

You're Not Alone

A mental health and suicide prevention blog for the construction industry



How is your Mental Health Today?

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by Bob Swanson

Prior to meeting with a doctor, you often have to fill out a brief questionnaire asking you to assess your overall mental and physical health on a scale of one to 10. If we did this every day, it would be clear that our mental and physical health fluctuate; this is quite natural. The events and environment of any day can greatly impact how we feel physically and mentally. Have you ever noticed you can feel better on a warm, sunny day rather than a cold, cloudy day? Do you feel better on a Friday afternoon rather than a Monday morning? Our physical health is about our body, and our mental health is about how we think and feel. They are obviously interrelated.

With May being Mental Health Awareness Month, I want to discuss mental health further. First of all, mental health and mental illnesses are two different phenomenon. Let's first describe mental health. Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices. Mental health is something that everyone has, it is intrinsically related to our physical health, it's changeable and we need to pay attention to it. Our overall mental health is impacted by sleep quality, diet, exercise and stress. You may notice that the same items are key to our overall physical health.

How does a mental illness differ from our overall mental health? A mental illness is a disease of the brain that causes mild to severe disturbance in thought or behavior that results in an inability to cope with life's ordinary demands and routines. Like all physical illnesses, mental illnesses are on a continuum of severity. People with a mental illness are able to function quite well with the proper care. The term for that condition is "being in recovery."

During the month of May, I challenge you to examine your company's culture. Is the overall mental health of each employee a top priority each day? Is it safe and ok for employees to discuss their health concerns? If not, why? Are resources readily available for employees to address their mental health concerns?

A beginning step every company can take to protect its employees' mental health is to cultivate an environment that encourages and allows employees to talk about their mental health. Let me close with a highly relevant quote from Mr. Rogers, "Anything that's human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less over-whelming, less upsetting and less scary."



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.