

Statement by Ben Jones Board-Member-At-Large.

Hi All,

I have abstained in the board vote regarding recommending to the membership whether to leave or stay, because I think each member needs to make up his or her mind based on the the best information, and my job is to try to make that information available. However, I am leaning toward departure for one primary reason.

Deciding issue

To me the most important factor is that I believe that there are many, many MFT's in the East Bay and the Bay Area in general who are disillusioned with CAMFT, and have left both CAMFT and EBCAMFT, and who are seeking an organization to belong to. I am the only person left in my consultation group that still belongs to either EBCAMFT or CAMFT. In addition, there seem to be many MFT's from AAMFT and other organizations who have expressed interest in joining our organization if we leave. Therefore, it appears to me that leaving CAMFT would provide our organization with a great opportunity to grow our membership and redefine what our goals and roles are in the future, in order to provide the most benefit to the most therapists.

This opportunity may also allow us to permit other professions into the organization, while CAMFT continues in its current and necessary role as a trade organization promoting the MFT profession. It would also allow us to expand our range beyond the East Bay, perhaps statewide.

Dividing Assets.

Regarding assets, I think the furor about what happens to the assets is a scare tactic and completely false. EBCAMFT has assets, and the assets would not be lost just because it decided not to be a chapter of CAMFT anymore. The assets stay put right where they are. There is no other place for them to go. There is no other organization that has any claim on them. Perhaps later if Ronald Mah starts a new CAMFT chapter to replace EBCAMFT, he may want to claim some of the assets, and the membership may vote to agree with him, but that is a question to be settled later. Nevertheless, questions about dividing up assets is not about *whether* to leave, but a discussion of *how* to leave. I personally believe that members pay dues from year to year and receive benefits from year to year, and the fact that there are funds that are reserved for emergencies or service initiatives has no bearing on the separation. CAMFT has several millions of dollars in assets, but I have not heard anyone demand that if EBCAMFT decides to leave it should get a share of those funds.

Here are other, lesser, reasons to separate from CAMFT. There may be others.

1. The issue of separation arose when CAMFT issued an ultimatum to all the chapters to sign a new Chapter Agreement or be ejected from CAMFT. The EBCAMFT board decided that this new agreement was not acceptable. It shielded CAMFT from any liability for lawsuits against the chapters, on the rationale that we are independent entities, while at the same time imposing financial and membership burdens on the chapters that contradicted this very idea of independence. It provided that a chapter could be kicked out of the statewide organization by a majority vote of the board, "if the Board believes that the CHAPTER is not operating in the best interests of CAMFT." That seems like a very subjective criterion, and could be used to threaten a chapter that was merely disagreeing with CAMFT policies. Anyone familiar with recent CAMFT behavior would take that seriously.

2. CAMFT has behaved extremely unethically, and perhaps illegally. The details cannot be revealed because the people subjected to this behavior are subject to a confidentiality agreement and they can be sued personally by CAMFT if they divulge what happened. The previous CAMFT board president, Laura Strom, was threatened with an ethics violation that she had to fight with a lawsuit. Also Jurgen, in his official capacity as CFO of CAMFT, was prevented from obtaining financial information necessary to his position. He also prepared a financial report that the CAMFT board prohibited from being published, and it is still held in secret.

For Jurgen and Claire-Elizabeth, separation is personal, based on unethical actions by CAMFT, and a question of justice and abuse of power. I respect their passion on the subject, and I share their concerns.

3. Many EBCAMFT members have left CAMFT, due to their frustration with CAMFT's policies, and since only CAMFT members are allowed to be members of the chapter, they have therefore also left the East Bay chapter. Because so many members have left EBCAMFT, I question whether EBCAMFT is serving its members well by staying. For me personally, this is the biggest reason to leave.

4. If EBCAMFT leaves, it can establish its own ethics guidelines, which is currently prohibited by CAMFT, more in keeping with the current state of mainstream psychotherapy, and the culture of the Bay Area.

5. There are many MFT's in the East Bay who are not members of CAMFT, and do not wish to be. If we separate from CAMFT, many of those people are likely to join us. In particular, members of BAAMFT will be looking for a place to go, since their chapter of AAMFT is dissolving. Likewise, perhaps members of Gaylesta may be interested in joining.

6. Leaving would permit EBCAMFT to expand geographically as well. We could accept members from the rest of the Bay Area in addition to the East Bay. There are many MFT's around the Bay Area who object to CAMFT's policies, and perhaps even far beyond the Bay Area.

7. If EBCAMFT leaves, it may be able to eventually start its own lobbying efforts in Sacramento, if its membership grows enough. CAMFT has avoided lobbying regarding managed care. The issue of single payer health care in California has been pending for years, and it is currently going through the legislature. If EBCAMFT attracts significant numbers of additional members, it may be able to have the funds to mount effective lobbying efforts.

8. CAMFT is dominated by lawyers, although that may change as a result of recent events. The influence of the legal mindset is demonstrated by its creation of the AB1775 law, working from the point of view of law enforcement rather than therapeutic concerns. Another influence is on the kind of legal advice that it provides members. It is oriented towards protecting members from liability, and is not informed by the goal of providing the best therapy. If EBCAMFT leaves, and if its members increase, it will have the opportunity to hire legal advisors who are informed by the goals of therapists, not only lawyers.

9. CAMFT and EBCAMFT are already relatively independent organizations. If EBCAMFT stops being a chapter of CAMFT, most people won't notice much difference. Members will still pay dues to both CAMFT and EBCAMFT, just as they do now. There would not be any kind of division of the chapter into those who want to stay and those who want to leave. All the members remain members. They will still get all the benefits from both organizations, just as they do now. They still can call CAMFT to get legal advice. They can still attend all the local events hosted by EBCAMFT. If they wish to let one or the other membership lapse, they can do that when their membership renewal comes up.

10. If EBCAMFT separates, it will go through an interesting and exciting time of figuring out what it is to become, from choosing a new name to growing into new roles (See disadvantage #7, below.)

Here are reasons NOT to separate from CAMFT.

1. Implementing the ambitious plans and ideas for the separated organization will require time and energy, and possibly paid staff.

2. Board members will no longer attend the Chapter Leadership Conferences, where board members of all the chapters get together to share ideas and get updates from the CAMFT leadership.

3. The EBCAMFT board has been a force pushing for change at CAMFT. If EBCAMFT leaves, that pressure is removed. Individuals can still attempt to influence CAMFT, but it seems clear that the chapter is more powerful, more organized, and more focused than individuals would be.

4. EBCAMFT has kept in touch with CAMFT issues and elections to the CAMFT board, and has been influential in helping new board members get elected to the board. If EBCAMFT leaves, it will obviously lose this influence on helping candidates get elected to the board. Even if CAMFT has seemed impervious to change in the past, If changes are indeed coming to CAMFT with Jill's departure, then this influence could be quite useful.
5. It is possible that the status of EBCAMFT as a chapter of CAMFT gives it an air of legitimacy that it will lose if it departs.
6. Some people value the very fact that EBCAMFT is a chapter of CAMFT very highly, perhaps out of loyalty or respect or because they have been members a long time. One person told me he would leave EBCAMFT if it parted from CAMFT, just because it was no longer a chapter, regardless of the other factors.
7. If EBCAMFT separates, it will go through a disorienting and stressful time of figuring out what it is to become, from choosing a new name to growing into new roles (See advantage #10, above.)

Sincerely,

Ben Jones