



## The History of Employee Assistance Programs in the United States

by Dale A. Masi, USA, The Employee Assistance Research Foundation, 2020, 156 pp., ISBN: 9798650318576

David Sharar

To cite this article: David Sharar (2021) The History of Employee Assistance Programs in the United States, Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health, 36:2, 172-174, DOI: [10.1080/15555240.2021.1930023](https://doi.org/10.1080/15555240.2021.1930023)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15555240.2021.1930023>



Published online: 19 Jul 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## BOOK REVIEW

***The History of Employee Assistance Programs in the United States***, by Dale A. Masi, USA, The Employee Assistance Research Foundation, 2020, 156 pp., ISBN: 9798650318576

Finally, Dr. Dale Masi has written a comprehensive book that addresses a critical deficiency in the Employee Assistance (EA) knowledge base—the need for a definitive and evidential resource that documents the history and evolution of Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) in the United States (U.S.) from the early beginnings through 2020. This book details a chronologically accurate and authoritative narrative that begins with early antecedents of EAP and concludes with future directions for the field. Historical trends and influences that occurred throughout the evolution of EAPs in the U.S. are also documented, such as:

1. The role of organized labor and occupational alcoholism programs,
2. The transition from occupational social work to EAP,
3. The formation of the EA “Core Technology,”
4. The key ingredients of what the field considers “EAP,”
5. The emergence of the “external vendor” model,
6. The diffusion of EAP and expansion of new bundled service elements like managed behavioral health, work/life and critical incident response,
7. Efforts to professionalize EAP via associations, certifications, accreditation, and academic preparation, and
8. Research and evaluation efforts, with a call for more rigorous methods.

The undertaking was solely funded by the Employee Assistance Research Foundation (EARF), a 501(c) (3) not-for-profit foundation dedicated to supporting more rigorous research in the EA field. EARF is now in the process of transitioning to become a part of the Employee Assistance Professional Association or EAPA. Dr. Dale Masi, a name familiar to many in the EA field, is an internationally recognized EA expert, pioneer, researcher, and prolific author and scholar. She led the effort to comprehensively document the 70+ year history of EAPs in the U.S., weaving in research, best practice, and her professional experience.

In the Introduction chapter, Dr. Masi rightfully describes her archival methodologies, including the examination of scientific literature, trade publications, government documents, and extensive video interviews with leading EA experts, and other relevant sources. Following the Introduction the remainder of the book is organized into six chapters. Each chapter is briefly summarized in the following paragraphs.

1. Chapter 1: Background and Antecedents: This chapter traces the roots of EA as emerging from the welfare capitalism movement in the latter half of the 19th century when some employers began to focus on employee well-being as a way to stabilize the labor force and inspire more good-will toward the employer. It also describes the occupational social welfare movement that evolved in the early 20th century, the role of Alcoholics Anonymous in providing employers

- with a rationale and scheme to treat employees with alcohol problems, and how it spawned the work-based Occupational Alcohol Program movement.
2. Chapter 2: The Early Years: This chapter describes the influence of National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) along with national and local efforts by organized labor and how Occupational Alcohol Programs eventually evolved into broader “employee assistance” or EA. It concludes with a summary of Roman and Blum’s (1985, 1988) EA “core technology” and Masi’s own “essential ingredients” published in the 1980s (Masi, 1984).
  3. Chapter 3: Evolution and Diffusion: This chapter examines the growth of EA including the transition from internal to external models and the emergence of EA vendors and contractual “affiliate” networks. The documented benefits and shortcomings of these transitions are presented, including how many EAPs moved away from providing supervisory consults and encouraging management referrals and assess/refer/follow-up protocols to “free short-term counseling models.”
  4. Chapter 4: Continued Expansion: Chapter Four looks at the exponential expansion of EAPs in the 1990s and 2000s driven in large part by the Drug-Free Workplace Program legislation, the popularity of EAP paired with managed behavioral health carve-outs, and EAPs providing critical incident response intervention following disruptive workplace events. The chapter also addresses the efforts to complement (or even integrate) EAPs with allied service lines such as Work/Life programs and Workplace Wellness programs. Chapter four concludes with the explosion of new technology platforms to deliver EAP, the need for more rigorous empirical research and evaluation studies on EAP effectiveness and outcomes, and efforts to professionalize the field through professional associations, certifications and program accreditation, and university concentrations in EAP.

I found the fifth chapter on Future Directions and the final sixth chapter (Conclusion) particularly thought provoking and timely. These two chapters analyze major events and decisions on future directions confronting the EA field. The major themes and questions for the future include:

- Are EAPs a commercial business or a profession?
- How are EAPs priced and procured?
- What is the future market share and impact of mergers/acquisitions?
- Will new technology replace or supplement EAPs?
- How can EAPs better serve diverse working populations?
- Will the past focus on addictive behaviors be renewed given the low incidence of substance use referrals?

Throughout the book Dr. Masi inserts many relevant and poignant quotes from a diverse array of original pioneers, practitioners, researchers, and subject matter experts. Each quote is directly linked to a historical marker or evolutionary event. The reader will be able to “connect-the-dots” between the past 70 years and the field’s present vexing dilemmas and challenges. For the first time in the history of EAP, a careful, conceptual and theoretical framework has been constructed that explains the foundation and base of EAP and looks at the factors that shaped the field, including how EAP has interacted with other disciplines and employee services and benefits. Readers will be

able to grasp how EA has changed through the decades and the link between our rich roots and the present disruptions and hopefully, opportunities. Will the field “re-invent” itself, distance ourselves from the current paradigm and return to our roots, or gradually disappear? Understanding the history of our field is a path forward to either predict or create a new future for EAP. This book should be a required read for any new professional entering the field or anyone who cares about EAP grappling with such questions.

In short, Dr. Masi’s legacy contribution with this book gives our field a more authentic “identity.” *The History of EAP in the U.S.* is essential for any type of EA or workplace behavioral health professional or those in allied fields close to EAP such as labor, occupational health, human resources, employee benefits, managed care, and wellness. All EA professionals (emerging and long-tenured) need the broad, objective and accurate perspective offered by this book. I am honored to endorse *The History of Employee Assistance Programs in the United States* on behalf of the EARF and offer a hearty thanks to the author—Dr. Dale Masi—for being such a significant and positive influence in the development and maintenance of my 30-year EAP career—along with so many others.

## References

- Masi, D. A. (1984). *Designing employee assistance programs*. New York, NY: American Management Publishing.
- Roman, P. M., & Blum, T. C. (1985). The core technology of employee assistance programs. *The Almacan*, 15(3), 8–12.
- Roman, P. M., & Blum, T. C. (1988). The core technology of EAP: A reaffirmation in 1988. *The Almacan*, 18(8), 17–22.

David Sharar  
Chestnut Health Systems, Bloomington, IL, USA  
 [dsharar@chestnut.org](mailto:dsharar@chestnut.org)

© 2021 Taylor & Francis Group, LLC  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15555240.2021.1930023>

