Half Technology (www.rht.com).

Resources

🖰 **Boost Employee Engagement: 18 Strategies to Help Supervisors Create a Great Place to Work**, $99, PDF download, PBP Executive Reports, (800) 220-5000, www.pbpexecutivereports.com. This report offers concrete training ideas supervisors can apply immediately to foster more positive employee relationships. ■

Defending Against Workplace Complainers – *Part I*

By Trevor Blake

Being around complainers at work is not only unpleasant; it's bad for your workplace brain and performance. Brain researchers have long known that the adult brain is surprisingly "plastic" – we can strengthen synaptic connections through repetition, for example, to improve our memory. But a new study using functional MRIs found that negative words actually stimulate the areas of the brain associated with perceptions and cognitive functioning.

Why does this matter? Negative thinking at work, or being around negative co-workers, can decrease your workplace performance. Chronic exposure to negative messages from complainers will reinforce negative thinking and complainers.

Fascinating new research proves that the brain can't distinguish fact from fiction, so if you keep hearing negative messages, your workplace behavior will change to fit these perceptions – and not in a good way!

The following are several ways to defend yourself against workplace complaints – yours and others' – so you can rewire your brain and boost the occurrence of positive thoughts and behaviors.

❖ **Become self-aware**. When you feel a complaint coming on, no matter how trivial, stop yourself. You can't delete the thought, but you CAN revise it before saying it aloud. Instead of saying, "Oh, that's exciting, but they would never give me that assignment," you might say, "That's the type of challenge I'm ready to tackle once higher-ups take notice of me."

❖ **Redirect the conversation**. When you participate in negative dialogue with a complainer, you'll walk away feeling depleted. Instead, take control of the direction the conversation is going. If he says, "I hate Mondays, the weekend isn't long enough," counter the negative statement with a positive one: "I'm glad I rested up this weekend! Now I'm ready to dig into that big project!" ∎

NEXT MONTH: More ways to defend yourself against workplace complaints are presented.

*Trevor Blake is a highly successful entrepreneur and author of <u>Three Simple Steps: A Map to Success in Business and Life</u>. For more information, visit http://trevorgblake.com. **Editor's note**: This article originally appeared on the Impact blog. Subscribe (for free) at http://impactpublishing.wordpress.com.*

Critical Mistakes Made by Supervisors

The following are eight critical mistakes made by supervisors when dealing with employees in trouble at work:

❖ *Critical mistake #1* – Failing to set clear expectations or to regularly enforce them;

❖ *Critical mistake #2* – Letting problems you're aware of fester before addressing them;

❖ *Critical mistake #3* – Failing to communicate with people about their problems;

❖ *Critical mistake #4* – Taking the matter personally;

❖ *Critical mistake #5* – Playing "gotcha" with troublesome or difficult workers;

❖ *Critical mistake #6* – Waiting too long to get professional help, such as from an EAP;

❖ *Critical mistake #7* – Failing to recognize the importance of due process; and

❖ *Critical mistake #8* – Unwillingness to see a problem through to resolution. ∎

Sources: Bob Gilson, a retired government labor and employee relations director; FedSmith (www.fedsmith.com).

Young Employees Don't Value Reviews

By Brian Poggi

Ask any young employee about their desire to undergo a performance review, and most will baulk at the opportunity. But if they better understood the consequences, today's young professionals would change their attitude and course of action.

Young professionals who do not prepare are sleepwalking through an important event. Bottom line: they aren't taking charge and showing their value to their supervisors and their companies in the review process. If they are top performers, they're leaving money and their career progress on the table – and those "average" reviews become a permanent record in their personnel files.

What can young professionals do to prepare for a performance review? They need to ask themselves, and then answer, the following questions:

1. What value do I bring to the company? Identify specific, quantifiable, fact-based results. If you take the time to review you will find you do much more than you think. Clearly communicating your value is essential.

2. What more can I do? List areas where you can contribute more to the company beyond your current responsibilities. No one knows your job better than you. Use this knowledge to identify better ways to drive results. Ask to lead initiatives and projects.

3. What am I looking for? How do you see yourself growing with the company? What should you next position be? Don't be afraid to ask. Outline your strategy and timetable. Bosses are not mind readers, so help them better understand what is most important to you. ■

Brian Poggi is the author of I Am Not Average: How to Succeed In Your Performance Review, $19.99 paperback, $9.99 Kindle, Performance Review Prep, www.amazon.com.

Tips to Communicate Better

There are many uses for communication: to describe projects for employees; to negotiate workplace conflicts; to resolve a customer service issue; *for EA professionals, to assist the employees and managers of their corporate clients*; and many others. Whatever the reason, the following tips should help:

❖ **Stop talking!** You cannot listen if you are talking. Take a breath, and then listen. "Give every man thine ear, but few thy voice." – Hamlet

❖ **Put the caller or visitor at ease**. Build a positive environment for conversation. Help him/her feel free to talk by treating him/her as a professional acquaintance, even if this isn't the case.

❖ **Listen to understand, not to reply**. Sound and act interested. This will require a sequence of asking, asking another question, and then listening before responding. Use good eye contact and smile frequently.

❖ **Remove distractions**. Do not do other things while you're talking to someone – it looks rude.

❖ **Empathize**. Try to put yourself in the other person's place, and express understanding of his/her feelings. Communicate how you see this individual's point of view.

❖ **Avoid defensive responses, arguments or criticism**. It's possible to win a particular point in a conflict, but "lose" in the bigger picture (such as that person's business).

❖ **Ask open-ended questions, and then actively listen**. Encourage detailed expression of needs. ■

Sources: Julian Wasson's "Market Mate" CD, and ExchangeEveryDay.

Are Financial Fairs a Growing Trend?

Could financial fairs be a growing workplace trend in today's uncertain economic climate – and a potential niche for EAPs in helping coordinate them for employers?

Most of the financial information that employees are provided focuses on retirement planning. While retirement is an important topic, many employees are more stressed about finances that affect them *today* – things like mortgages and other bills. Moreover, finances are often the number-one cause of marital problems in couples.

Financial issues are of even greater concern when layoffs occur, as has been the case in the University of California system

due to the state's budget crisis.

In response to these worries, Wendy Nishikawa, work-life program manager at UC Berkeley, formed a financial resources workgroup consisting of representatives from Human Resources, University Health Services' Faculty/Staff programs (EAP, work/life and health), and the Retirement Center.

Earlier this year, University Health Services and Human Resources co-sponsored the first-ever UC Berkeley Financial Fair as part of ongoing efforts to help employees make the most of the university's benefits package, and to showcase the myriad of work-life programs tailored to the campus community.

Sixteen campus programs and affiliated vendors fielded questions

on a variety of work-life topics, from saving, investing and retirement planning, to flexible spending plans and kids' college funds.

In planning such events, it is particularly important to assess and address the financial needs of the various generations in the specific workplace. It would not be a good idea, for instance, to gear discussions solely about retirement, if the majority of employees are in their 20s or 30s.

"We recommend it [a financial fair] as a way to highlight resources and benefits that you offer, that your employees may not be aware of," Nishikawa said. "The feedback we received indicated that it [the fair] was viewed as very useful." ∎

Tell Them Only One Thing

By Nick Morgan

Many employee assistance professionals make presentations at various conferences. It's a great way for them to help their peers by sharing their expertise about a certain topic, and it gets their name "out there" as an expert in a certain area at the same time. It's a win-win. But many speakers make the mistake of overwhelming their audiences with too much information.

Audience members simply don't remember much of what we hear. We're easily sidetracked and

confused. Speakers have to keep it *simple*. Many studies suggest that we only remember a small percentage of what we hear – somewhere between 10% and 30%.

But when an EA professional, or any speaker, gets in front of an audience, the urge to tell them everything they know is hard to resist. Far too many speakers perform a "data dump" on their audiences at the first opportunity.

Unfortunately, we can only hold four of five ideas in our heads at any one time, so as soon as a speaker gives us a list of more than

five items, we're going to start forgetting as much as we hear. There is only one defense against this dismal human truth: *focus your presentation on a single idea*. Write that one idea down in one declarative sentence, and paste it up on your computer. Then eliminate everything else, no matter how beautiful a PowerPoint slide it's on, that doesn't support that idea. ∎

Nick Morgan, the author of Targeted Leadership – Building a Team That Hits the Mark, wrote about this topic for "Harvard Business Review."

Appreciation in the Workplace – *Part II*

By Dr. Paul White

Why is feeling appreciated so important in a work setting? Because each of us wants to know that what we are doing matters. Without a sense of being valued by supervisors and colleagues, workers start to feel like a machine or a commodity.

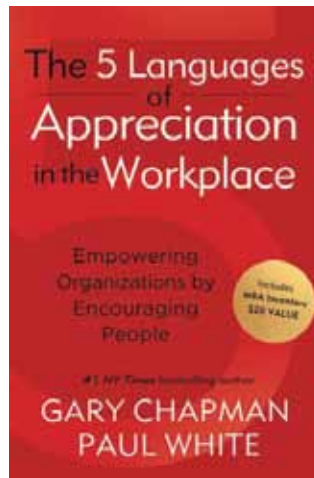When team members do not feel valued, the results are predictable:

Workers become discouraged, feeling there is "always more to do and no cares where I do a good job or not."

Employees begin to complain about their work and negative communication among co-workers increases.

Negative behaviors increase: tardiness, absenteeism, conflict, stealing, lower quality work, and apathy.

We have identified four critical factors that need to occur for appreciation to be experienced as *authentic* appreciation for team members:

❖ *Appreciation must be communicated regularly*. If appreciation is only conveyed during performance reviews, employees don't believe the messages sent. Similarly, infrequent messages (once or twice a year) don't adequately communicate that the team member is truly valued.

❖ *Appreciation must be individualized and delivered personally*. People want to be appreciated for what they *individually* have contributed. Unfortunately, most organizations use *group*-based acts of appreciation – an email blast thanking the department for completing a key project, etc. This type of communication often backfires, with employees becoming cynical or feeling offended by the general nature of the act.

❖ *Appreciation needs to be communicated in the languages and actions that are meaningful to the recipient*. Individuals have specific ways in which they prefer to be encouraged. When messages are sent repeatedly in ways outside of our primary language, the intent of the message "misses the mark." Not only is this ineffective, it becomes discouraging as well – both to the sender and the receiver of the message.

❖ *Appreciation needs to be perceived as being authentic*. People want appreciation to be genuine. Workers are skeptical of programs implemented from the top down, where supervisors are given instructions to "communicate appreciation for each team member at least once a week." While we all want to know that we are valued, we want it to be authentic, and not contrived. ■

Dr. Paul White is a psychologist, consultant, speaker, and co-author of The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace: Empowering Organizations by Encouraging People. For more information, visit www.DrPaulWhite.com.

Summary

Given the safety issues concerning what is now termed "digital stalking," EA professionals should create established protocols for online interventions. Proper intake and assessment can aid in defining what services are best suited for which person. Approaching each situation in an individual manner is fundamental while staying abreast of new technologies and any impending risks the new technologies may bring. ■

DeeAnna Merz Nagel, LPC, DCC is an international expert regarding online counseling, online coaching and the impact of technology on mental health. DeeAnna and Kate are co-founders of the Online Therapy Institute and Online Coach Institute and Managing Co-Editors of TILT Magazine ~ Therapeutic Innovations in Light of Technology. Kate Anthony, DPsych, FBACP, is a leading expert on the use of technology in therapy. A modified version of this article is offered in Safe Interventions for Victims of Domestic Violence: Considerations for the use of Technology and the Internet, a course offered through Online Therapy Institute, http://onlinetherapyinstitute.com/domestic-violence. For more information on the authors, or a list of references used in this article, contact DeeAnna at da@onlinetherapyinstitute.com.