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Spotlight on Success: John Scherer

MHN Communications

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Wednesday, 3:24 p.m. In a cubicle at MHN's EAP Center of Excellence in San Rafael, CA, John Scherer's phone headset crackles to life. The caller, distraught and disoriented, is sobbing over the traffic noise: "I can't do this anymore". She cannot remember how long she has been driving, where she is, or how she got there.

Scherer, a licensed marriage and family therapist, is calm and reassuring. He coaxes her to a parking spot and helps her establish her location and regain her composure. At the same time, he beckons to a colleague to bring him a local map. When the caller is ready, Scherer directs her to a mental wellness center three blocks from where she is parked – and stays on the line until she is safe at the reception desk. The next incoming call arrives just twenty seconds later – barely enough time for Scherer to reflect on having potentially saved a human life.

As a clinical case specialist on MHN's EAP team, Scherer helps ordinary people manage challenges that affect their emotional health, family life and work life. His foremost tasks are to assess a caller's situation, provide clinical intervention if needed and direct callers to the resources they require.

"Not every call is as dramatic as that one," Scherer explains. "But every moment of my work day is about being there for people at the crucial moment and putting them on the road to wellness," he notes.

Intake Specialists – the Front-line Force

EAP members phoning the Center of Excellence are greeted by a trained intake specialist. "These folks are our front line," Scherer says. "The EAP could not function without them."

The intake specialist performs a general assessment based on well-defined clinical criteria and then

refers the caller to a professional counselor or consultant. These include the psychologists, social workers and marriage and family therapists on Scherer's team. Also on call are management consultants who are trained to interface with a member's workplace manager as part of a clinical intervention. Depending on their need, callers may also be referred to external providers, such as financial advisors, child and elder care providers, enrolled IRS agents, retirement counselors and lawyers.

Teamwork Is the Key

According to Scherer, it is the close-knit collaboration among team members that makes the EAP a success. "None of us really works alone," he observes. "Every workstation has an emergency flag that we can wave if we need backup. Or we might pass a note to a colleague asking them to send emergency services to the home of a caller who is on the line.

"It's this spirit of teamwork that guarantees our true value, within the EAP team and throughout the organization," he continues. "If we can remember to care about our job and to support each other in everything we do, then we will make a real difference in the lives of our members. And that, after all, is what we're here for."

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