

# CONSTRUCTION + SUICIDE PREVENTION: WHY IS THIS AN INDUSTRY IMPERATIVE?

**10** Questions LEADERS  
MUST ASK Themselves



By **SALLY SPENCER-THOMAS & CAL BEYER**



## WHY CFMA SUPPORTS THIS INITIATIVE



**Stuart Binstock**  
CFMA's President & CEO  
[sbinstock@cfma.org](mailto:sbinstock@cfma.org)  
609-945-2429

On behalf of the Construction Financial Management Association (CFMA), we are honored to sponsor this publication. Our journey to promote awareness of mental health and suicide prevention has covered much ground in a relatively short amount of time.

The first step of our journey occurred at CFMA's 2015 Annual Conference & Exhibition in Chicago. Cal Beyer, a longtime CFMA member, proposed an article on suicide prevention to Kristy Domboski, editor of *CFMA Building Profits*. When she came into my office to talk about this article, we discussed that even though the topic was outside of the magazine's usual scope, it was crucial for the construction industry to understand. As a result, "Mental Illness & Suicide: Break the Silence & Create a Caring Culture" by Cal Beyer and Sally Spencer-Thomas was published in the November/December 2015 issue of *CFMA Building Profits*.

The next, and perhaps most crucial, step occurred when Cal posted on CFMA's Connection Café (our members-only social media site) about his upcoming article and the significance of mental health promotion and suicide prevention to the construction industry. The overwhelmingly positive reception that Cal's post received on the Café was astonishing, as many members publicly shared their personal stories about suicide and reinforced the importance of this subject for the construction industry.

Since then, there has been a tidal wave of interest from our membership regarding suicide prevention. In addition to the November/December 2015 article, CFMA's Valley of the Sun Chapter hosted a regional summit on April 7, 2016, in Phoenix, AZ, which brought construction company executives together with local mental health providers for education and networking – the first regional event of its kind in the U.S. construction industry. In addition, Cal and Sally will be speaking twice on the topic of mental health and suicide prevention at CFMA's 2016 Annual Conference & Exhibition in San Antonio, TX. Additional summits hosted by the Charlotte and Portland Chapters are also scheduled for November 2016.

Cal's dedication, persistence, and enthusiasm for teaching as many people as possible about this important topic is contagious. Through more than 10 articles on this topic in industry publications – including *Engineering News-Record* – and more than a dozen speaking engagements since his first article and Café post, he has been a force of nature in his dogged pursuit to educate the construction industry. I salute both Cal and Sally's efforts to bring such an important topic to light.

# THE NEED FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION IN CONSTRUCTION



**Doryn Chervin, Dr.P.H.**  
*Executive Secretary,  
National Action Alliance  
for Suicide Prevention*

[www.actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org](http://www.actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org)



The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention's Workplace Task Force identifies and engages key industries to advance our vision of a nation free from the tragic experience of suicide.

In construction, so many lives are lost to suicide and workers to depression and substance abuse. Not only is there a profound human cost, but there is also loss of economic strength as companies wrestle with absenteeism, presenteeism, and loss of productivity. As a co-lead of the Workplace Task Force, Sally Spencer-Thomas has developed resources and tools for workplace leaders to advocate, educate, and lead others in the work of saving lives. Cal Beyer joined the Workplace Task Force to enhance the understanding and increase the involvement of the construction industry. He now serves as a Co-Lead for the Task Force and was appointed to the Executive Committee for the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention. Cal is a passionate and dedicated champion of helping construction professionals become advocates for their workers' mental and physical safety. He focuses on helping these professionals better understand their employees' mental health, enhance their wellness, improve their safety, assist in supporting them in times of crisis, and ultimately save lives.

We look forward to more members of the construction industry joining this important movement by leading worker safety programs, improving mental wellness, and preventing death by suicide.



**Clare Miller**  
*Director, Partnership for  
Workplace Mental Health  
American Psychiatric  
Association Foundation*  
[www.workplacementalhealth.org](http://www.workplacementalhealth.org)

The workplace is a critical place for changing how our country addresses mental health. The Partnership for Workplace Mental Health recognizes that the U.S. construction industry is quickly becoming a leader in the area of suicide prevention.

We believe that this resource will help owners, managers, and supervisors to increase awareness and prevent suicide. We must change the culture to recognize that reaching out for help is a sign of strength, and employers can play a powerful role in delivering that message.

The time for action is now, and thanks to this guide, even more owners, managers, and supervisors are equipped to begin efforts at their companies.



PARTNERSHIP FOR  
**WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH**



# SUICIDE PREVENTION IS A HEALTH & SAFETY PRIORITY IN CONSTRUCTION:

## A CALL TO ACTION FOR CONSTRUCTION COMPANY OWNERS, CEOs/PRESIDENTS & C-SUITE LEADERS

Too often, the construction industry's "culture of safety" is limited to the physical aspects and neglects the psychological aspects. According to a recent article in [The New York Times](#), between 1999-2014, there was a **22% increase in mortality among white, middle-aged men** with less than a college education; suicides, opioid overdoses, and alcohol abuse were listed as the causes of this increased mortality.

The subpopulation **most likely to die by suicide** – white, working-age men – dominates the **U.S. construction workforce**. According to a report recently released by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), **workers in construction have the [second-highest suicide rate](#) of all occupational groups.**





## CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY RISK FACTORS FOR SUICIDE

The known **CONTRIBUTING FACTORS FOR SUICIDE** and many aspects of working in construction create a **“PERFECT STORM” OF RISK:**

**“TOUGH GUY”** culture of fearlessness, stoicism, and recklessness

**HIGH PRESSURE** environment of schedule, budget, and quality performance with **POTENTIAL FOR FAILURE** and resulting **SHAME/HUMILIATION**

Exposure to **PHYSICAL STRAIN** or **PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA**

Prevalence of **ALCOHOL** and **SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

Reassignment and **TRAVEL TO REMOTE PROJECTS** creating **SEPARATION FROM FAMILY** and **FRIENDS**

**SEASONAL EMPLOYMENT** leading to a **FRAGMENTED COMMUNITY** and **ISOLATION**

**CHRONIC PAIN** from years of hard, physical, and manual labor

Industry with the associated **HIGHEST** incidence of **PRESCRIPTION OPIOID USE**

**SLEEP DISRUPTION** due to construction work schedules and rotating shifts

**LACK** of access to **MENTAL HEALTH CARE** and **LOW UTILIZATION** of **EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS (EAPS)**

**STIGMA** of **MENTAL ILLNESS**

**ACCESS** to **LETHAL** means like **PILLS** and **FIREARMS**

# WHY CAN'T YOU AND YOUR COMPANY AFFORD TO IGNORE MENTAL HEALTH?

## IT'S TIME TO ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION AND SUICIDE PREVENTION.

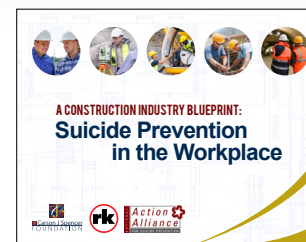
Up to 25% of the U.S. population experiences mental illness at any given time, and nearly two-thirds of people with diagnosable mental disorders do not seek treatment.

Typically the delay for mental health care lasts a decade or more, during which time disorders can worsen. Additionally, untreated or undertreated mental health issues are costly to workplaces.

**Investing in mental health** and substance use disorders **yields positive return on investment** compared to the economic impact of absenteeism, presenteeism, and loss of productivity resulting from untreated mental health conditions.

Unresolved grief and shame exists among employees who have been impacted by suicide – either by a loved one or a coworker's suicide or suicidal behavior, or they struggle with their own suicidal thoughts.

Before you can start the conversation and be a champion of cultural change, you must first **assess your own readiness and reactions** to the issues surrounding **suicide**. Begin your assessment by reading [\*A Construction Industry Blueprint: Suicide Prevention in the Workplace\*](#).



“By putting the SPOTLIGHT ON MENTAL HEALTH, bringing it out of the shadows, we can rejuvenate our employees – giving them and their families healthier, happier lives and us an ENGAGED, PRODUCTIVE WORKFORCE!”

MICHELLE WALKER  
SPECIALIZED SERVICES CO. (SSC)  
PHOENIX, AZ





# A CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY BLUEPRINT: **Suicide Prevention in the Workplace**



## 2 HOW DO YOU FEEL AFTER READING A CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY BLUEPRINT: SUICIDE PREVENTION IN THE WORKPLACE?

### AMBIVALENT? ANXIOUS? ANGRY? CONCERNED? HOPEFUL? DISMISSIVE? UNCERTAIN?

Reflecting on your initial reaction to [A Construction Industry Blueprint: Suicide Prevention in the Workplace](#) may provide insight on your core beliefs about this difficult topic, as this seminal document may be the first you've read about the risks of suicide that could affect your workforce.

Given that suicidal thoughts and many behavioral disorders are invisible, coupled with the fact that most people do not talk about how they have been affected, you may not know the extent to which your employees have been impacted by suicide or mental health issues. **Your stance on this topic will shape how others in your organization respond.**

“As a company leader in a business that is dependent on people to make a difference for our customers, it made me feel like we need to do a better job of making a difference in our employee’s lives...

**WE NEED TO DO BETTER  
AT RECOGNIZING THE  
RISK FACTORS AND  
TAKING ACTION!”**

**STEVE TENNEY**  
STORY CONSTRUCTION CO.  
AMES, IA





3

## ARE YOU COMPELLED TO TAKE ACTION TO PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH AND SPEAK OUT FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION IN THE WORKPLACE?

Leaders who are **“VOCAL, VISIBLE, AND VISIONARY”** step boldly into this arena.

The notion that business leaders are supposed to take action may seem irrelevant or overwhelming. It's common for leaders to assume that mental health professionals are addressing these personal issues and that they should be handled outside of work. The truth is everyone can play a role in suicide prevention, and **leadership engagement is critical in guiding the cultural norms that make suicide prevention efforts successful**. Leaders set the tone for mental wellness and the importance of psychological safety through their words, policies, and actions. Rather than waiting for tragedy to strike, they want to be the first to try and prevent it. The reward for this courage is felt almost immediately, as people tend to come forward and offer their own personal struggles or losses. Then, peers “lean in” to learn more and a domino effect ensues.

Leaders who publicly support their employees' actions to take care of their mental health greatly influence the rest of the workforce.

**While there is no harm in taking the lead, there is great risk in holding back.**

## 4 HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR EMPLOYEES OR THEIR FAMILIES ARE STRUGGLING WITH MENTAL HEALTH?

**NEEDS ASSESSMENTS** and ongoing **EVALUATIONS** are critical to the **SUCCESS** of **MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION** and **SUICIDE PREVENTION** strategies.

Before implementing programs or training sessions, listen first. Needs assessment practices such as focus groups, in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, surveys, and data analysis (e.g., Employee Assistance Program (EAP) usage, absenteeism, etc.) help guide strategy direction and create tremendous buy-in with your team.

After a campaign, training, or policy change has been made, leaders should help ensure that the resulting outcome accomplished the intended goal. Ongoing measurement of employee satisfaction and changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior will guide the future evolution of your company's program.

One tool to help assess your workforce is the Working Minds Workplace Quiz at [www.workingminds.org/quiz.html](http://www.workingminds.org/quiz.html). Also, if you are concerned about yourself, an employee, or a family member, check out Man Therapy's 20-Point Head Inspection at [mantherapy.org/head-inspection/question](http://mantherapy.org/head-inspection/question).





5

## DOES YOUR COMPANY HAVE AN EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)?

An EAP's role is to **PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS** in your **WORKPLACE**

An EAP is a necessary component of a comprehensive and sustained mental health promotion and suicide prevention plan. Not only for larger companies, EAP services can be extended in cost effective ways to smaller employers that are often hit harder when an employee is experiencing overwhelming distress.

Unfortunately, most employees are not even aware of their EAP benefits. To help employees cope with overwhelming life challenges, substance use disorders, and other mental health conditions, ensure they are fully aware of their EAP benefits. While EAPs exist to help individual employees, these services are not generally suited to lead a cultural change in your company.

It is critical to provide continuity of behavioral medical care once it begins, so be sure to evaluate any potential insurance gaps that may exist between your company's EAP and your employees' needs for ongoing behavioral health services. You don't want the increased cost or a lack of insurance coverage for out of network service providers to derail an employee's decision to seek or continue care.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR EAP SELECTION

When selecting an EAP vendor, consider their professionals' experience, confidence, and competence in suicide risk assessment, management, and recovery. Some questions to ask a potential EAP vendor include:

**ARE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS** within the network of your company's (or labor unions') health care insurance plan?

**HOW COMFORTABLE** are your providers in working with someone experiencing suicidal thoughts?

**DO YOUR PROVIDERS** undergo continuing education to learn state-of-the-art suicide risk assessment and management strategies?

**HOW DO YOU TREAT** and support people with suicidal thoughts or suicide grief effectively and collaboratively?



“My company has embraced mental health awareness head on. From company intranet postings to group live sessions, our **LEADERSHIP IS MAKING MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AS RELEVANT AS PERSONAL JOB SAFETY IS TO OUR PHYSICAL WELL-BEING.**

**J. BRAD ROBINSON**  
LENDLEASE  
CHARLOTTE, NC

6

## HOW CAN YOUR COMPANY INTEGRATE MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION AND SUICIDE PREVENTION INTO ITS OVERALL HEALTH AND SAFETY CULTURE?

And, into its wellness and **EMPLOYEE HEALTH BENEFIT** and insurance programs?

Leaders who are truly intent on creating lasting change in their efforts to develop a robust mental health promotion and suicide prevention program will look beyond one training session or single awareness campaign. Rather, they will look for **innovative ways to incorporate changes** so that suicide prevention and mental health promotion **becomes woven into the company health and safety processes** and therefore more likely to be sustained. Pioneering leaders have incentivized mental health practices through their wellness programs. Others have promoted the messages of suicide prevention in their daily toolbox talks or have found ways to integrate supervisory training on having difficult conversations about mental health into their new manager orientations and ongoing leadership development training.



Click images to download flyers designed by the JP Griffin Group

“Realizing that THE BEST COMMUNICATION REQUIRES LISTENING. The company culture must BE OPEN TO ‘HEAR’ WHAT EMPLOYEES ARE SAYING and PROVIDE RESOURCES that can get them in a better mental state.”

DAVID JAMES  
DNF CONSTRUCTION, INC.  
TEMPE, AZ

7

## HOW CAN YOU HELP IMPLEMENT A MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION AND SUICIDE PREVENTION COMMUNICATION PLAN TO SUPPORT A CULTURAL SHIFT IN YOUR COMPANY?

Could your company **PROMOTE THESE TOPICS** in its **NEWSLETTER?** Website? Bulletin boards? **SOCIAL MEDIA?**

To create a cultural shift throughout your company, a long-term communication plan with multiple tactics to support a company's messaging is required. **Develop a coordinated strategy** that promotes key resources along with **hopeful, empowering messages to encourage employees to both seek and give help**. Leaders must be visible and vocal about sharing why mental health promotion and suicide prevention are meaningful to both the company and to them personally. Leaders with “lived experiences” and a willingness to share their testimonies have an unparalleled effect on a workforce. This helps **create a culture of caring and empathy** throughout the organization.

## WHAT OBSTACLES NEED TO BE OVERCOME TO SUCCESSFULLY ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION?

**MONEY, TIME, AND COMPETING PRIORITIES ARE OFTEN THE MASKS WE HIDE BEHIND**

The biggest obstacle that companies usually face is **overcoming the stigma** associated with **suicide and mental health**.

Misperceptions, myths, and marginalization that result in fear can prevent people from doing the right thing. This stigma can be present at all levels of a company, so the best thing leaders can do is to correct their own misinformation.

Just like everyone else, leaders have been conditioned by a culture that creates images of people with mental health conditions and suicidal thoughts as dangerous, unpredictable, and unreliable.

To combat this, spend time with people who are living with these conditions and become familiar with the mental health resources available: call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, meet with your EAP provider, and get a field tour of local mental health and addiction recovery treatment centers.



“I think THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE in the CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY is that it is MALE-DOMINATED. We don’t talk about our feelings in general, and are very unlikely to talk about it with whom we work. It takes a great deal of trust for most men to be open about their mental state, and ADDRESSING THAT OBSTACLE TAKES COURAGE AT THE TOP OF THE ORGANIZATION TO MAKE MENTAL HEALTH A PRIORITY.”

**JOE BURKETT**  
CAFCO CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT, INC.  
BOSTON, MA



### FIRST REGIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION SUMMIT FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

On April 7, 2016, CFMA's Valley of the Sun Chapter presented the inaugural Suicide Prevention Summit, a collaboration between members of the construction industry and mental health professionals to discuss suicide prevention for the construction industry. Designed for construction industry CEOs, CFOs, HR professionals, and safety and risk managers, the event provided a wealth of knowledge and resources to more than 100 industry professionals.

"National data shows that men are four times more likely to die by suicide than women, and Arizona's numbers mirror this statistic," explained Sandra McNally of EMPACT-Suicide Prevention Center. "It is wonderful to see the construction industry's concern about the issue of suicide in their field."

9

## WHAT ARE YOUR PEERS DOING TO CREATE AWARENESS FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION?

Are you willing to **REACH OUT** to at least **ONE** other **CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY LEADER**?

The best way to spread this work is peer to peer, leader to leader.

By creating a community that is leaning in to this topic, we can all learn from each other and share best practices. If you are ready to take expanded action, consider hosting an executive roundtable of construction companies and suppliers within your region to discuss this topic.

Other examples of approaches to spread the word through your leadership network include the following avenues for an expanded dialogue:

**TRADE/INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS** presentations or training programs and publications/newsletters

**PROFESSIONAL PEER** or industry group discussions

**INSURANCE CAPTIVE** risk management roundtables

# HOW CAN I HELP?

## 10 WHAT RESOURCES EXIST TO HELP YOUR MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION?



### RECOMMENDED FOLLOW-UP READING:

[Construction + Suicide Prevention: 10 Action Steps Companies Can Take to Save Lives](#)

Beginning in November 2015, articles have been published on mental health and suicide prevention in industry publications, including:

[CFMA Building Profits](#)

[Risk & Insurance's Workers Compensation Forum](#)

[Maryland Construction Network's e-newsletter \*Networked & Connected\*](#)

[Associated General Contractors of America's \*Constructor\*](#)

[Engineering News-Record \(ENR\)](#)

[CE Risk Management](#)

[Construction Business Owner](#)

[National Association of Women in Construction's \*Image\*](#)

[ENR Southwest](#)

[CE Managing Your Business](#)

[Forbes.com](#)

[Industrial Safety + Hygiene News \(ISHN\)](#)

[Construction Executive](#) (to come in July/August 2016)

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

for Construction Company Leaders:

**THE CARSON J SPENCER FOUNDATION**

[www.carsonjspencer.org](http://www.carsonjspencer.org)

**CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL (CDC)**

[www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/wr/mm6525a1.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/65/wr/mm6525a1.htm)

**MAN THERAPY**

[www.mantherapy.org](http://www.mantherapy.org)

**MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID**

[www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs](http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs)

**NATIONAL ACTION ALLIANCE FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION**

[actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org](http://actionallianceforsuicideprevention.org)

**NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE**

[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

**PARTNERSHIP FOR WORKPLACE MENTAL HEALTH**

[www.workplacementalhealth.org](http://www.workplacementalhealth.org)

**SCREENING FOR MENTAL HEALTH, INC.**

[helpyourselfhelpothers.org](http://helpyourselfhelpothers.org)

**WORKING MINDS FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION**

[www.workingminds.org](http://www.workingminds.org)



# WHAT ADDITIONAL RESOURCES DO YOU NEED TO ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION IN YOUR COMPANY?

**WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!** Please let us know how we can better serve you.

## ABOUT SALLY



**Sally Spencer-Thomas**  
*Co-Founder & CEO*  
Carson J. Spencer Foundation  
Denver, CO  
[sally@carsonjspencer.org](mailto:sally@carsonjspencer.org)  
303-219-5042

DR. SALLY SPENCER-THOMAS is the CEO and Co-Founder of the Carson J Spencer Foundation in Denver, CO – an award-winning organization leading innovation in suicide prevention and the umbrella organization of the Working Minds Program.

She is the Co-Lead of the Workplace Task Force with the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention and Co-Chair of the Workplace Special Interest Group of the International Association for Suicide Prevention.

Dr. Spencer-Thomas has received wide recognition for her work and has been an invited guest to White House Briefings on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in Washington, D.C. and to the World Health Organization's World Suicide Report Launch in Geneva.

## ABOUT CAL



**Cal Beyer**  
*Director of Risk Management*  
Lakeside Industries, Inc.  
Issaquah, WA  
[cal.beyer@lakesideindustries.com](mailto:cal.beyer@lakesideindustries.com)  
425-313-2611

CAL BEYER is the Director of Risk Management at Lakeside Industries in Issaquah, WA. Cal has more than 27 years of professional experience in safety, insurance, and risk management and has served the construction industry in various capacities. He is currently serving on the Executive Committee and as a Co-Lead of the Workplace Task Force of the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention.

Cal is the 2016 recipient of CFMA's esteemed Danny Parrish Leadership Award for his dedication to suicide prevention in the construction industry. A longtime active CFMA member, Cal speaks regularly at CFMA's Annual Conference & Exhibition, frequently presents at CFMA regional conferences, and is an established author for *CFMA Building Profits*. He is also a regular contributor to the Heavy/Highway Subcommittee and *Talking Heavy* e-newsletter.