The Differing Perceptions of Physical and Mental Illnesses

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by Bob Swanson

The NFL season has begun, and every Monday morning each team reports any new injuries and players physically unable to practice. On the other hand, in the event of non-physical issues, teams typically state that the player is unable to practice for non-specified reasons. Why are physical and non-physical issues treated differently?

On many occasions the non-physical issues later become public only after law enforcement personnel become involved. At that point the individual is typically blamed for their behavior without analysis of what prompted the behavior. There is a hesitancy to ask if the behavior was caused by a mental health issue, especially in male-dominated industries such as sports and construction.

Recently, the Minnesota Vikings excluded Everson Griffin from practicing because of his behavior. As his behavior became more serious, law enforcement personnel became involved. Thankfully, Everson is now getting the medical care that he needs. I am very relieved that this situation didn’t result in a suicide attempt.

In my opinion, Everson’s unusual behavior was a cry for help. Rather than being excluded from practicing with his team, he needed medical care. Two years ago a quarterback for the Minnesota Vikings, by the name of Teddy Bridgewater, tore his ACL in practice and he was immediately transported to a hospital. Everson’s medical condition required the same immediate medical care. Unfortunately, the stigma and shame of mental illness continues to hold back impacted individuals from getting the care they need.

When an employee exhibits warning signs of a mental crisis (such as what I’ve discussed in previous blogs), treat it in the same manner as if it were a serious physical injury. It is critical to stay with the individual until trained personnel are contacted and available to assess the situation, and determine the care required.

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.

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