

Pushing the needle on mental health is a team effort

As I gear up for our May technical meeting for my nonprofit Wisconsin Construction Wellness Community – www.Wisconwel.com, I think of a stat I just saw again that said construction workers die by suicide at a rate 4.3 times greater than any other workplace. This is higher than all jobsite fatalities combined. We are going to focus on how to recognize signs of mental health stressors and how to provide support to employees that need help. Can we create a mentally healthy workforce and the involvement of workers at all levels to help reduce the stigma of mental health issues and suicide in the construction industry? I know we can, but it will take all of us working together.

As the year ended and I took time off and took a trip to the UP of Michigan with my son, it gave me time to reflect on the past few years. Not only on me but my family, my friends, my co-workers and just life overall. What can we do to help each other's mental and physical health conditions? Is there a way that we can do more to help others? What is the best way to move that mental health needle?

A couple of things come to mind: you seriously have no idea what other people are going through in life....so just be nice! That is the least that we can do for each other and it might just might make someone's day. The president of my company sent out a super nice year-end email. I took the time my first day back in the office to thank him for that email but to also personally thank him for what he does for me and all the other employees. As employees we are always looking for recognition, but I think sometimes we forget about our supervisors and management. These folks have thankless jobs, but they are truly our first line when it comes to managing our mental health at work similar to our family and friends at home. So just like in my training, I would like to give you homework to not only be nice when it might be hard but think of someone that does not get the praise at work or in your personal life. Give them a nice text or email or phone call or even go old school and send them a note in the mail!

Also, we truly need to focus on ourselves to make sure we are the best version we can be at work and at home. What that means to each of us is different. Self-care and intrusive voices in our mind are truly that hardest things to deal with in life. In my personal experience, working through challenges can be tough but facing them and not running from them can only make you stronger. Let's empower ourselves and make the effort to adopt healthier approaches while also thinking of others. Align yourself with people in your life that can help you through this journey and make you a better person!

This morning I went to meet with my county's mental health resource supervisor. I've lived in Waukesha County for nearly 15 years and did not know what resources were offer. There are so many options offered by people that want to help others in their community. These are people who live near us and truly have a passion for what there are doing. In talking with her I learned that the resources are under-utilized and we need to find a way to get the message out that they are here and want to assist anyone who needs that help. It could be a referral to a resource or therapy or group sessions. They can provide help or can even come to your house. I have referred many people over the years to resources and I have not had one of them come back and say that was useless. If you are struggling and want to make a fresh start, reach out to someone you can trust and feel safe talking to and see if they can help. Or go to your physician or local NAMI and see if they can point you in the right direction.

We also want to focus on making a business case for making mental health a strategic initiative. According to the CDC, the economic tool of suicide on society is immense. Suicides and suicide attempts cost the nation almost \$70 billion per year in lifetime medical and work-loss costs. So, the challenge is for you is to figure out what can employees, employers and our organizations do to help promote a

mentally healthy workforce and provide resources to help workers address these challenges. These are challenges we can't afford to lose.

Some resources are:

- www.agc.org/mental-health-suicide-prevention
- <https://wisconwel.com/resources>
- <https://namiwisconsin.org/resources/>
- <http://www.preventconstructionsuicide.com/>
- Call 211
- Call 988