



## BEYOND THE HARDHAT: TACKLING SUICIDE PREVENTION HEAD-ON

Construction workers are accustomed to talking about physical safety. This session expands that same safety mindset to mental health and suicide prevention. The goal is not to turn supervisors into therapists. The goal is to help people recognize when someone may be struggling, respond with empathy, connect them to appropriate help, and build a workplace where asking for help is treated as a strength.



September 8, 2026



Virtual

PREPARED FOR:



## UNDERSTANDING THE RISK

1 WHAT MAKES CONSTRUCTION WORKERS MORE VULNERABLE?

2 RECOGNIZING WARNING SIGNS

## EMPATHY, VULNERABILITY, AND SUPPORT

3 EMPATHY IS NOT FIXING

4 DIRECT CARING CONVERSATION

5 BUILDING A CULTURE WHERE PEOPLE SPEAK UP

6 APPENDIX: WHEN CONCERN BECOMES A CRISIS

7 APPENDIX: SUBSTANCE USE AND MENTAL HEALTH

8 RESOURCES

# COURSE OBJECTIVES

*“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.”*  
– Benjamin Franklin

- Understand the alarming statistics and prevalence of suicide in the construction industry.
- Identify key work-related stressors and demographic factors contributing to mental health issues.
- Recognize the signs and symptoms of mental distress and suicidal thoughts among colleagues.
- Develop empathy and active listening skills to better support struggling workers.
- Learn how being vulnerable is the key to eradicating this situation.
- Foster a culture of vulnerability and emotional openness within the workplace.
- Implement mental health programs and resources tailored to the construction industry.
- Train supervisors and managers in mental health awareness and supportive communication.
- Promote work-life balance and effective stress management techniques.
- Address substance abuse issues and their connection to mental health.
- Learn crisis response protocols and intervention strategies for immediate support.
- Understand the importance of follow-up and continued support for at-risk individuals.

## **Important Safety Note:**

**If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, has attempted suicide, has a serious injury, or cannot stay safe, treat the situation as an emergency. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department. In the U.S., call or text 988 for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Do not leave a person alone when immediate safety is a concern.** For nonemergency situations, you can text BRIGHTER to 741741 to reach someone familiar with the industry.

During this training, participants may encounter sensitive material. You may step away, take a break, or seek support at any time.

\*Eric is not a licensed therapist. This course is designed to understand suicide prevention, reduce stress, and start the conversation about this important issue. This workbook is to be utilized as a learning tool only, and is not a substitute for clinical assessment, emergency response, or professional mental-health care.

# UNDERSTANDING THE RISK

## What Can Make Construction Workers More Vulnerable?

Risk is rarely caused by one factor. Construction can combine demanding physical work, deadlines, changing crews, travel, seasonal or project-based employment, financial pressure, pain or injury, sleep disruption, and a culture that may reward toughness and discourage asking for help.

- Long or irregular hours and fatigue
- Job insecurity, layoffs, project uncertainty, or financial stress
- High-pressure deadlines and production demands
- Physical pain, injury, or disability
- Isolation, commuting, travel, or extended time away from home
- Relationship or family stress
- Substance use or misuse
- Grief, trauma, or major life changes
- Stigma around mental health and fear of being judged
- Limited awareness of available resources

These factors do not mean someone will become suicidal. They are reasons to pay attention, strengthen protective factors, and make support easier to access.

Which pressures are most common in your work environment?

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## Understanding the Scope of the Issue

According to the CDC, in 2025:

- 1 in 2,300 construction workers committed suicide
- The two most common means used were firearms and overdose, specifically via opioids
- 89% of the construction industry is male, 11% is female
- Men in construction are 5.4x more likely to commit suicide than women in the industry

# UNDERSTANDING THE RISK

## Recognizing Warning Signs

Warning signs are signals that a person may need support. One sign alone does not prove that someone is suicidal. Look for significant changes, combinations of signs, or behavior that is unusual for the person.

- Talking about feeling hopeless, trapped, worthless, or like a burden
- Withdrawing from coworkers, family, or normal activities
- Marked changes in mood, behavior, appearance, or work performance
- Giving away important possessions or putting affairs in order
- Increased substance use or risky behavior
- Severe agitation, anxiety, anger, or emotional pain
- Sudden calmness after a period of intense distress
- Talking about death, suicide, or not wanting to be here
- Statements suggesting there is no reason to continue or no way forward

When a person mentions suicide, do not dismiss it as attention-seeking or assume that asking about suicide will create suicidal thoughts. A calm, direct question can open the door to help.

What changes in a coworker would cause you to check in?

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### **Construction Scenario: What Do You Notice?**

A normally engaged crew member has become withdrawn, is missing work, seems exhausted, has started drinking more after shifts, and recently said, "I don't know how much longer I can keep doing this."

What do you notice? What would you do next?

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# EMPATHY, VULNERABILITY, AND SUPPORT

## Empathy Is Not Fixing

Empathy means trying to understand what another person may be experiencing without immediately minimizing, judging, or taking over. You do not have to agree with someone's perspective to acknowledge that their experience is real to them.

Use the **L.A.S.T.** listening model:

| Step               | What It Looks Like                                |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Listen             | Give full attention; reduce distractions.         |
| Acknowledge        | Reflect what you heard: 'That sounds like a lot.' |
| Stay curious       | Ask open questions rather than assuming.          |
| Take the next step | Connect the person with appropriate support.      |

One listening habit I want to strengthen:

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## Vulnerability is a Leadership Skill

Vulnerability does not mean sharing everything with everyone. In a workplace context, healthy vulnerability can mean acknowledging that stress affects people, admitting when you need support, asking for help, or saying, "I don't have all the answers, but let's find the right resource." Leaders can normalize help-seeking by modeling appropriate openness, responding respectfully to concerns, and making support visible and accessible.

# EMPATHY, VULNERABILITY, AND SUPPORT

## Direct, Caring Conversations

A supportive conversation does not require perfect words. It requires presence, concern, and a willingness to connect the person with appropriate help.

A simple approach:

1. **NOTICE** — Name the change you have observed without judgment.
2. **ASK** — Ask directly and calmly whether they are thinking about suicide.
3. **LISTEN** — Give them space to speak. Do not rush to solve the problem.
4. **CONNECT** — Encourage professional or crisis support and help remove barriers to getting it.
5. **STAY WITH THE PROCESS** — If immediate safety is a concern, do not leave the person alone; follow your emergency protocol and escalate.

### Phrases That Open the Door:

- I've noticed you've seemed different lately. How are you doing?
- You don't seem like yourself. Do you want to talk?
- I'm concerned about you, and I'm here to listen.
- When you say you can't keep doing this, are you thinking about suicide?
- Would you be willing to talk with someone who can help?
- Let's figure out the next step together.

### Phrases to Avoid:

- Just toughen up.
- Everyone has problems.
- Think about how good you have it.
- You'd never actually do that.
- Keep this between us.

### Practice: Rewrite the Response

A coworker says: "I'm done. I can't do this anymore." Write a response that communicates concern and opens dialogue.

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# EMPATHY, VULNERABILITY, AND SUPPORT

## Building a Culture Where People Speak Up

A prevention culture is built through everyday leadership, not only during a crisis. Employees are more likely to ask for help when they believe they will be treated with respect, that confidentiality will be handled appropriately, and that seeking support will not automatically be interpreted as weakness.

- Include mental health in safety conversations and toolbox talks.
- Train supervisors in warning signs and supportive communication.
- Make EAP, 988, benefits, and community resources visible and easy to access.
- Create clear crisis-response and escalation procedures.
- Address workload, fatigue, harassment, bullying, and chronic stressors, not just individual coping.
- Build regular check-ins into supervision.
- Recognize that asking for help is compatible with professionalism and accountability.
- Review substance-use policies and recovery-support practices.
- Provide post-crisis support and follow-up.
- Measure awareness, resource access, and perceptions of psychological safety.

### What Can We Control?

Within Our Control

Needs Broader Organizational Action

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### **When Concern Becomes a Crisis**

If someone appears to be in immediate danger, has made a suicide attempt, or cannot stay safe, treat the situation as an emergency. Do not leave them alone. Follow the organization's emergency response plan and contact emergency services.

For serious but non-immediate concern, encourage the person to contact 988 or another qualified crisis/mental-health resource. When appropriate, offer to stay with them while they make the call.

U.S. crisis resources: call or text 988. For immediate emergencies, call 911. OSHA provides employer and construction-specific suicide prevention resources.

#### **Crisis Response Checklist**

- ☐ Stay calm and take the concern seriously.
- ☐ Move to a private, safe setting when possible.
- ☐ Ask directly about suicide when appropriate.
- ☐ Do not leave the person alone if immediate safety is a concern.
- ☐ Contact 911 for an immediate emergency.
- ☐ Call/text 988 for crisis support when appropriate.
- ☐ Follow your organization's crisis and reporting protocol.
- ☐ Document according to policy and protect confidentiality.
- ☐ Arrange appropriate follow-up.

### **Resources**

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline — Call or text 988 in the United States.

911 — For immediate emergencies.

OSHA — Mental Health (Suicide Prevention) resources, including construction-specific materials.

CPWR — Center for Construction Research and Training, mental-health and construction workforce data/resources.

Construction Industry Alliance for Suicide Prevention (CIASP) — construction-specific suicide prevention resources and training.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) — suicide prevention education, resources, and support.

### **Substance Use and Mental Health**

Substance use and mental-health concerns can overlap. In construction, substance-related risks deserve attention as part of a broader safety strategy. CPWR reported that in 2022 there were 17,100 overdose deaths among construction workers ages 16–64, compared with 5,200 suicide deaths and 991 fatal work injuries.

The goal of a supervisor is not to diagnose addiction. Focus on observable behavior, safety, performance expectations, and connection to appropriate resources.

- Do not shame, threaten, or publicly confront someone about suspected substance use.
- Follow company policy and established fitness-for-duty or impairment procedures.
- Separate immediate safety concerns from longer-term performance management.
- Know where employees can access treatment, recovery, EAP, or crisis resources.
- Use consistent expectations and document concerns appropriately.

### **Opioids, Injury, and Addiction**

Construction workers may be prescribed opioids to manage pain following an injury. In some cases, workers may feel pressure to return to work before they have fully recovered, using medication to manage or mask pain so they can continue working. While opioids can be appropriate for short-term pain management, continued use can lead to tolerance, dependence, or opioid use disorder for some individuals. Recognizing this connection reinforces the importance of proper injury care, safe pain management, early support, and access to appropriate treatment and recovery resources.

# CONTACT INFO

*Helping leaders and their teams communicate effectively, build stronger relationships, and achieve lasting results.*



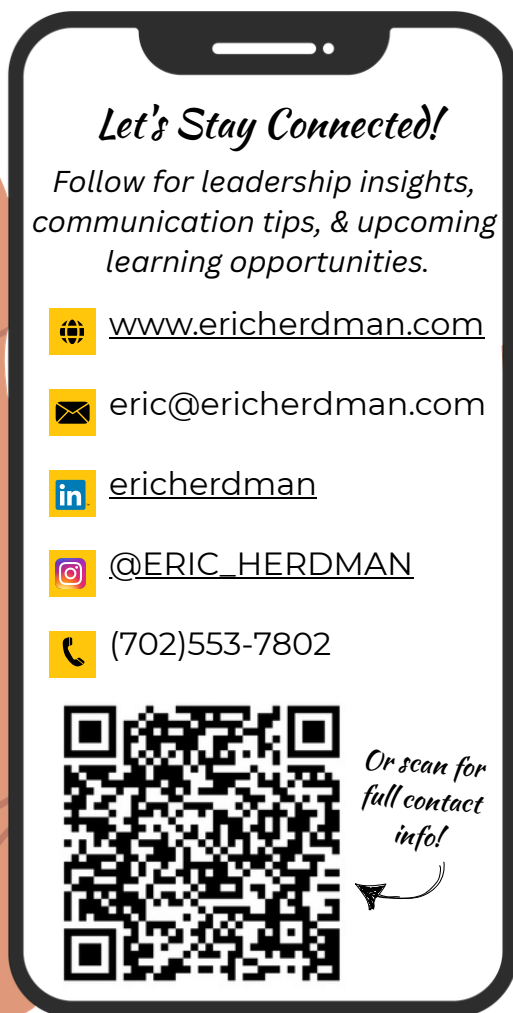
## Thank You for Participating!

### Your Growth Doesn't End Here

Thank you for investing in your professional development. The skills, insights, and strategies you've explored throughout this program are most valuable when put into practice.

As you move forward, challenge yourself to apply one new idea, start one new habit, and take one action that supports your continued growth.

Remember: ***Small, consistent actions lead to meaningful results.***



## Ready to Continue Your Growth Journey?

Whether you're looking for group or individual classes, I'd love to help.

### Services Offered:

- Customized Group Workshops
- Public Live Virtual Training Sessions
- One-on-One or Small Group Coaching

### Topics Covered:

- Leadership Development
- Communication Skills Training
- Emotional Intelligence Development
- Workplace Wellness & Resilience

*For a full list of courses or for more information or registration for one of our public sessions, just go to:*  
<https://ericherdman.com/programs>

# YOUR WORKSHOP FACILITATOR

*Eric Herdman*



Eric Herdman is an organizational development expert and entrepreneur, who delivers instructional workshops on improving communication and leadership skills and developing the core skills necessary for career growth. For 3 decades in-person and virtually for over 5 years, Eric has entertained, informed, educated, and engaged audiences into action.

Herdman graduated Ohio University as an Exercise Physiology major. After college he started an emcee business, serving as master of ceremonies for beauty pageants and festivals. Returning to his passion for exercise in 2004, he raised the \$1,000,000 necessary to open a startup called the Red Rock Running Company. He grew the business into one of the largest specialty retailers in the southwestern United States market, with two locations. Although he sold the business 6 years later, it continues to operate today in Henderson, Nevada.

For over 38 years Eric has walked the walk as a competitive ultra-endurance athlete, competing in 103 triathlons, 6 marathons and 35 ultra marathons. Eric holds the 12-hour course record at both "Flatlanders" race and "Race Against the Clock" as well as the 50-mile course record in the "Valley of Fire" race. He has also run in many 24 hour races, including the "Ultimate Treadmill Challenge", running 24 hours on a treadmill.

Eric started speaking professionally in 1996, and draws on his experiences as a small business owner and competitive athlete to help others learn and grow. He works with a variety of clients from multibillion-dollar pharmaceutical companies to top financial institutions to national associations and government agencies. Eric's clients include one of the world's largest franchise health club chains, who utilized his strategies to reach a \$20,000 increase in revenue in the first month after his training. Eric was on the forefront of virtual training as during the onset of remote and hybrid work, Eric redesigned and updated his studio to professional equipment and his own production software to ensure top quality education whether clients choose an in-person or on-line format. He has delivered over 1,000 virtual presentations, with a total audience of over 50,000 people.

Eric has published several books including "Actions Speak Louder Than Words," and "The Complete Guide to Managing Everything, Everyone and Every Task." Most recently, he has updated his "Time, Energy, and Focus" e-book, featuring a technique he created to improve productivity, and he released an additional e-book, "The Power of Communication". Eric has also developed several online courses focusing on conflict resolution and building empathy.

Whether you're looking to improve your productivity, empower your leaders, or build a more collaborative team, Herdman has the knowledge and skills to help you and your company achieve top-level success.