



Happiness on site: How to improve the mental well-being of your skilled workers and boost the safety and efficiency of your business

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A Letter from the CEO

When I started Alder Airfield Services in 2020, I thought my biggest business concern was going to be finding and establishing regular clients and partners in an industry I was not wholly familiar with yet.

Along with the excitement and stress of starting a business, something that quickly became my biggest concern was the mental well-being of the people I would be hiring.

As a former educator, teen therapist and mental health mentor, I knew what red flags to look for in workers. At my previous AOA job, I had seen them all: lack of communication, little collaboration, and worst of all, no pride in the importance of the work they were doing. I wanted to build a company that was going to be different.

Since 2020, I've been on a mission to understand how we can better support the mental health of skilled workers.

I started compiling research about the skilled trades, what companies were doing to mitigate mental-health-related risks on job sites, and how they were supporting their workers. What I discovered was that, for the most part, the skilled trades haven't prioritized the mental health of their workers with the same intensity and investment as they do office workers. Old news, but news to me, nonetheless.

Of course, there were the obvious barriers, such as the seasonal and transient nature of construction industries and transportation safety businesses like Alder. It meant that investing in robust worksite wellness programs and EAPs didn't make much business sense, but what could we offer that might help? I sought to find out.

I also began to understand the deep and complex ways time can either work with you or against you. Whether it's a contractor delay or inclement weather, time is money. Taking time off to address an employee's mental health? That's not in the budget, but what resources can we provide that are free or low-investment? I wanted to figure that out, too.

Moreover, I kept hiring temp and seasonal workers who were usually in need of a short-term job so they could earn money during their search for a permanent position. We understood holding a flag for eight hours a day on a tarmac in the Texas heat was not anyone's idea of a dream job, but how could we make it better for folks needing someone to lift them up?

If we bring more happiness to the worksite, we create an environment of safety, inclusion, open communication and job satisfaction—no matter what the industry or the job position inside that industry.

Whether you are managing a team of construction workers or a team keeping everyone on the airfield safe, there are many benefits to implementing well-being on worksites.



Increased safety

Alder has experienced a near-perfect safety record since its founding in 2020. This is due in part to our company's commitment to workers' mental health.



Motivation

In an industry that has a high turnover rate, most of Alder's workers are either permanent, full-time employees or they are temp workers who regularly sign up for shifts when we need them.



Enhance brand reputation

The better your safety record, the better your reputation, and you can have both if you're willing to invest a bit of time and money in worksite wellness.



Boost personal satisfaction

Many of our workers tell me they have never had a job like the one at Alder, and that's because they join us onsite and are welcomed into a team that sees human value first. Period.

Today, Alder is an award-winning safety company that protects and improves the safety and efficiency of airport projects. We offer contractors services ranging from resident project representatives, escorting, flagging, and barricading, and we work with one of the world's biggest and busiest airports — and at small local airfields, too.

Our people come to work every day with smiles on their faces, can-do attitudes, and a commitment to service that is second to none. I attribute this healthy work environment to the investment we've made in ensuring our workers feel safe, physically—and emotionally.

How to use this information

Throughout this workbook, I hope to show you some of the benefits of employing workplace wellness on site and how it can transform your team into a happy, empowered group of individuals who know their worth and show up every day to demonstrate it.

I believe I was called to found Alder Airfield Services because there was (and continues to be) a need in the airfield safety space to recognize the importance of workers' mental wellness. As much as I love the aviation industry and establishing relationships with the folks who fuel a fascinating industry that's worth \$3.5 trillion in GDP, I knew that my background in education and therapy has given me a unique seat at the table.

And if the airfield safety space needs help, then it's likely other industries similar to ours do, too.

**THE AVIATION
INDUSTRY IS
WORTH \$3.5
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IN GDP.**

Why mental health matters in the skilled trades

A growing number of companies are adopting kindness as a formal or informal part of their organizational culture.

Whether through kindness policies, core values, or specific initiatives, companies such as Google, Starbucks, Zappos and Patagonia recognize that fostering a culture of kindness leads to higher employee satisfaction, better teamwork, enhanced customer loyalty, and stronger community relationships.

Suffolk, a Boston-area construction company, recently pushed OSHA to encourage worksites to add suicide prevention training among workers.

John Fish, the CEO of Suffolk, wrote a letter to OSHA in collaboration with a veteran's wellness nonprofit, which stated: "Our collective goal as an industry should be for every worker to return home to their families each day," they wrote in the letter. "It is our job as industry leaders to train, support and educate our workers on the symptoms of mental illness and identifying suicide risk factors, which should be taken as seriously as any jobsite risk. The time is now to rally our entire industry to address this dire issue."

Finding the root cause: psychosocial safety on the job site

Many laborers are left to feel emotionally unsafe on the worksite for a variety of reasons. There could be language and culture barriers between employees that result in communication breakdowns. It could be lack of communication, unsupportive leadership, or poor work-life balance.

Employees sometimes experience fear of retaliation, and expectations are unclear. These places can be described as toxic, high-stress

and high-conflict. There is little appreciation and little room – if any – for mental wellness.

American Psychological Association: how to identify a psychosocially dangerous workplaces

Psychosocial Danger

- **Fear of retaliation:** Employees hesitate to express concerns due to fear of negative consequences.
- **Toxic leadership:** Managers dismiss or belittle employee concerns, creating a hostile atmosphere.
- **Overwork and burnout:** High pressure, unrealistic expectations, and poor work-life balance lead to stress.
- **Discrimination and exclusion:** Certain groups are marginalized or excluded, and diversity is undervalued.
- **Lack of mental health support:** Little to no access to mental health resources, with stigmatization of mental illness.
- **High conflict:** Frequent disagreements, competition, and mistrust among colleagues create a tense environment.
- **Unclear roles:** Ambiguity in roles and goals leads to confusion, anxiety, and frustration.
- **Lack of recognition:** Employees' efforts go unacknowledged, leading to disengagement and low morale.
- **Unfair practices:** Favoritism, inequality, and lack of transparency in decision-making breed resentment.



How high-stress environments can lead to conflict and violence

Psychosocial safety in the workplace is important for all industries, but it's particularly important in high-risk environments like construction, where stress, physical demands, and hazards are ever-present. Attention to psychosocial safety can have a profound impact on both mental and physical outcomes for workers.

Lack of autonomy. When staff feel they don't have much to contribute or their voices and opinions don't matter, it can weigh on self-esteem and contribute to anxiety and depression.

Poor work conditions. Too heavy a workload, feeling rushed or not having enough time to finish a task adds strain.

Inadequate training. By their very nature, industrial sites are high-stress and demanding environments. There is pressure to meet deadlines while performing physically demanding tasks and dealing with dangerous conditions.

Bullying. Microaggressions and implicit bias can undermine safety on a worksite by creating an environment of tension, exclusion, and mistrust, particularly for people of color. When stereotypes and subtle discriminatory behaviors go unchecked, they contribute to stress and distraction, which can affect focus and decision-making, increasing the risk of accidents and conflicts.

Violence. Mental health struggles in the workplace can also contribute to an increased risk of violence in many industries, such as construction.

Alder's work is relatively unique, but consider the typical road construction site and you will have a good picture of our daily landscape. It's busy, loud, aggressive, and like construction teams, how much work we can get done in one is dependent on many factors out of our control, like weather and unanticipated timeline hiccups (such as a global pandemic, for example).

But it can also be monotonous and make for long days standing in one spot holding a sign up. If one of our worker's mental health isn't where they deserve it to be, we know that they run the risk of externalizing what's happening on the inside.

While anxiety and depression primarily lead to internal struggles, such as emotional distress, absenteeism, and reduced productivity, under certain circumstances, these mental health challenges can escalate into behaviors that may contribute to conflict, aggression, or even violence on site.

Statistics show heightened risk of injury and violence in construction fields

Although the relationship is complex and often mediated by other factors, it should not be ignored. If the state of the construction industry says anything about the state of workers like the ones we hire at Alder, then it's important to recognize the startling statistics showing work-related fatalities and injuries among construction workers:

- **Black or African American fatalities accounted for 13.4 percent (734) of all fatalities in 2022 but represented 33.4 percent (175) of fatalities from homicides.**
- **The second highest cause of fatalities to Black or African American workers was injuries due to violence and other injuries by persons or animals (199)**
- **Foreign-born Hispanic or Latino workers accounted for 63.5 percent of total Hispanic or Latino worker fatalities (1,248) in 2022.**
- **Similarly, women made up 8.1 percent (445) of all workplace fatalities but accounted for 15.3 percent (80) of homicides in 2022.**
- **Workers in the 55 to 64 age group continued to have the highest number of fatalities in 2022 with 1,175 (21.4 percent of total fatalities), up from 1,140 in 2021. Transportation incidents were the highest cause of fatalities for this age group (455), followed by falls, slips, and trips (251).**

US Bureau of Labor Statistics

Solutions for creating better work environments for all

It takes a workplace environment where you feel confident and safe enough to reach out to someone and let them know that they're struggling. It doesn't mean that the workers are weak or don't have the qualities we need, but it's a soft skill to be able to reach out to your coworker and make sure they're OK.

People are motivated to seek therapy for a variety of reasons, but many show up feeling like they don't have a voice in their relationships or at work. Those same people are also managing depression and anxiety disorders.

While determining which came first—the mental health concerns or the feeling of low autonomy—is a bit of a chicken-before-the-egg scenario, the important part is always to find tools that will help the person move forward. This can include:

- **Having a safe space to vent and communicate what's bothering them**
- **Allowing the person time to process emotions**
- **Offering on-the-job techniques to reduce anxiety in moments of tension or stress**
- **Encouraging short-frequent breaks throughout the day to "reset"**

Increase psychosocial safety with these tips

At Alder, staff are encouraged to speak up if they see something that isn't quite right or they have an idea to share that could solve a particular problem. And, while the workforce is generally a mix of personalities with one or two workers onsite who might be more vocal or communicative, they don't necessarily run the show.

The single most important solution is to increase the physical and emotional safety of your workers. Alder has experienced a near-perfect safety record since its founding in 2020.

We follow the American Psychological Association's guidelines for managing a healthy worksite:

Establish open, honest communication

Our workers must be comfortable speaking up without fear of repercussions.

Hire supportive leadership

Managers and leaders actively listen, provide guidance, and offer emotional support.

Demonstrate work-life balance

Encouragement of boundaries and flexibility to ensure mental and physical health.

Lead with respect and inclusion

Diverse perspectives are welcomed and employees are treated with respect regardless of background.

Offer emotional support

Mental health resources and peer support networks are easily accessible.

Encourage a collaborative environment

Teams work together with trust and shared responsibility, minimizing conflict.

Set clear expectations

Roles, responsibilities, and goals are clearly communicated, reducing uncertainty.

Express recognition and appreciation

Positive feedback is regularly given, and contributions are acknowledged.

Treat fairly

Policies ensure equity, and grievances are handled transparently and respectfully.





Empowering worksite wellness for all

We hope you have a better understanding of why we should be bringing more happiness to the worksite and how we can make that happen in the future. It's our belief at Alder that people deserve to be happy and safe on the job, and that as leaders, it's our responsibility to ensure access to resources and support. By providing the tools for safety and well-being, employees and workers will be empowered to do their jobs more effectively and efficiently as ever. That's good for any industry.

Helpful resources

To continue your learning about well-being on the job site, here are a few helpful resources.

- ▶ [The case for kindness](#)
- ▶ [Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being](#)
- ▶ [2023 Work in America Survey: Workplaces as engines of psychological health and well-being](#)


About Alder Airfield Services

At Alder Airfield Services, we specialize in supporting your airport airfield projects with flagging, escorting, barricading, and other services that reduce surface incidents while increasing construction site productivity. Our team takes control of access to traveling back and forth from your jobsite to mitigate human error, and we partner with some of the largest airports in the world and help construction teams fulfill their projects on time, on budget, without incident.

Alder was founded in 2020 by Ali Munzer, a former educator and therapist who is passionate about improving work conditions for people in skilled trades and temporary labor fields.

Stay in touch with Alder!

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