



Spring 2007

The Value of EAP

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(1) Challenge of the Day

Does the EAP Provide a Return on Investment?

In life, we juggle multiple roles – workplace managers, community volunteers, managers of our household. Because of this, we must constantly evaluate our investments of time, energy, and resources against results. In some areas of our lives, we don't need "hard data" to show us a return on our investment (ROI). Often, a child's smile, a feeling of satisfaction, or the knowledge that we helped someone or did the right thing may be all we need to recognize that our efforts were worth it.

When it comes to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), we know it helps people and that it is an asset to the workplace. However, should we expect the services of the EAP – which supports the well-being of the workforce – to give us ROI hard data? Are testimonials from others or our own useful experiences with the EAP sufficient proof of the EAP's ROI?

We should be able to expect both quantitative data and qualitative experiences to support the value of the EAP. Given that EAPs are sponsored and supported by the workplace, EAPs should have a workplace impact. And, they do.

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(2) Exploring the Issue

How the EAP Strengthens the Bottom Line

Unscheduled Absences and Presenteeism

Most managers are familiar with the disruption that can occur when an employee calls at the last minute to say he or she “won’t be in today.” Unscheduled absences affect the efficient operation of the workplace when others must fill in for the missing employee. Emergencies can’t be prevented, however when those last-minute calls become habitual, it can become a problem.

Then there is the problem of “presenteeism,” when an employee is physically present, but emotionally, miles from the job and not fully functioning due to illness and/or lack of focus. If presenteeism becomes a recurring issue with an employee, it can seriously impact productivity.

CCH Inc., a firm that provides employment law and human resources information found that, in 2006, the rate of absenteeism had reached 2.5 percent. In the 16 years CCH, Inc. has collected this data, absenteeism has steadily increased.

CCH found that while personal illness is still the most frequently reported reason for unscheduled absences (35 percent), it only accounts for one-third of all unscheduled absences. This means that two out of every three unexpectedly absent employees are not physically ill. In fact, CCH found that employees were absent because of family issues (24%), personal needs (18%), and stress/burnout (12%)

The EAP can help managers deal with problems like chronic absenteeism, emotional issues affecting job performance, and presenteeism.

The EAP Impacts Absenteeism and Presenteeism – the “Hard Data”

Could you use some help in getting your employees to show up on time at the office? Would you like to have your employees fully engaged in the work on their desks or workroom instead of gazing off thinking about the stress in their marriage or whether the kids are okay at school? The EAP can help.

The FOH EAP gathered data from almost 60,000 clients and analyzed the extent of the EAP client’s improvement in major outcome areas relevant to workplace performance and overall health and functioning. Data were collected over a three-year period using a standardized procedure that involved validated self-report instruments and counselor-assessed measures.

Of the six outcome areas surveyed, two gauged work productivity, one absenteeism/tardiness, one work and social relationships. One outcome area gauged perceived health status and one addressed general life functioning. Improvements from when the client began the EAP counseling sessions until concluding the sessions were strong in each of the six areas surveyed (see Table 1 for more information).

Table 1 Summary of EAP Client Improvement				
Outcome Area	Definition of Deficit Level	Pre-EAP	Post-EAP	% Change Improved
Productivity Affected by Mental Health	Rating of “extreme difficulty” or “quite a bit of difficulty” doing work	30%	8%	73%
Productivity Affected by Physical Health	Rating of “could not do work” or “quite a bit of difficulty” doing work	15%	5%	66%

Work and Social Relationships	Rating of "extreme" or "quite a bit of interference" in social & work relationships	31%	8%	74%
General Health Status	Rating of "poor" or "fair" perception of own health status	16%	11%	31%
Unscheduled Absences or Tardy from Work	Average number of days in past 30 days	2.37	0.91	62%

Note: N = 59,685

FOH found that the number of people who reported having a lot of difficulty performing work before beginning the EAP was reduced significantly after concluding EAP sessions. Those who reported little or no difficulty performing work increased greatly after using EAP. The clients' perception of their own health status increased after using the EAP, even though the EAP does not directly address physical health issues.

Figure 1.
Pre- and Post-EAP Improvement for Workers Reporting Difficulty Before EAP Intervention

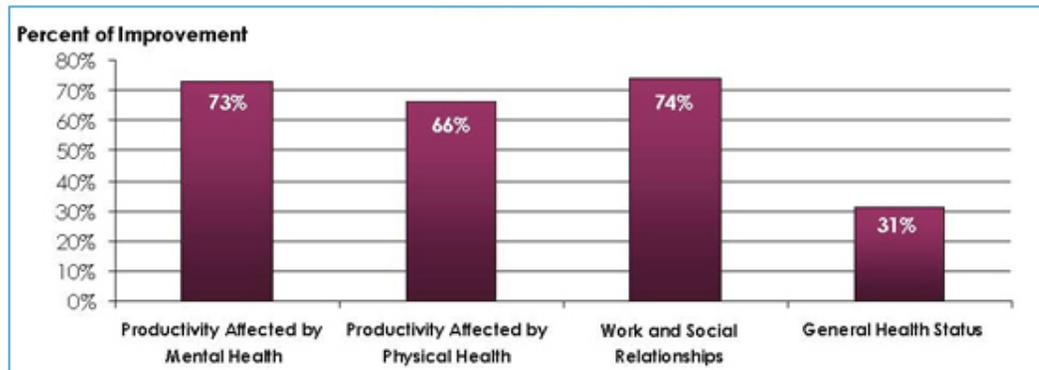
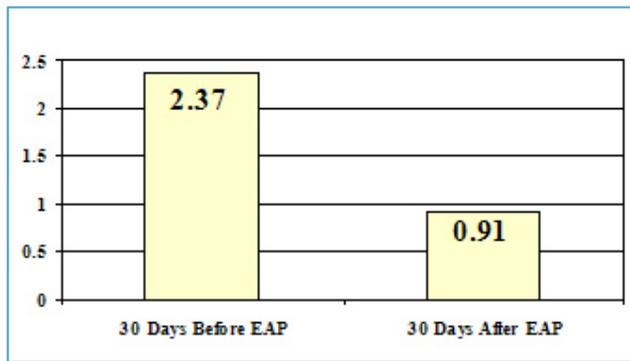


Figure 2
Unscheduled absenteeism and tardiness



Probably of greatest interest is the reduction in unscheduled absenteeism and tardiness after using the EAP. When beginning EAP counseling, clients reported an average of **2.37 days** of unscheduled absences or tardies in the prior 30 days. At the end of EAP sessions, clients reported being unexpectedly absent or tardy an average of **.91 days** in the previous 30 days. This represents a 62 percent drop in average lost time away from work.

That's Fine – But what does this all mean for me?

Study after study has found that the EAP saves the lives and livelihood of employees and their family members. The EAP doesn't just respond during emergencies such as when there are critical incidents and disasters, the EAP actually makes a measurable difference on an agency's "productivity" bottom line.

The EAP makes business sense. When employees are depressed, stressed about family problems, misusing alcohol, or anxious about work, they take more unscheduled absences, arrive late to work more often, and are less focused and less productive on the job.

So, with EAP interventions and counseling, we can find ways to better handle the stresses and problems of everyday life. We can be happier, healthier, and better equipped to carry out all the things we do in our lives, including approach work with enthusiasm, focus, and gain a sense of fulfillment from doing our work well. That's a bottom line all managers can live with.

(3) Tip of the Day

The EAP helps the individual and the workplace. As a manager or supervisor, you are key to making employees aware of the EAP and making referrals to the program. Managers can make **informal** or **formal** referrals to the EAP.

The following are examples of situations appropriate for **informal referrals**:

- An employee returns to work after two weeks of vacation. After his supervisor asks him how he enjoyed his time off, the employee admits that it was quite stressful. His teenaged son ran away from home for the second time. The supervisor informs him of the services and phone number of the EAP.
- A supervisor finds an employee crying at her desk one morning. She recently returned to work after taking personal leave. Her husband died a month before after a long struggle with cancer. The supervisor informs her of the services and phone number of the EAP.

Note: It is always the employee's choice whether they choose to contact the EAP. A manager's job is to make sure that they are thoroughly informed of all resources available to them, including the EAP.

When an employee's performance and productivity is declining, a **formal referral** to the EAP may be appropriate. Supervisors should take the following steps to make a **formal written referral**:

- Consult with human resources staff about their agency's specific policies and procedures.
- Document, as part of a performance improvement plan, that the employee was made aware of the EAP as a resource.
- Notify the EAP that a referral was made.
- As appropriate, provide relevant documentation to the EAP of the performance problem.

Note: Participation in the EAP will not give employees preferential treatment or protection from discipline, including discharge. All employees should be evaluated strictly on job performance criteria.

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(4) Resources to Make Your Day

- The FOH EAP has professional staff available at the call service center 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to discuss employee issues with you.
- If employees are tardy, absent, or losing focus due to childcare or elder care issues, child and eldercare resources are available through the EAP website, www.FOH4you.com. The top center section of the homepage has a caregiver locator service.
- For guidance on making an employee referral to the EAP, visit the EAP Website. Under **Benefits/Services** on the homepage, click on **A Supervisor's 24/7 Resource** to access a video and printed material.

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(5) About this E-Magazine and How to Contribute a Topic

References used in this issue are: Selvik, R., Stephenson, D., Plaza, C, Sugden, B. EAP Impact on Work, Relationship, and Health Outcomes, *Journal of Employee Assistance Research Report*, 2nd Quarter 2004, 18-22. CCH Incorporated, 2006 CCH Unscheduled Absence Survey.

The FOH EAP provides assessment, counseling, referral, training and consultation to Federal employees and agencies worldwide. The goal of this e-magazine is to help Federal leaders address their workplace relationship concerns. Please let us know your topics of interest by contacting Diane Stephenson, Ph.D., FOH EAP at 1 312-886-3942 (DStephenson@psc.gov).

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