

# You're Not Alone

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



## Living with a Mental Illness

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*by Bob Swanson*

As I've said in the past, all illnesses (including mental illnesses) are on a continuum of severity. All illnesses will exhibit improvement and decline, often without any noticeable reason. Illnesses are no one's fault, and the person living with the illness does not want it. A distinction with mental illnesses is that the afflicted person doesn't exhibit any visible signs and usually masks their illness in shame.

A few months ago, I received an anonymous email through a friend providing a description of what it is like living with a mental illness. The email is lengthy, so I'm only providing selected portions to provide some insight. The email's writer uses mounting and continuous snow as a means to describe what it feels like to live with a mental illness in the following words:

*"Some days it's only a couple of inches. It's a pain and you still make it to work; but it is still snowing and who knows how bad it might get tonight, so you leave work early, and head home.*

*Some days it snows a foot. You spend an hour shoveling out your driveway and you're late to work. Your back and hands hurt from all of the shoveling. You leave work early again because it is really snowing.*

*Some days it snows four feet, and you shovel all morning but your street never gets plowed. You are not making it to work, or anywhere else for that matter. You are so sore and tired, so you just go back to bed. By the time you wake up, all of your shoveling has filled back in with snow. People have called from work, but you don't feel like calling them back because you're too tired from all of the shoveling. Plus they don't get this much snow at their house so they don't understand why you are still stuck at home. They just think that you are lazy or weak, although they rarely come out and say it.*

*When it snows all of the time, you get worn all the way down. You get tired of hurting all of the time from shoveling, but if you don't shovel on the light days, it builds up to something unmanageable on the heavy days. The snow continues unconcerned if it buries you or the whole world."*

**The message to everyone is grab a shovel, and help your neighbor in need.** "Depression is blind chemistry and physics, like snow. Like the weather, it is a mindless process, powerful and unpredictable with great potential for harm." That said, we are not helpless. If we take action at every level, we can stop losing so many people to these illnesses.

Let's end the silence, and open the door to having open dialogue about mental illness without any judgement. IT'S AN ILLNESS!



### 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.