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thrive



Calls rise to Employee Assistance Programs

By Michelle Goodman / NWjobs

Stress stemming from the monster recession has been a hot topic in NWjobs lately.

Yes, experts say the worst is behind us and the employment numbers are starting to perk up.

And yes, I'm about to disregard that and lay some depressing statistics on you about the recent increase in calls to Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), those counseling hotlines employers offer to workers so they can discuss personal

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problems. Harris, Rothenberg International, Inc., which helps companies "solve their most challenging and complex people issues," recently released

its annual trends report. As part of the report, HRI analyzed data collected from the EAPs it implements for its clients.

Among the findings: EAP calls rose 14 percent from 2008 to 2009 and are still on the upswing this year. As the HRI report points out, "This includes November and December, which are traditionally low months for EAP calls."

Once upon a time when the economy wasn't all shot to heck, employees were predominantly calling their EAP hotlines about one issue and one issue only — be it a marriage on the rocks, a child acting out, a mortgage on the line or a gambling problem. Today, however, HRI says that employees are burning up the EAP lines with calls about "two or three underlying issues" at once.

In 2009, the number of emergency calls to EAP hotlines rose by a whopping 75 percent. According to HRI, this means that despite workers' through-the-roof stress levels, "they are delaying calling for help until they reach a crisis stage."

The number of workers who took advantage of the legal or financial services offered by their employers skyrocketed from 2008 to 2009. Requests for foreclosure support rose by 137 percent, help with mortgage issues by 95 percent and assistance with bankruptcy issues by 75 percent.

There is a bright side, sort of. HR executives interviewed for the report told HRI that their firms are adding more EAP services to the health benefits packages they offer employees. Because if there's one thing smart employers have learned in the past two years, it's that a super-stressed, uber-miserable employee is an unproductive employee.

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