

hAPPiness: Technology and the EAP

By Ryan Atherton



“hAPPiness” is the term I use to describe the suite of well-being application software programs I recommend to EA professionals to help employees and employers; in short, APP + happiness = hAPPiness. I originally came up with this concept in 2018 as a way of providing free, practical tools to help audiences at organizational presentations.

Apps are accessible, cost effective, and easy to use. I recommend every employee assistance professional incorporate this concept into their work. I’ve used differing amounts of apps in situations ranging from conference presentations to Critical Incident Responses (CIRs) with various degrees of success at every turn.

Please note that an app is **not** a replacement for clinical interventions or diagnoses but as an *additional tool* to use with current CEAP guidelines. There is not a situation I can think of where providing someone with a free (usually) tool at their fingertips would not be helpful.

Specific Recommendations

That said, my recommendation of using apps requires further explanation. In terms of clinical use, I suggest merely that the app will *improve the well-being* of a typical client – and **not** for formal mental health diagnoses. In addition, since many apps utilize CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) and ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) I envision combining these apps *with traditional* aspects of therapy in assisting an individual with a formal diagnosis.

Even here, the exact use will depend on the client and the therapist. Again, the general idea is that many of these apps will help the average employee improve their mental well-being, and in turn enhance their quality of work. Here is an example:

Last year I delivered a training seminar to an organization on this very topic. After the presentation a woman approached me and asked about some further features of the What’s Up app. After some discussion we identified some of her unhelpful thinking patterns.

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I opened the Thinking Patterns part of What's Up. Since it's rooted in CBT, we were able to identify Mind Reading and Catastrophizing as her two primary negative thinking patterns. Whenever she caught herself doing this she could go to the app and use the "Ask Yourself" portion of the Thinking Patterns page to replace the negative thoughts and reduce her stress.

Using Apps

Many mobile apps, which are the focus of this discussion, have corresponding desktop applications (e.g., email). To add an app to your mobile device, go to an app store (Google Play, Apple, et al.) and choose the appropriate icons. If an app requires you to connect via a social media account or email I always choose email and use what I refer to as a "burner" or "dummy" email account; in other words, an account I don't monitor and won't clutter my primary email inbox. You can use the following template to create one on Gmail quickly: yourname.dummy@gmail.com. Some of the apps I will mention I want to receive notifications from, so in that case I use my standard email address.

The Apps

I've reviewed 200+ apps since 2018 and continually update my "master" list. With that in mind, the following apps can be leveraged in the EAP industry as a counselor, account manager or leader; additionally, you can utilize many of these apps for your own personal growth. **Disclaimer:** I have no conflict of interest in disclosing the information provided in this article. I have not been influenced to promote specific products nor received compensation from any company to use a tool cited in this article.

Mental Health

What's Up (free)

Can't beat the cost and clinical paradigm. Uses CBT and ACT to address stress and anxiety.

CrewCare (free)

Most used professionally because of the cost and effectiveness. This app is designed to offer mental health assistance for first responders. EMS, police, fire, military, and others looking for a specific line to call or text for assistance by someone from their vocational milieu. For example, the Frontline Helpline is a 24/7 call line answered by first responders to speak to first responders (there are similar lines for police and veterans).

Talkspace (Subscription, \$250 to \$400 monthly)

One of the most discussed mental health apps. Anyone

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over 13 can register to discuss their mental health. Users can be connected to licensed therapists by state.

MindShift (free)

Uses CBT and a quality interface to assist with anxiety and depression.

Physical Health

Charity Miles (free)

The best for motivation. This app partners with sponsors who donate money to a charity of your choice (available on the app) based on how much you exercise.

MyFitnessPal (free + premium options)

One of the most, popular physical health apps as it combines diet and exercise into one platform. Able to sync with fitness trackers.

Fooducate (free + premium option)

Nutrition app. Use the barcode scanner to find healthier alternatives to foods while you're shopping or search by categories for food grades (A to F).

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FatSecret (free)

Tool specifically for counting calories. Fast. Simple.

Couch to 5K/10K

This one offers a plan to get you from little physical activity to a 5K/10K at a pace that works for almost everyone.

Freeletics Bodyweight (free + add-ons if desired)

This app provides strength building tutorials using your bodyweight.

Financial Health – NOTE: Many of these apps involve linking financial accounts.

Mint (free)

Planning app. Tracks and categorizes spending habits. Provides net worth and credit score updates.

Pocketguard (free + premium options) and *Dollarbird* (\$4.99 + subscription options)

Budgeting apps. Pocketguard subtracts expenses and lets you know how much is left in your “pocket” for spending. Dollarbird uses a calendar interface to visualize budgeting. Can also link with family members for further organization.

Prism (free + variable fees)

Payment app. Prism tries to do it all and succeeds; however, it does everything at an average level and nothing really stands out.

Acorns (\$1 monthly up to \$5k – check rates after), *Chime* (free), *Qapital* (free), *Digit* (\$2.99 monthly, and *Qoins* (\$1.99 monthly)

Saving apps. The idea between many of these involves rounding up your purchases to the nearest dollar and putting that extra money to work (I call them digital piggy banks). Acorns invests it. Chime saves it. Qapital saves it toward a specific goal, Digit uses AI to determine how much you can save. Qoins pays debts.

It's Deductible (free)

Tax app. Log charitable donations and easily track how much you can save on your taxes.

Joy (free)

Uses affective psychology to alter individual spending patterns.

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Editor's Notebook



When Ryan Atherton contacted me about his pitch for this month's cover story, I have to admit I was pretty skeptical. After all, a lot of companies are touting apps as a substitute for the services provided by employee assistance professionals.

Dave Sharar, a renowned EA clinician and developer of the Workplace Outcome Suite, refers to these tools as “digital disrupters.” He makes the important point that few, if any, of these apps and related products can provide clinical evidence that they can actually do what they claim.

But the typical employee, unaware of the requirements and standards involved in clinical practice, doesn't know the difference, and these products *are* easy to use after all.

Given the proliferation of well-being apps and self-help applications, it's clear they are not going away either, so what's an EAP to do? While Ryan uses apps in his work as a CEAP he stresses to his clients that an app is NOT a replacement for clinical intervention or diagnosis, but it is an ADDITIONAL tool to use in assisting them.

If people are using well-being apps anyway, why not take advantage of the situation and educate them about what apps can and CAN'T do?

Returning to work after a lengthy absence is never easy, but between masks, social distancing, and other precautionary measures, the pandemic has made this transition more difficult than ever. This month's *Brown Bagger* takes a look at this important topic.

Remote work, while a boon for some, has been more of a bust for others, and some of the negative aspects of this workforce trend are explained in the conclusion of a series in the *Lifestyle Tips* insert.

Be careful and be well!

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Academy Offering Police Empathy Training

*Editor's note: This article appeared in the July 2020 EAR, and is being re-run due to an incorrect URL in the original version. The academy's website is not yet live, but it **does** have a go fund me page. See info in bold at end of the article below.*

The Police Empathy Academy (based in Denver) is offering an empathy training and racial bias certification for police officers, precincts, academies, and police departments across the country. The long-term goal of the organization is to push for politicians to make empathy training a requirement to becoming a police officer.

The goal of the training is to appeal to the human nature of its participants through structured sessions led by industry leading and qualified professionals. Once the course is completed, successful candidates are presented with a Police Empathy Academy – Continuing Education certificate and are able to affix the academy's logo to their websites and resumes.

The academy is operated nationwide and open to all police personnel who would like to improve their empathetic and communication skills, improve their mental health, learn personal life skills, and manage their emotions during tense situations.

With the current state of unrest across the country due to the George Floyd protests against police brutality, many are touting this measure as a necessity for all police departments to begin implementing immediately.

Learning to deescalate confrontation between an officer and a civilian is a key component of this important job. This tactic can keep both the police officers and civilians safer and help heal the divide.

For further information, contact Brianna Hatcher, (720), 262-4077; email support@policeempathy.com or visit gofundme.com/the-police-empathy-academy ■

Additional source: PR Newswire.

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Cognitive Health

Elevate (Free for 14 days, then \$39.99 per year)

Created with input from educational experts. Improves abilities that translate to professional skills such as memory, speaking, and attention.

Peak (free + Pro version for \$34.99 per year)

Designed with help of U.S. and U.K. neuroscientists. Personalized games with performance analysis. View your own “brain map” and get help from a coach.

Spiritual Health

Calm (free + subscription options)

One of the best, if not “the” best meditation apps out there. Truly an all-inclusive relaxation aid.

Headspace (free + subscription options)

If Calm is (1a) then Headspace is (1b) in terms of popular meditation apps. Spiritual mindfulness for those that don't want a religious base.

Aura (free + premium options)

Short (3 minute) daily meditations. AI directed stress reduction meditation app.

Simply Yoga (free + paid ad free)

Pose guides with different class lengths. Good for fitness of the mind and body.

Summary

The most frequent questions I receive when discussing these tools all relate to personal privacy, confidentiality, and data integrity. For example, “*How do I know what they're doing with my information?*” First, understand that I am not responsible for the information a user provides on any of these apps. That said, I've downloaded all these apps cited in this article and have not had any of my data compromised.

Lastly, the two best pieces of advice I can give you are: 1) *Read the security disclaimers* each developer provides and, 2) *Don't do anything you're not comfortable with*. It is nearly impossible to feel 100% at ease with anything in the ever-changing world of technology. I have chosen to explore and embrace this tool and suggest any reader does, too. ■

Ryan works as an Account Manager with FEI Behavioral Health. He is a member of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA) and a Certified Employee Assistance Professional (CEAP). He holds a Master of Science degree in Psychology – Cognitive and Affective Sciences from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. For more information or a list of references used in this article, contact Ryan at ratherton@feinet.com