

Suicide Prevention in the Workplace: Blueprint or Roadmap?

Cal Beyer – posted on LinkedIn on March 1, 2018

This article provides a pathway to addressing mental health and suicide prevention in your organization. If you are a construction company, please read more at the Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention (www.preventconstructionsuicide.com).

There is no one blueprint. I teach company leaders that this needs to be a *roadmap*.

Where you are and where you need (or want) to get to determines the route and the speed you must travel. The only caveat is that you get started as quickly as possible. Start with the premise that lives are at risk and that perfection is a killer.

The organization must accept that the initial plan will be imperfect. I use the analogy of building the bridge while you cross it. It is empowering and it spurs just in time solutions to challenges.

You've already made the first decision: to something or do nothing. Thank you for accepting the challenge.

The next decision is simple and has two inputs; either A or B:

A. if your company has an established caring culture towards its employees, then weave mental health and suicide prevention into your safety culture. That is why I use the tag-line "the next frontier in safety". This is a perfect stepping stone and allows for candid conversations like how mental health and suicide prevention are the next stages of Safety 24/7 (or zero injury) culture development.

B. if your company does not have an established caring culture towards its employees, then this road is steeper and pitted with potholes. It is not insurmountable. It will inherently take longer. This requires bolder leadership. This requires decisive no holds barred action and serious commitment to drive change.

Management Strategy to Address Suicide Prevention -- Summary Steps

1. Acknowledge mental health and suicide prevention as the next frontier in safety. It is not enough to get employees home safe at the end of work shift; for "at risk" employees it is more important to get them back to work safe from home.

2. Consider how to embed mental health and suicide prevention into existing safety, health and wellness programs.

3. Assign responsibilities to undertake a needs assessment and gap analysis of current capabilities

4. Understand how your Employee Assistance Program works. For example, what is the utilization rate and what services are offered, especially in behavioral support?

5. Understand the behavioral health services available in your employee health plans

- Are crisis services available?
- What is the typical waiting period on the phone when calling?
- How long does it take to schedule an in-person appointment?
- Are telehealth services available in the interim while waiting to schedule an in-person appointment?

6. Arrange for telephonic crisis counseling for employees who can't get schedule timely appointment

7. Conduct training for managers and supervisors

- Why this is a workplace topic
- Industry and demographic risk factors
- No bullying and anti-harassment
- Confidentiality & privacy doesn't mean don't offer support services
- Recognizing warning signs of self-harm and/or suicide
- Support services to offer

8. Leverage communication channels and tools to normalize the topic. The objective is to make the topic real and a relevant

- publish hotline information in the employee newsletter
- place posters where employees assemble or pass through -- Crisis Text Line and National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

- distribute wallet cards
- include resources in Open Enrollment health benefits
- include EAP and wallet cards in new hire orientation process

9. Incorporate mental health and suicide prevention into workers compensation, FMLA, ADA and integrated disability management policies and processes. Start with a "stay at work" and "return to work" mindset.

10. Download the free National Safety Council Employer Kit for Prescription Medications (<http://www.nsc.org/learn/NSC-Initiatives/Pages/prescription-drug-employer-kit.aspx>). Addiction recovery is a major area of importance for employers.

Cal Beyer serves on the Executive Committee for the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. He catalyzed an initiative in the US Construction industry to incorporate mental health and suicide prevention into safety, health and wellness culture.