One Every 15 Minutes

Sadly, that’s the average number of suicides in the US—95 per day [1]. And more recent data (2007) show people aged 45-54—those you’re likely to encounter in your workplace—now have the highest suicide rate of any age group [2].

Statistics tell the numbers but not the reasons. Experts do agree, however, that sometimes warning signs are evident. Dr. John Westefeld, professor of counseling psychology at the University of Iowa, says that if you have a co-worker who is under a great deal of stress, who seems depressed and hopeless, or has made comments about attempting suicide, it’s very important to reach out to him or her. As difficult as it is to bring up the subject, do not be afraid to ask directly, “Have you been feeling so bad that you’ve thought about harming yourself?” Many people will appreciate the permission to talk about what’s bothering them [3].

Dr. Westefeld has researched and taught on suicide for more than 30 years and also has experience with a close friend’s death by suicide. He considers a willingness to reach out one of three key elements in preventing suicide. Another is knowledge—are you familiar with the warning signs? or the resources available to help a suicidal person? The third key factor is treatment, which a person often resists initially. Your continuing to encourage them to seek help can make the difference.

A workplace often has referral mechanisms for treatment such as an Employee Assistance Program and is also a good place to build knowledge with targeted communications. And for many people it’s a strong community that gives them more connections than they may have with family [4]. So let’s take care of each other and combat this tragic problem.

1 – American Association of Suicidology - www.suicidology.org/web/guest/home