When I have an appointment at a medical clinic, the visit begins with the nurse recording my height and weight. This is a lagging indicator determining what has resulted since my last visit. Next, the nurse registers my temperature and blood pressure, and these are considered some of my vital signs. They are not visible outwardly, but they are an important reflection of what is happening inside me. My vital signs provide a glimpse of my heart and soul.

What are the vital signs of your business? The typical responses to this question generally cover: financial measures (including work backlog), cash reserves, profitability, revenue growth, a positive income statement and strong balance sheet, a strong safety program, and testimonials from key customers. All these items are considered lagging indicators. They can be measured by industry standards, and they are the result of leading a successful business.

What do these vital signs indicate about your employees, who are the heart and soul of your business? Your employees are vital to your business’ success. As you hire new employees, rehire furloughed employees or check in with current employees, how do you assess their vital signs? What do you measure? You can’t rely solely on an individual’s outward appearance, as that can mask the true vital signs hidden beneath.

Let’s go back to my medical appointment example above. When I get my temperature checked and blood pressure taken, I trust the instruments to be accurate and the nurse to use them properly. I trust that the nurse cares about my well-being. A safe environment has been established that allows me to discuss my physical and mental condition. Has your company established a safe environment for your workers to discuss their physical and mental conditions?

In today’s current environment, we have each endured the stress and strain of living amidst a pandemic. This pandemic has disrupted our normal daily lives. It’s affected how we work, how our children learn, our ability to socialize, our ability to worship and so much more. We’re not sure what the new normal will be, nor when it will come about.

We have all experienced the last few months differently and have had little opportunity to share our fears. As you think about what your employees have faced or are facing, consider these words from Anais Nin, “We don’t see things as they are. We see them as we are.” Your vital signs might be ok, but what about your employees’ vital signs? What are they feeling, what are their fears and what are their concerns?

It is more critical than ever that your employees know you truly care about their wellbeing. Difficult times like these are when we need each other. Remember, we’re all in this together. Our only path forward is through, and we’re only going to make it through by supporting one another.
As touched on earlier, people living with mental illnesses and substance abuse disorders (and those in recovery) are especially vulnerable right now. It is critical they stay on their treatment plan, including use of their prescription medications and maintain contact with their medical provider and support group. Thankfully, many medical providers and support groups quickly adopted virtual meeting technology to adapt to our current environment.

Here are several resources available to help:
- http://workplacementalhealth.org/covid19tips (COVID-19 Mental Health Tips)
- https://www.samhsa.gov/ (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

We all are in an unprecedented and uniquely challenging time. But remember, neither you nor your employees are alone. We will pull through these times together.

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.