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ABC Chairman's Message: During Mental Health Awareness Month, make mental health part of your company's safety program

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Vera Vadeboncoeur

Few in construction would dispute that the eight million people the industry employs nationwide are our most valuable asset. These men and women use tools every day. In May, which is Mental Health Awareness Month, we focus on making sure they have the tools they need for suicide prevention and to enhance their mental health.

May 1-5 was also Construction Safety Week. With construction being the industry most at risk for suicide deaths, we must make mental health as much of a priority as our employees' physical safety. This awareness was behind ABC's Total Human Health Initiative, which is focused on building a resilient workforce connected through relationships and engaged in performing construction work to a high standard. The initiative incorporates a whole-person approach to engage a person's body, mind, heart and soul; psychological safety that is respectful and inclusive of a diverse workforce; acknowledgement of the risk of distraction; and impairment and responding with appropriate care.

This year, ABC added total human health as a key component of an effective safety program in its STEP Safety Management System, which for more than 30 years has provided the framework to measure, strengthen and build industry-leading safety programs. Any company can participate in STEP by visiting abc.org/step.

Just as ABC has done, I hope you will incorporate Total Human Health into your company's safety program. Your employees' overall health is key to establishing an industry-leading safety culture. Raise the bar by providing support and acknowledging preoccupying concerns in your team members' daily lives.

There is much work to be done to equip our workforce with the mental health tools they need. Both ABC MA and our national parent organization will continue to look deeper into the complexity of conditions that affect our workforce's decision-making process. As we learn more, we'll pass on additional insights into how to protect our industry's most valuable assets.

Vera Vadeboncoeur is the 2023 ABC MA chair and is controller at Fernandes Masonry, Inc., New Bedford, MA

New England Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540