

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE REPORT

supporting EA professionals

Spiritually Integrated Counseling

By Leah Szemborski

Many mental health counselors balk at the idea of talking about faith with their clients. Results from a study of over 400 Licensed Clinical Social Workers found that most clinicians (80%) thought that discussing religion and spirituality would be helpful in counseling, but only a handful of clinicians actually do so. Many counselors have had no formal training in addressing spiritual matters, and have no idea how to even begin.

Some may not have strong religious convictions themselves and feel ill-equipped to help clients enhance their spirituality; while others may have strong convictions and fear that they may be perceived as pushing their religious views on clients if they bring up this topic.

Regardless of why many counselors are choosing not to address spirituality in counseling, Gerald Corey, (sponsored

by the American Counseling Association), states:

“Spiritual and religious matters are therapeutically relevant, ethically appropriate, and potentially significant topics for the practice of counseling in secular settings.”

Research clearly demonstrates that people in good spiritual health are happier, have greater well-being, and more hope, optimism, and gratitude than those who are not (Koenig, 2012). There are many benefits to incorporating spirituality into counseling work. It is to the client’s benefit when the counselor feels equipped and confident in bringing up such matters.

Understanding Spirituality

To start, counselors must have a framework for understanding spirituality. Basically, spirituality seeks to answer two fundamental questions:

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- What is the purpose of my life?
- Am I connected to something bigger than myself?

A person's religion might help them be more spiritual by providing meaning and purpose in life.

For example, a Christian might see the purpose of their life as sharing the gospel with others. The connection to something bigger would most obviously be their connection to God, but could also be their church congregation, or the "mission field" (community) in which they live. Religion can certainly help people be spiritual, but *spirituality is not exclusive to religion*.

Many people who do not associate with any organized religion feel a deep sense of purpose—maybe to raise a healthy family, or to advocate for an important cause. Their connection to something bigger could be family, nature, community, vulnerable populations, or any number of things.

Beginning the Conversation

A simple way to start a conversation about spirituality is simply to ask. A question like, "*Do you have any faith or spirituality?*" can be a great way to gather information about the role of religion, faith, and spirituality in their life. Clients who are connected to a religious institution often find great comfort in their belief system, or the support network that they have there, while others might have been badly hurt or humiliated by religious leaders and are still carrying the wounds.

Some people find hope in ritual and scripted traditions, while others are much more ambivalent about their belief in "God," and instead believe in a spiritual force or connection that runs through humanity and the universe.

Regardless of whether the client's beliefs are a source of comfort, protection, and guidance, or if the client is ambivalent or angry towards God or religious institutions, *all of this information is invaluable to the counseling process*. One thing to remember, though, is that if the counselor doesn't ask about faith or spirituality, the client probably won't tell you. It's important that counselors intentionally ask these questions of every client in order to have a comprehensive assessment that acknowledges this essential aspect of life.

Healing Wounds to Enhancing Spirituality

Once the counselor has an understanding of the client's spiritual and religious perspectives, part of the counselor's work might be to help the client heal religious or spiritual wounds, or encourage them to enhance their faith and seek deeper spirituality.

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Of course it would be inappropriate to impose these goals upon the client without their consent, but in many instances clients recognize the importance of faith or spirituality and are happy that their counselor also deems it important and will help them on their journey.

There are many ways a person can enhance their spirituality. The counselor may suggest many options and ask the client which ones they are most comfortable with. Some suggestions include:

- Meditation;
- Ritual;
- Prayer;
- Religious media, music or literature;
- Worship, other connecting with a spiritual community; and
- Having an open, curious attitude.

Some people prefer to learn about many different faith traditions and then choose to practice

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pieces of each that are comfortable to them. Others prefer to practice solely within one religious tradition, and so setting goals to engage in more intentional or frequent religious practices might be more appropriate.

Each person's spiritual journey will be different, but it's *up to the counselor to acknowledge and encourage clients to engage and pursue spirituality in a way that is comfortable and meaningful to them*, just like a counselor would encourage diet, exercise, healthy relationships or any number of things that have been shown to improve mental health.

The Purpose of Life

Another way of integrating spirituality into the counseling process is by asking clients what they believe is the purpose of their life. Many clients don't feel a sense of purpose, or believe that they have a purpose but don't know what it is. When people have a sense of purpose they tend to have a stronger self-identity, find more meaning in life, and begin to live life with intention.

For example, one study of over 100 young adults found that those who discussed their values, life goals, and purpose had higher goal-directedness and life satisfaction than those who did not (Bundick, 2011). In addition to purpose, a counselor might explore the client's values and how they live either in-line or in contrast to them. Many counselors do these things already, and don't even realize that they are integrating spirituality into the counseling process!

Summary

Many counselors are hesitant to practice spiritually integrated counseling, but research clearly shows that people benefit from having a healthy faith or spiritual connection. When counselors engage their clients in discussions about purpose, meaning, connection, they are already integrating spirituality into counseling.

By asking more intentional questions about faith, religion or spirituality, and encouraging clients to seek and pursue spiritual connections, counselors can help clients enhance and improve a fundamental aspect of their life that has deep implications for overall well-being. ■

Leah Szemborski has been an EAP counselor, consultant, and educator for over nine years. Leah has a passion for spiritually integrated counseling, and enjoys helping her clients find purpose

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Editor's Notebook

It is too bad that today's politically correct climates help deflate potential discussions about spirituality. "Many counselors have had no formal training in addressing spiritual matters, and have no idea how to even begin," writes Leah Szemborski in this month's *EAR* cover story.

"Some may not have strong religious convictions themselves and feel ill-equipped to help clients enhance their spirituality;" Leah continues, "while others may have strong convictions and fear that they may be perceived as pushing their religious views on clients if they bring up this topic."

That is a shame. "There are many benefits to incorporating spirituality into counseling work," Leah adds. "It is to the client's benefit when the counselor feels equipped and confident in bringing up such matters."

But how? Leah goes on to explain. A loosely related article, "Share Holiday Happiness Safely" offers additional suggestions. See page 8.

While readers will receive this newsletter sooner than the end of the year, in terms of our production schedule we've just completed our 22nd year of publishing *Employee Assistance Report (EAR)*. I wish to thank some key contributors to *EAR* this year:

The aforementioned **Leah Szemborski, Linda Fensler, Susan Skinner, Nancy Shriner, Empathia, David Moakler, Janeen Haller-Abernethy** (and associates), **Andie Burjek, Sheryl Hill, and Mary Ellen Gornick.**

Everyone is busy these days, but the EA professionals (and others) who go "above and beyond" already hectic lives to write insightful articles for this publication are essential!

If you are interested in writing for *EAR*, contact me anytime! Happy holidays. Until next year.

Mike Jacquart

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Avoiding Delegation Pitfalls – Part II

By *Angela Civitella*

Delegating is the key to a successful business and what sets bosses apart from true leaders. The hardest part? *Knowing when to let go.* The following are some of the top delegation mistakes leaders make and how to avoid them. The remainder were discussed in part one of this two-part article.

Delegating without clarifying the level of authority

It's important that the person you delegate the task to understands your expectations. You need to convey how much authority they will have on the matter.

Will they have free reign, or will you be monitoring decisions closely? This might depend on how complicated the task is, and it could also change as the project progresses.

Not allowing for mistakes and failure

Mistakes are going to happen no matter how hard you try to avoid them. Very few mistakes are fatal, and/or irreversible. Mistakes most often can be turned into opportunities and teachable moments. An environment that fosters people making mistakes and allowing for growth and change, is the best of environments in which to grow.

Pressure and stress, in the right measure, usually brings out the best in people. So, know how to push and pull, and more importantly, create an environment where they can come to you without hesitation if something goes wrong.

Not being clear about the goal, vision, and timeline

Don't expect your team to suddenly develop psychic abilities or guess your every expectation. Be as clear and concise as possible. Share specific and well-defined expectations. What are the project goals? When do you realistically expect the project to be complete? How will success be measured?

Request employee buy-in. If they seem hesitant about taking on the task or project, you may want to reconsider or have a longer talk with them about why they are not sure they can do it before delegating.

Not taking time to review the work

Trusting your employee is important, but that does not mean you don't need to review their work

and provide your approval. Without this important check-point your team has no way of knowing if they are on track. Always check everything that comes back to you.

Don't accept partially finished work – don't redo anyone's work. Provide the proper feedback so they can complete the task on their own and learn.

Summary

Delegation is not about dumping tasks on others. It is a fine art, and if done properly, your team and your business will flourish. It starts with management, first recognizing that you have too much to do, and that your time is maybe better spent on more top-level tasks.

Then it takes careful planning and training for a successful hand-off. Avoiding delegation mistakes takes time and work, but the payoffs are exponential for everyone. ■

Angela Civitella is a business leadership coach and founder of the firm INTINDE <http://intinde.com/>

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‘Pot’ Breath Tests Look Promising for Employers

Employers have never had accurate drug testing options to determine when an employee might have ingested marijuana and, therefore, if they are likely to still be impaired. As a result most employers have policies that impose a *maximum* penalty for *any* positive test for the drug.

However, “breathalyzer” tests slated for release in 2020 use advanced technology to measure whether an individual has *recently* smoked, vaped, or even eaten marijuana products. The devices show immediate results, which means employers can quickly deduce whether an employee is impaired and should be kept from working.

This advancement marks a big change from current tests, which detect cannabis use as long as 30 days before testing, meaning they can’t show whether someone is high *at the present time* or used the drug while off duty. Employers are most concerned when it

comes to safety-sensitive activities, including operating dangerous equipment or driving.

With marijuana use now legal in 33 states and the District of Columbia, employers have to find a balance between safety concerns, zero-tolerance drug policies, and both medical and recreational drug use.

Two recent announcements highlight the new tests’ capabilities and their potential shortcomings.

There is a drawback to the new tests. Unlike alcohol, there is currently no legal standard for impairment based on the amount of THC detected. Still, one startup lab says its product will still let employers make a call about whether an employee is fit for work by indicating how recently they ingested a THC-containing substance. ■

Source: HR Morning.

In the News

EAPA Conference Sessions at Special Price

The Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) has released a new online conference recordings package that provides unlimited access to both this year’s EAP Conference in St. Louis and last year’s conference in Minneapolis.

Through Oct. 31, 2020, purchasers of the package can view or review as many sessions from both conferences as they want — any time at their convenience — AND receive PDHs or other continuing education credit while doing so.

Keynote sessions are full multimedia re-creations with synchronized audio, video and slides. Breakout sessions include synchronized audio and slides. All session handouts are also included and can be downloaded any time.

The new package is available to EAPA members for just \$199, and to non-members for \$299.

More info at <https://eapa.sclivelearningcenter.com/MVSite/default.aspx> ■

Share Holiday Happiness Safely

The following are some examples that the EAP might wish to try:

❖ **Survey employees to discover their cultural heritage in a positive, informative manner.** The EAP can assist. This is a terrific time of year to engage people in their personal identities. Let workers know that your organization cares about their personal lives and does not want to offend or exclude anyone.

Moreover, raising the issue of cultural and religious diversity can help eliminate fears and misconceptions. If a business sets an accepting tone, employees will feel the freedom to express themselves. However, be sure to allow people to opt out of participating if the matter is sensitive or uncomfortable.

❖ **Decorate and design a non-offensive holiday party.** Almost all cultures cherish and celebrate light during the dark winter months. String white lights throughout the office and light candles during formal parties. Include employees by asking them what they would like to see.

❖ **Instead of exchanging gifts, plan events that will make employees feel good.** Collect canned foods for a local food pantry. Donate money to a local charity in the company's name. Contact a local social service agency for information about a needy family, then collect and buy gifts for the family's children. ■

Quick Ideas

The 'Empty Chair' Technique

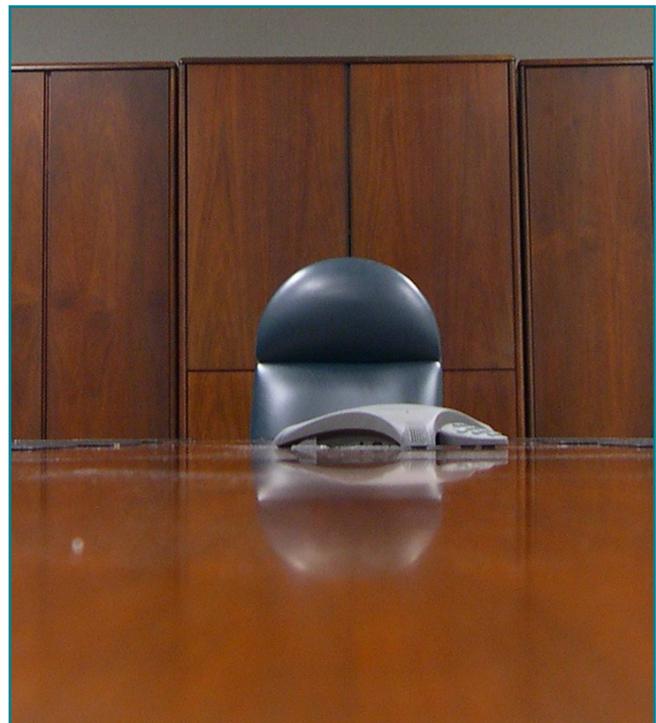
Grief and loss is never easy, and it can be particularly difficult this time of year. In terms of the workplace, when you gather a group of people who have lost a beloved work colleague, one topic likely to come up involves what to do with their "stuff."

Some employees may prefer holding on tight to their loved one's workplace belongings for as long as possible; a favorite picture of him/her, or a prized sports memento. Others will want personal items in an office or cubicle removed as quickly as possible, feeling they are a constant reminder of the person who is no longer there. (Certainly, either decision is ultimately up to the family.)

One idea is to situate an *empty chair* in a staff meeting to represent the importance of your lost workmate. If they would like, colleagues can share favorite stories about their co-worker.

Or simply place a picture of this person on the chair, and hold a silent moment in their memory.

These are just ideas; as an EA professional, you may have additional suggestions for grieving employees. ■



EAPA Town Hall Meeting on Dec. 12

EAPA Chapter/Branch Leader Town Hall Meetings are hosted by the EAPA Board of Directors and include updates from the Board committees, task forces, and EAPA staff. There is plenty of time for discussion on topics of interest to participants. Forward any questions or suggestions for agenda topics to president@eapassn.org.

Virtual meetings are held in the EAPA online meeting room. The next Town Hall meeting is Thursday, **December 12**. Detailed agendas and log-in instructions with dial-in numbers will be sent out prior to each meeting.

In addition, the EAPA Labor Chapter is entirely virtual. For more info about upcoming meetings, visit <http://www.eapassn.org/labor>. ■

On the Job

More Proof Pet Therapy Works

The use of pet therapy in mental health isn't new. Numerous studies show that animal-assisted therapy reduces pain and anxiety among patients with cancer, heart disease, and PTSD. According to one study of four million people worldwide, dog ownership was as effective as medication, lowering the risk of premature death by 24%. Another study of 336,000 men and women found that dog owners had better health after suffering a major heart attack, compared to non-owners.

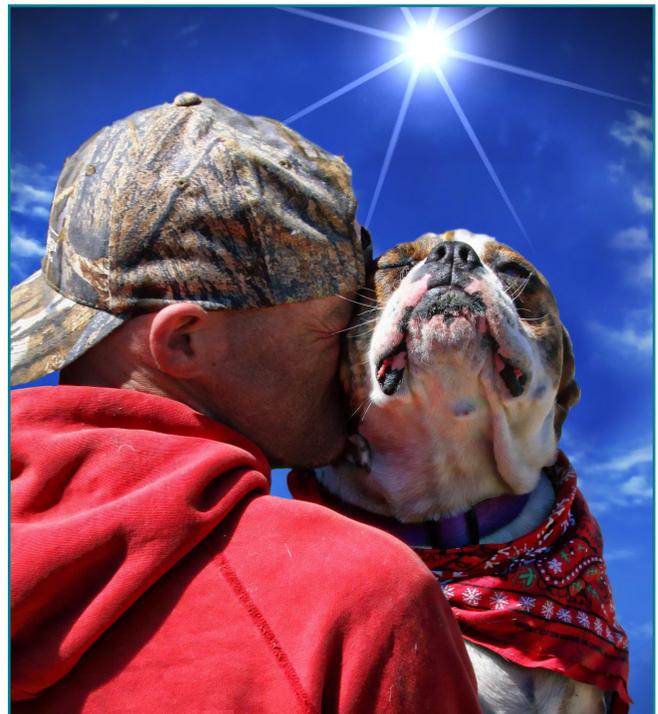
Puppies Behind Bars (PBB)

In the United States, more first responders die by suicide than in the line of duty each year. What is new and unique is a nonprofit New York-based program, Puppies Behind Bars, committed to mitigating and increasing awareness of PTSD.

The organization trains prison inmates to raise service dogs for first responders and war veterans suffering from PTSD. Through six correctional facilities in New York and New Jersey, PBB has raised more than 1,200 dogs, bringing their love and healing to hundreds of individuals and hope and pride to their raisers.

PBB has had a profound impact on our nation's heroes, some who have physical wounds and many others have "invisible wounds," like PTSD.

These consequences can interfere with emotional well-being but also everyday life—even regular



errands like going to the supermarket are difficult for individuals suffering from PTSD. This unique program, and the support of service dogs, helps bring our heroes back to who they are as people, no matter what daily challenges stand before them. ■

Source: *Forbes*. Read more here <https://bit.ly/36YFhV0>

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How Social Media can Reduce Holiday Spending

The following are ways your employee clients can utilize social media as a holiday *savings* tool instead of one that *encourages* spending.

❖ **Consider quick bargains.** The problem with quick bargains is that they're seemingly available one minute and disappear the next, so it's important to jump on them as soon as they become available.

A few years ago, I was skimming through social media and came across a post with an attached picture of a necklace that was on sale for a very brief amount of time. The jewelry was significantly discounted, and I immediately knew it would make a perfect present.

❖ **Ask for recommendations on deals.** Many people would be surprised at the amount of feedback simply by making a post asking for people to give a heads up if they spot a deal on a particular item.

A friend of mine recently asked on her social media page if anyone knew of any sales happening for a specific kitchen gadget, and within the hour, she had multiple people giving their input.

❖ **Pay attention to comments.** The closer we get to the holidays, the more often you're likely to see posts from individuals asking for advice on gift ideas for a particular person, presents within a specific price range, or suggestions for someone interested in a special hobby.

If possible, *read through those comments* if you think it might help with gift buying. Consumers can get some great ideas from these posts, especially when it comes to those who are hard to shop for.

❖ **Keep an eye out for social media donation requests.** Speaking of those who say they don't want or need anything and you can't figure out what to give them, employee clients should consider giving a donation in their name instead of struggling to figure out an actual gift.

Many organizations post wish lists close to the holidays or host events where the purchase of those tickets goes to fund their cause. *This could be a wonderful chance to give back while also supporting a cause that's close to the heart of someone important to them.* In the instances where the organizations are looking for specific supplies, it also allows you to look around for great deals on those requested products. ■

Source: *The Dollar Stretcher* (www.stretcher.com), helping people live better, for less since 1996. More social media shopping tips are available at <https://www.thedollarstretcher.com/frugal-living/social-media-can-reduce-holiday-spending/>

Editor's note: "Money Matters" falls closely on the heels of the "Resource Corner" feature in *EAR* by providing readers with practical tips to share with their employee clients who may be having personal finance problems.



Spirituality... cont'd from Page 3

and meaning. She is very active in her own faith community and believes spirituality is an essential component for a happy, healthy life. **Editor's note:** See related story on page 6.

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