

# Today's EAP: Fueling the journey

## Perspectives on ConocoPhillips' Employee Assistance Program

by Kathryn Donelson, photography by Garth Hannum and Paul MacFarlane

*Certain contributors to this story have chosen to remain anonymous. Per the EAP's strict confidentiality policy, all individuals who seek support through the EAP will remain anonymous, with full confidentiality, unless express consent is given otherwise.*

**W**e're all on a journey. Whether striving toward the attainment of a personal goal, charting an exciting career path or just getting through life, we can hardly go it alone. How you navigate and ultimately arrive at your destination – and what shape you're in when you get there – are largely determined by the support you have along the way.

As employees and individuals, we seek personal success, a sense of well-being and achievement.

For managers and HR professionals, the goals are different. They need access to tools and resources that can support them in inspiring, equipping and engaging employees.

As a corporation, we strive to enhance workplace safety, promote a healthy and vibrant employee community, and ensure that people are able to do their best work.

You might think about today's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) as a travel agent for mental health support services. Where a travel agent's job is to fully equip the traveler for an enjoyable, hassle-free trip, the EAP similarly ensures employees, their families, supervisors, HR and company leaders have the support they need for a safe and successful journey at ConocoPhillips – and a good suspension system for those inevitable bumps in the road.

## Family support

### A LOOK AT HOW THE EAP SUPPORTS EMPLOYEES AND THEIR FAMILIES

“We knew something was wrong when our son started getting into trouble at his new school,” a five-year, male employee said. “We didn’t want to sit still, and we couldn’t solve it ourselves. I thought the EAP would be a good place to start.”

His son’s behavior began to take a toll on his ability to concentrate at work. “You don’t want to watch your kid self-destruct. You can burn up your mental energy on these things, and you really need to stay focused at work. If things with the family aren’t good, it plays into everything else you do in life.”

A phone call to the external U.S. EAP provider yielded contact information for several counselors; a few brief phone calls narrowed the search to one.

The family knew their son’s attention deficit disorder (ADD) had something to do with his recent behavior but weren’t sure to what extent and how to address it. “The counselor knew without even meeting our son what was going on in his head,” the employee said.

EAP counseling is goal-oriented and solution-focused. Depending on the situation, the counselor may suggest additional sessions through one of ConocoPhillips’ medical plans to help the employee reach his or her goals. The important thing is that the employee decides, along with the counselor, about the right action plan.

Ultimately, the counselor was able to work with the family and help put their son on a clear path. “She took the time to explain to all of us what ADD was, what it meant for him specifically and the tools he needed to succeed in the school environment.

“If you don’t take advantage of the company benefits available to you, you’re missing out,” the employee said. “Everybody at some point



has issues, and the tendency is to ignore them; but, your problems won’t pack up and go away. It’s better to face them with the help of a professional, get it figured out and fix them. Unresolved problems can ruin lives, and that’s an unnecessary tragedy,” the employee said.



**Michael Hack,**  
manager, Global  
Workplace Solutions

## Expat support

### A LOOK AT HOW THE EAP SUPPORTS THE EXPATRIATE COMMUNITY

Each year, about 300 ConocoPhillips employees accept jobs outside their home countries, with close to 850 employees living as expatriates at any given time. These “expats” – and often their families – agree to take on exciting opportunities that can present challenges and experiences most of us can only imagine.

Fortunately for these employees, the company supports their transition with services available via global and local Employee Assistance Programs.

“The level of difficulty for expatriate assignments is intensified when there is a significant cultural difference between one’s home country and the host country,” said Michael Hack, manager, Global Workplace Solutions. Other

challenges include language differences; school differences; and expectations of the employee, family, company and host country nationals.

For the spouse of a 10-year, male employee, the EAP proved an invaluable resource throughout their expatriate assignment. “There was support prior to our leaving and even after we arrived,” she said. “The Workplace Solutions counselor talked with us about what to expect and helped us understand the cultural differences. I was so relieved to know they were there if I needed something.”

Thankfully, this family’s expatriate experience was a good one – they really enjoyed their 2½-year assignment. But they knew of families at other companies without this type of service who had a harder time adjusting as expatriates.

In response to the inherent challenges of expat assignments, Workplace Solutions, ConocoPhillips’ global internal EAP, has begun

a project in collaboration with Global Learning and Development and Expatriate Services to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors that enhance family adjustment and expatriate success. The project’s goal is to develop strategies to enhance services for expatriates and improve repatriate support and retention.

“We recognize the special nature of these assignments and the unique issues they present,” Hack said. “Our goal is always to provide the right levels of support and intervention so the family, the host culture and the company get the most from the experience.”

For the employee and his family, the EAP services proved key to their success. The couple met with Workplace Solutions for their Cross-Cultural Adaptability Assessment, then kept in contact throughout their transition overseas. They also arranged to meet with the local EAP vendor there

## Showing the value of an EAP

Studies show that an effective EAP can increase employee productivity, efficiency and morale; reduce absenteeism; reduce sick leave and disability claims; decrease usage of health care benefits and Worker’s Compensation; and lower costs related to turnover, accidents and stress-related disability.

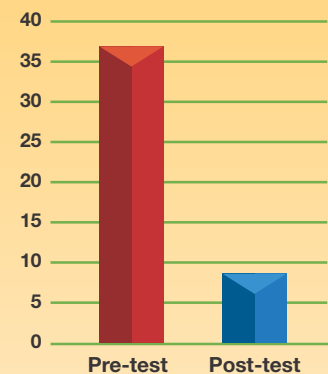
A Roper Poll reported 87 percent of respondents would work harder for a company willing to help them deal with personal problems.

A recent pilot program

conducted by the Workplace Solutions team looked at missed work, diminished productivity and work engagement associated with EAP clients pre- and post-intervention. The study found that absenteeism, or average hours missed due to personal problems, dropped 76 percent.

“We’ve always known that good mental and physical health go hand-in-hand with productivity; it just hasn’t been easy to quantify on the mental health side,” said Michael

**Absenteeism pre- and post-EAP intervention**



Hack. “Our new outcome metrics help show value to our customer and the business.”

to facilitate their adjustment.

“It was great to be able to talk with the counselor in the beginning stages of making friends and getting established,” the employee’s spouse said.

“That support was especially helpful when

It was more than six months later before she managed a visit to the Workplace Solutions counselor in Houston. “I can truly say that saved my health, likely my job, and restored my faith,” she said.



**Above: (from top) Lisa Countryman, Dennis Mongello and David Stawecki, regional Workplace Solutions coordinators**

**“Our goal is always to provide the right levels of support and intervention so the family, the host culture and the company get the most from the experience.” –Michael Hack**

we had a major change to our family – the birth of our second child while on assignment,” the employee said.

The spouse acknowledged that anytime a person undertakes a significant move, there’s going to be an adjustment period. “For us, it was the same thing,” she said. “Once we got adjusted and figured things out, it really felt like home.”



## Personal support

### A LOOK AT HOW THE EAP SUPPORTS EMPLOYEES IN TIMES OF LOSS

“Those who know me recognize me by my happy and positive personality, in spite of the fact that I’ve had more than my fair share of heartache,” said a 20-year, female employee.

After losing the man she described as “my soul mate,” she was devastated. “I could barely function, and many days I couldn’t drag myself out of bed. My faith was shaken; I was hurt and angry. The light in my life had gone out.”

Even with the encouragement of well-meaning friends and the support of managers and co-workers, the employee was unable to recover. “My productivity suffered, to say the least. I had descended into a deep depression that was taking a dangerous toll on my health.”

According to the World Health Organization, five of the top 10 reasons for workplace disability are mental health conditions, with depression now the leading cause of disability globally. Many people who are depressed fail to seek help on their own.

Sharing her experience is important to this employee. “Too often, I meet people going through difficult times – divorce, illness, addiction – and they resist reaching out for help. For some, it may be an issue of limited resources; however, for those of us at ConocoPhillips, there is no excuse. The resources are available, and they work.”

Individuals resist seeking help for reasons as diverse as the people themselves. Less than one-third of the millions of adults who are suffering with a mental or addictive disorder actually seek professional help.

“Would we think twice about going to the doctor when we are ill? We need to understand that when we are mentally or spiritually hurting, our ability to function is diminished – even if we think it isn’t.”

After two very challenging years of pain, healing and growth, the employee is finally beginning to feel her life move forward again. She is quick to share her gratitude. “I truly give credit and am so grateful to this company. We are so blessed to work for an organization that provides the support we need to keep body, mind and spirit healthy.”



## Manager support

### A LOOK AT HOW THE EAP SUPPORTS THOSE WHO SUPPORT OTHERS

Supervisors and HR Business Partners (HRBPs) often find themselves in the trenches of interpersonal relations. It's the job of the EAP counselors to provide these professionals with training and awareness of the tools available so they are prepared for challenging situations.

Kerr Johnston, president, Russia/Caspian, has seen firsthand how EAP counselors help employees. "The EAP counselors are active, empathic

partnership can drive outcomes of reduced absenteeism, increased levels of employee engagement and productivity, decreased accidents, and lower levels of distress at work and home," Hack said.



Ingrid Torres

Ingrid Torres, HRBP director, Mid-Continent Business Unit, Lower 48, has witnessed how much value the EAP adds to

***"The EAP counselors are active, empathic listeners. They are truly committed to helping individuals in need."***

*—Kerr Johnston*

listeners. They are truly committed to helping individuals in need.



Kerr Johnston

Supervisors and managers need to know the EAP is a resource that can help resolve difficult issues. Awareness is key," he said.

The EAP makes available a host of workplace-specific tools for optimizing the mental and behavioral health of the work force. Some of these tools include crisis intervention, assessment and screening, cross-cultural adaptability assessment, employee and manager consultation, suggested EAP referrals, mental health and substance abuse treatment resources, and follow-up to ensure clients connect with the appropriate level of support.

A strong partnership among the EAP, management and HR contributes to success. "Such a

partnership can drive outcomes of reduced absenteeism, increased levels of employee engagement and productivity, decreased accidents, and lower levels of distress at work and home," Hack said.

the organization in times of difficulty, most notably throughout her time as the HR manager in Venezuela when ConocoPhillips employees there had to be evacuated.

"The EAP coordinator in Venezuela served as an ad hoc member of the crisis management team and helped provide coaching and psychological support," she said. "The EAP was seen as an added-value partner in decision-making concerning the well-being of our employees and expats."



Don Robertson

Don Robertson, president and general manager, Libya, expressed gratitude for the EAP's involvement throughout the recent evacuation of employees from that country.

"The evacuation was a traumatic event for all involved," Robertson said. "The EAP service in

the U.K. and the U.S. provided support to our staff and their families and arranged for counseling sessions in Aberdeen immediately following the evacuation. Participants all commented on how beneficial these were. Ongoing telephone counseling was also helpful, as individuals reacted to the event at different times – many several weeks after the evacuation.”



Patricia Waddy

Patricia Waddy, HRBP for the corporate staffs, shared her perspective. “I see Workplace Solutions and the external EAP as a tool for organizational effectiveness,” she said. “The EAP helps individuals remove barriers to success, and the Workplace Solutions team helps improve group dynamics. It all translates to a more effective, connected organization.”



## Substance abuse support

### A LOOK AT HOW THE EAP SUPPORTS EMPLOYEES LIVING WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND ADDICTION

There’s a saying in Al-Anon (Alcoholics Anonymous for families) that goes, “If nothing changes, then nothing changes.” The implication is if you continue enabling alcoholics and tolerating their dysfunctional behavior, you will continue living with them in the same manner. Human beings are such creatures of habit that we will change things only when the pain of going on in the

same way becomes too great.

In 2008, the pain became too great for this 30-year, male employee.

Having lived through the difficulty, denial and destruction that come from marriage to an alcoholic, the employee was referred by the EAP to Al-Anon. Working through the program and realizing his role in their family dynamic, he knew something would have to change.

His personal life was also starting to affect his work, and he grew concerned that his performance would suffer. “I was feeling so much stress, and I almost never felt rested because the situation at home made it impossible to get a full night’s sleep. I was tending to my son. ... It was too much, and I knew I needed something to change.”

Through the EAP, the employee was connected to a counselor well-versed in Alcoholics Anonymous. “Having someone to talk to about these things gave me a clarity and perspective that I couldn’t have found on my own,” he said.

Today, things are better for this employee. In late 2010, his wife finally consented to a recovery facility that was covered under the ConocoPhillips benefits plan, and at the time this story was written, she had managed to remain sober.

The employee credits the EAP for helping him through some of the darkest days of this journey, and he has something to say to those in similar pain: “When you’re dealing with an alcoholic, you lose your own identity and self-worth. I want others to know that you don’t have to live that life; there’s another way, and there’s help to get you there.”



**Substance abuse** *The World Health Organization cites alcohol as the third-leading global risk factor for disease and disability.*

## Employee assistance: Why do we need it?

**Michael Hack, manager, Global Workplace Solutions:** *The EAP is focused on prevention and early intervention – a primary goal is to help employees address their concerns before they start to negatively affect health and work performance. We’d much rather be contacted at the onset of an issue, before it escalates to a crisis. Ultimately, we want to help employees get to a place where they can think, feel and be their best.*



**Dr. Paul Hodgins, chief medical officer:** *We all have different challenges, whether physical or mental. Our company is committed to supporting employees’ overall health and wellness. We all benefit from having healthy, productive employees.*



**Carin Knickel, vice president, Human Resources:** *At ConocoPhillips, human resources – our people – are the most valuable resources, so we have a vested interest in their well-being. Healthy, engaged employees are much better positioned to be productive and effective. Our EAP helps ensure our employees are well taken care of as individuals so that they can perform at their best as part of the team.*



## Crisis management

A LOOK AT HOW THE EAP KEEPS  
EMPLOYEES SAFE

Some 2 million American workers fall victim to it each year. It can strike anywhere, and no one is immune. Fortunately, there are often clues and warning signs before it strikes, and early intervention can go a long way in preventing it. What is this very real and present danger? It is the potential for violence in the workplace.

Rejecting the “it can’t happen here” mentality, ConocoPhillips maintains a Crisis Management Threat Assessment Team (CMTAT) that is consulted in the event of a potential threat of violence. The team includes representatives from Human Resources, Global Security, Legal, Management and Global Workplace Solutions. “In this way, no one person must shoulder the full burden, and every group brings their own perspective,” said Denise Stoneburner, director, Security Policy and Programs.

Incidents vary and can include a threat of harm to self or others, a threat following a termination of employment, inappropriate talk of violence, or talk of bringing weapons to the workplace, as well as concerns for domestic violence. “As with any mental or behavioral health situation, early intervention is critical to addressing a threat. The earlier we intervene, the less likely that the situation will escalate to something more serious,” Hack said.

“As part of the team, Workplace Solutions aids our understanding of the behavioral health component of workplace violence,” Stoneburner said. “They have contributed significantly to our understanding of what personal issues or situations could pose threats and how to address them from the behavioral perspective.

“As a company with an EAP working hand-in-hand with Global Security, we reduce our

risk of incidences of workplace violence, since we're constantly screening for red flags behind the scenes and linking our people to the appropriate level of help and treatment."

Even with vigilance, workplace violence remains a threat. In 2008, the CMTAT responded to eight issues of concern. In 2010, that number rose to 12. As of March 2011, the team had already met six times in



Denise Stoneburner

employee. Help was a phone call away to the EAP.

The employee was given names of counselors in her area and vetted each carefully. "I wanted to find a good fit," she said. Her initial goal was to work through this difficult transitional period. "I knew I had access to the EAP, and I thought that would be all I'd need."

Initially the counseling sessions focused on the job transition. "We were able to work through some work-related concerns and anxieties," the employee said. "In fact, I'm not sure I would have been able to deal with some of the things that came up at work if I hadn't gone to counseling. She helped me get to a place where I felt more

***"As with any mental or behavioral health situation, early intervention is critical to addressing a threat."*** —Michael Hack

response to threatening incidents, two of which posed serious threats.

"Each time we respond to an incident, we learn," Stoneburner said. "Those experiences often translate into tangible changes that improve the safety and security of employees across the globe."



## Employee support

### A LOOK AT HOW THE EAP SUPPORTS EMPLOYEES THROUGH WORK-RELATED CHALLENGES

"I had just accepted a new position, yet a replacement for my former job had not yet been named. I felt like I was living in two worlds. To complicate matters, the new position was in a different location, so I was commuting back and forth. I felt completely overwhelmed," said this six-year, female

comfortable and less anxious."

During the transition, the counselor focused on better managing time and lessening stress. "She gave me practical tools I could apply to work more efficiently. These are skills I'll take with me for the rest of my career. I've become so much more effective!"

This employee has something to say to those who may be reluctant to reach out for support during a difficult period: "Talking with a professional who's completely separate from the situation can be so productive. For me, it's about learning concrete things you can do to improve overall and have a better life," she said.

When asked whether this employee would consider contacting the EAP again, the answer was a resounding yes. "Overall, it was just a really positive experience," she said. ■

ConocoPhillips employees and supervisors can find the global Employee Assistance Programs online on eStream.