

# You're Not Alone

*A mental health and suicide prevention blog for the construction industry*



## An Example of a Difference Made

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*by Bob Swanson*

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), approximately 60 percent of individuals living with mental illness don't receive the treatment they need. That is a staggering number of people in need who aren't getting help, and there are a number of barriers that have contributed to this statistic. One of the largest barriers is the stigma and shame associated with mental illnesses. Other barriers include the lack of: mental health facilities, psychiatrists and psychologists and adequate insurance coverage (as I discussed in a previous blog).

Let's think about this. Is there any hesitation by anyone to tell their employer they need time off for a doctor's appointment? What about when an employee requests time off to see a psychiatrist or a therapist? In both instances, the request would hopefully be approved, but the second instance might provoke more lingering questions regarding the employee's long term well-being and dependability. It shouldn't, but that's where we still are as a society, and that's what we need to move away from.

We know that the stigma is alive and well in our industry, but it is also very prevalent in the world of sports. Last year I indicated that it took bizarre public behavior of a Minnesota Viking before medical help was sought. Thankfully that individual is now in recovery and contributing to the team. Another Minnesota athlete recently came forward with his story regarding his journey with serious depression, and there are lessons we can learn from it.

Robert Covington was traded unexpectedly last season from the Philadelphia 76ers to the Minnesota Timberwolves and suffered a season-ending injury shortly after being traded. The sudden trade and serious injury frustrated Robert. He went months without telling his family or team about his worsening mental state. He became angry and began missing rehabilitation sessions. At this point, it would have been easy to blame and admonish Robert. However, Minnesota head coach Ryan Saunders noticed the changes in Robert and instead approached him with his concerns.

The coach cared about Robert as a person and began a life-changing conversation, recommending he see a therapist. Robert now states he felt strongly that, "seeing a therapist was kind of weak." He had to overcome his hesitation of "always being strong." Through therapy and the support of his family, team and coach, Robert has stabilized from both his physical injury *and* his period of deep depression.

Remember you can make a difference! In this case, Ryan Saunders cared and took action to help a person in need. The way we beat this stigma and make a difference is by doing what Ryan Saunders did - don't shame the individual, encourage them to get the help they need.



### About the Author - Bob Swanson

Bob Swanson is the past president of Swanson & Youngdale and the first Chairman of FCA International. He tragically lost his son Michael to suicide on March 13, 2009 at the age of 33. Bob now focuses his efforts on creating awareness of the impact of mental health and suicide in the construction industry.