

Safety, Mental Health, and Peak Performance

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The construction industry has always been stressful, but according to a recent global study compiled by the International Metal Worker's Federation, stress and burnout are on the rise around the world.

Our workers are being asked to do more with less. The physical, emotional, and mental demands are tremendous. Many employees are working 60, 80, even 100-hour weeks, sometimes for extended periods of time.

Think about some of the people you know who have been in the industry for a while. Do they look older than they are? Do they appear to be beaten down, worn out, and exhausted? Who do you know in the industry who is overweight and out of shape? How many folks do you know who have developed stress related illnesses such as autoimmune maladies, heart disease, high blood pressure, or diabetes?

Many of the people I coach use nicotine and caffeine in the morning to get started and alcohol and recreational or prescription drugs at night to calm down and be able to sleep. They tend to use both prescription and over the counter medications to control many of the physical symptoms of stress such as headaches and other pains, stomach and digestive problems, allergies, fatigue, anxiety, and irritability. The need to control pain is a contributing factor to the opioid crisis. These folks tend to avoid addressing the underlying stress, which, much of the time, is the root cause of many of these physical symptoms.

The World Health Organization projects that by 2030, depression will cause more premature deaths and years of disability than cancer, stroke, heart disease, war, or accidents.



In the United States in 2021, we spent over \$535.3 billion on prescription drugs. In 2019, 4.22 billion prescriptions were written (14 for every man, woman, and child in the U.S.). We had 275 overdose deaths per day in 2021, many of these from opioids. We spent almost \$38 billion for over-the-counter medications in 2021. The point is that we take a lot of drugs and medications to treat sickness and disease and function in the world. Despite the use of these drugs, our life expectancy has dropped from 79 to 76 over the last three years.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, per capita spending on healthcare in the US (2018) was \$11,172 per person, which is the highest in the world. We spend double what the next highest country spends. And yet, compared to all other countries, we have the highest rate of obesity, and we have seen a recent increase in mental health issues. The

causes of death (heart disease, cancer, COVID, accidents, stroke, and chronic respiratory issues), 40% are caused by lifestyle choices and could be prevented. The World Health Organization says that 80% of all illnesses are caused by or made worse by stress.

The construction industry has the second highest suicide rate of any industry according to the Centers for Disease Control.

Could you manage the work to accommodate them? It's certainly worth a try.

The other aspect to this issue is cultural. Our industry not only values hard work, but it tends to draw folks who are highly

They tend to have lower emotional self-awareness, lower empathy, and lower emotional expression along with higher

folks aren't aware of their emotions and even if they were, they would likely not express them. They are highly independent and assertive and don't have great empathy, so they don't understand others well. Couple this with a hypermasculine work environment where you can't be vulnerable, can't ask fo(vwf0 10 27 568.4001 Tm(w)11TEAu .elpBT and don(ork)30 (en1 (uggll.g 27

He was overweight and smoking two packs of cigarettes per day. On his project, they were working a lot of long hours and there were a lot of unhappy people. His initial reaction to the program was negative. He didn't think the course would help

and after EQi in the chart above.

Keep in mind that 100 is the mean, or average, similar to an IQ test. This person had self-actualization (having purpose and meaning) of 59. Imagine a person with an IQ of 59.

Look at the six indicators of burnout (self-regard, self-actualization, interpersonal relationship, stress tolerance, happiness, and optimism). The before scores are all extremely low. Now look at the after scores. The change in this participant

and indicates a shift in behavior. This is a new human being. In his words: "Without the program I would have never known where I was and how to get me out of the hole that I was in. Look at these techniques and no matter how ridiculous you may think they are, just try them and see what happens to you. Because it does work." He lost 20 pounds, quit smoking, and was much happier with his life and work. The project was a big success and led to a promotion for this participant.

The moral of this story is that everyone can turn this dynamic around with some focus on their emotional and physical

wellness and peak performance. We CAN create an industry that supports and takes care of our people! We also have a great tool called the Body Battery Inventory that measures stressors versus recovery activities. *See the link at the end to download.*

As important as these areas are for better safety, performance, and well-being, the third component to the Primal Safety Program is human connection and emotional intelligence. When you connect people better in behavior



About the Author

Brent Darnell is the owner and president of [Brent Darnell International](#) and a mechanical engineer and a graduate of Georgia Tech. He is a leading authority on emotional intelligence and a pioneer in its use in the construction industry to improve social competence and leadership skill among managers and