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—Format.....Opinions
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Notes from editor (not for publication):

Mel, this is beautifully written. Minor changes to transform it for newspaper style. Please feel free to arm wrestle or be in touch with questions. —All the best, Jeff



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 Men in construction trades, your struggle represents a
2 mental health emergency

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

3 Creating safer, healthier, and more inclusive workplaces
4 is not about weakening the culture but ensuring that the people
5 who construct our homes, buildings, and infrastructure can thrive
6 while doing it.

####END SUBHED####

7 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

8 DEAR MEN IN CONSTRUCTION,
9 In honor of Mental Health Awareness Month, this letter is
10 addressed to you.

11 We are vocal advocates of building inclusive workplaces
12 and job-site cultures that attract and retain people from
13 underrepresented groups, helping to ease our national labor
14 shortage. We are equally committed to ensuring men in the
15 trades have access to safe, dignified, and healthy workplaces.

16 Our sector is facing an unprecedented mental health
17 emergency, and not enough people are talking about it.

18 * * *

19 TRADESMEN ARE STRUGGLING. The construction industry is
20 still 96% cisgender men on job sites (88% when including office-
21 based positions). It's one of the most gender-segregated industries
22 in the world.

23 Two-thirds of construction workers report experiencing
24 anxiety or depression. Suicide rates in construction are more than
25 four times the national average, with an estimated 5,000 workers
26 dying annually by suicide.

27 Men in the trades are struggling at alarming rates. The
28 culture and conditions of the construction industry are
29 contributing to a mental health and substance use crisis.

30 What is driving the crisis? Construction has long been a
31 predominantly male industry often characterized by a tough,
32 macho culture that celebrates a grin-and-bear-it attitude while
33 penalizing those who dare to veer from strict rules of masculinity.

34 Workplace injuries are the highest of any occupation,
35 often leading to an over-prescription of opioid pain management.
36 Tradespeople have a rate of substance use double the national
37 average. We are seven times more likely to die of opioid-related
38 overdoses than other workers and account for 25% of all fatal
39 opioid overdoses nationally.

40 In our society and especially in the trades, there is a
41 reluctance from men to ask for help and a stigma around seeking
42 mental health support. Meanwhile, construction is a high-stress,
43 high-risk occupation worsened by the labor shortage and a lack
44 of skilled workers and training.

45 * * *

46 MENTAL HEALTH in construction cannot be separated from
47 the larger culture of discrimination and violence that exists across
48 parts of the industry.

49 Just months ago, in 2025, 20-year-old female welder
50 Amber Czech was brutally murdered by her 40-year-old male co-
51 worker. Violence against minorities in construction is not new.
52 Over 50% of women report incidents of harassment on the job
53 site, and 31% have reported sexual assault while at work in
54 construction; 76% of Black and 77% of Asian workers in
55 construction report limited career progression due to their race.
56 The actual number of incidents is likely higher because many
57 workers fear retaliation.

58 Additionally, in our current political climate, Latino
59 workers and others perceived to be immigrants (regardless of
60 citizenship status) are under heavy threat of detainment and
61 deportation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).
62 Many are afraid to show up to work.

63 The situation is so severe that the U.S. Equal Employment
64 Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has a specific focus on
65 construction, highlighting the pervasive discrimination in the
66 industry, with the chair [pointing out](#) that “discrimination and
67 harassment in construction can be especially harsh and virulent,
68 including displays of nooses, threats and physical harassment,
69 and sometimes physical or sexual assaults.”

70 In an industry eager to attract and retain hundreds of
71 thousands of new tradespeople to meet the demand, the day-to-
72 day experience of those working in the built environment are in
73 direct conflict with these goals.

74 Whether we are referring to the experience of
75 underrepresented groups — women, LGBTQIA individuals,
76 people of color, immigrants, people with differing abilities — or
77 the white men who make up most of the trades, no group is fully
78 benefiting from the status quo.

79 * * *

80 IT IS NOT OFTEN that men, especially white men, are
81 invited to lead around culture change. In fact, you are frequently
82 criticized by others for taking up too much space and not sharing
83 power. But as your demographic that makes up the vast majority
84 of tradespeople in this industry, without your support, men, there
85 can be no change.

86 Please consider this letter a plea for your active
87 engagement and leadership in the transformation of the culture
88 and conditions of our industry.

89 Statistics show that many workers in this sector are not
90 thriving. The data, and my own 25 years in construction,
91 demonstrate that many underrepresented groups in the trades
92 continue to experience barriers, harassment, and violence in the
93 workplace.

94 Construction is a wonderful occupation full of
95 compassionate, hard-working, and innovative people. I have had
96 the privilege of building professional relationships and lasting
97 friendships with many men in this industry. For the safety and
98 well-being of current and future generations of tradespeople,
99 including your own self, I would like to invite you to take an
100 active role in reshaping the future culture.

101 I've witnessed many men hold back from taking action
102 because of fear of doing it wrong. Hesitation makes a lot of
103 sense, but do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

104 Here are some actions you can take to contribute to
105 building a healthier environment in your company. If you want
106 more support in developing or carrying out a plan or have other
107 ideas to share with us, reach out: info@buildhelm.com.

108 ***What team members can do***

109 • *Educate and raise awareness about the mental health*
110 *and substance-use crisis in the trades by sharing this letter, other*
111 *resources, or stories that highlight these issues.*

112 • *Model healthy masculinity by showing vulnerability,*
113 *asking for help, and talking openly about your own struggles and*
114 *challenges (with consent from others, of course).*

- 115 • *Counter the stigma around mental health support by*
116 *sharing your experiences with or other resources related to stress*
117 *management, depression, substance use, or other mental health*
118 *challenges.*
- 119 • *Check in with your team members who seem like they*
120 *are struggling and encourage your company leadership to talk*
121 *about mental health and substance use.*
- 122 • *Interrupt harmful behavior and language: Be the man*
123 *on site who is willing to speak up when something biased or*
124 *hurtful is said or done to anyone on site, including toward other*
125 *men.*
- 126 • *Find ways to meet people with curiosity and non-*
127 *judgment while also being direct in your communication.*
- 128 • *Be an ally and advocate to those from*
129 *underrepresented groups.*
- 130 • *Uphold best practices around safety and/or alert a*
131 *supervisor if safety protocols are not being adhered to.*
- 132 • *Ask for what you need: If you feel overwhelmed,*
133 *stressed, or under-resourced in your work, be proactive and bring*
134 *it up with your supervisor or manager; if you are struggling with*
135 *your own mental health, seek professional support or talk with a*
136 *trusted friend. Challenge the culture of handling everything on*
137 *your own in isolation.*

138 ***What company leaders can do***

- 139 • *Create policies and procedures that support your*
140 *team’s well-being, leveraging your authority to do so.*
- 141 • *Set the tone for your company culture by creating a*
142 *work environment where team members feel safe talking about*
143 *mental health or substance use without fear of repercussions,*
144 *such as job loss.*
- 145 • *Ensure there is a completed and accessible employee*
146 *handbook that outlines everything from your non-discrimination*
147 *policy to your zero tolerance for harassment; be clear about the*
148 *process for reporting, and, when possible, have human resources*
149 *led by someone other than the owner.*

150 • Consider including mental health resources in your
151 employee handbook. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health
152 Services Administration (SAMHSA) is a good national resource
153 and has additional resources and free mental health tools
154 (samhsa.gov).

155 • Have clear job descriptions that outline agreements
156 about responsibilities and define what success looks like in the
157 role; establish best practices for performance reviews and team
158 check-ins.

159 • Prioritize job-site safety, since occupational hazards
160 often lead to opioid prescriptions.

161 • Provide education and supervisor training related to
162 anti-bullying and anti-harassment, non-violent communication,
163 strategies for navigating a mental health emergency and how to
164 administer Naloxone (Narcan) when someone is experiencing an
165 overdose.

166 • Provide translated support and materials for any team
167 members who speak English as a second language.

168 • Be a recovery-friendly workplace. Avoid having
169 company events at bars and/or centered around alcohol or other
170 substances.

171 • Encourage your team to take advantage of Helm’s free
172 and confidential monthly [Recovery Construction Circle](#).

173 • Other important and direct ways to support employee
174 mental health are benefits for team well-being, including health
175 insurance, health reimbursement account (HRA), short- and
176 long-term disability, employee assistance program (EAP),
177 professional coaching, peer support or mentorship programs,
178 paid sick leave, flexible work schedules, and recovery treatment
179 support.

180 * * *

181 CONSTRUCTION HAS always been an industry built by
182 people ready to roll up their sleeves, solve complex problems,
183 and look out for one another while working under harsh
184 conditions. We need to lean into these core qualities to shape the

185 future of this sector. Creating safer, healthier, and more inclusive
186 workplaces is not about weakening the culture but ensuring that
187 the people who construct our homes, buildings, and
188 infrastructure can thrive while doing it.

189 Mental Health Awareness Month is a chance for us to
190 move beyond awareness alone and commit to taking action.
191 Regardless of your role or the number of years you have been in
192 the trades, you can also influence the culture around you.

193 We especially need men to bring leadership to these
194 efforts. Small actions like checking in on a team member,
195 interrupting harassment, insisting on safe job sites, asking for
196 help, or advocating for stronger policies and benefits can have a
197 big impact.

198 The future of our industry depends not only on recruiting
199 and training new workers, but on creating an occupation where
200 people want to stay.

201 Lastly, to the many men already helping to lead the way,
202 thank you.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

203 **MEL BAISER** (they/them) is co-founder and director of
204 vision and strategy at Helm Construction Solutions, a Brattleboro-
205 based consulting firm that, as described on the company's
206 [website](#), "work[s] with contractors and design-build firms "to
207 help businesses thrive — with more resilient finances, a positive
208 and inclusive work culture, and a more beneficial impact on the
209 environment."

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

LAST ISSUE IN WHICH THIS FILE CAN BE RUN:

####BEGIN MAXISSUE####

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####END MAXISSUE####

LINKS:

211

####BEGIN LINKS####

####END LINKS####

VIDEO:

212

####BEGIN VIDEO####

####END VIDEO####

LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

213

####BEGIN LOGLINE####

####END LOGLINE####