

Call to Action: Mental Health within the Boating Industry

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I recently received a call from Liz Walz of Marine Retailers Association of the Americas (MRAA) asking if our Association had any connections to mental health experts who could address the challenges we are hearing about within the boating industry. Liz said that MRAA has heard from several dealership owners concerned about the mental health of their employees and is looking for ways to help. Although there is no immediate solution to share, it provided an opportunity to share my support of this initiative and some personal experience. I went on to share with Liz some of the struggles that I personally have had over the years dealing with anxiety and depression especially during several dark months of 2020.

I am extremely fortunate and privileged to be in a much better position today than I was back in the middle of 2020. It has taken many months to get where I am today, but I do truly feel back to my “normal” self. Scores of other are not in the same boat. I decided to draft this article as I have felt better discussing some of the challenges that I have faced with friends, family, colleagues and, most recently, with my board. I am hoping that sharing some of my experiences and struggles may open the door for others to do the same and share their own challenges. As well, I hope that the sharing of stories will lead others to seek help and get better.

2020 had challenges across the board. We were (still are) in the grip of a global pandemic, the economy was (still is) facing unprecedented financial challenges, our country was (still is) divided on a political platform that carried over to personal and family issues. These realities and more may be part of the mental health challenges facing many. But they are definitely not all of it. Mental health challenges can be sparked by certain circumstances or “triggers,” they can occur out of the blue, and they can also exist as a lifelong challenge. There is no control over when and how it happens. This certainly has been the case for me looking back at 2020 and previous years that I have faced these demons. In taking ownership of my mental health issues, I have had to acknowledge the issues, talk about the issues, and seek help as applicable, where and when possible. These key steps remain critical elements of future success when dealing with mental health challenges. My goal today is to focus on the parts that you can control in an effort to get yourself better and to seek the appropriate professional assistance you may need.

What changed for me and what recommendations do I have for others? For me, and I cannot stress this enough, I am extremely fortunate to have a **GREAT** support system. I have a very supportive wife, two healthy kids, and many family members, friends, colleagues and more that were and continue to be a huge source of help for the mental health struggles and challenges I faced.

Specifically, here are few examples of what helped me and may do the same for you:

1. **Support system** – Acknowledge and speak about the struggles you are facing. This may be the hardest one, but probably the most important as well.
2. **Intervention from licensed mental health professionals** – Seek professional assistance where, when, and as needed.
3. **Activities with an “outward” focus** – I provide an example of this in my closing notes, but a couple examples would be giving back to your community and helping out, whether it is in a volunteer capacity or another outlet.
4. **Keeping busy and productive** – For me remaining busy was and remains a critical part of my recovery.
5. **Virtual wellness check-in groups** - I started a wellness check-in group with about 8 or so other state association leaders from around the country. This group was created not only to share professional experience, but to also provide an outlet to share personal challenges many of us faced with the COVID-19 pandemic and more. It was and remains a fantastic network and group of friends/colleagues that mean more to me than you can imagine. When you work at home or by yourself, these outlets and support groups are tremendously valuable. The global pandemic has afforded a virtual element to connect more frequently with individuals around the country and world that was previously underutilized.

Closing thoughts. If you struggle with mental health issues, please know that no matter what industry or profession you are in, you are **NOT** alone. We do not talk about these challenges enough. I would like to see that change in the future, and hope I can help make that happen. Please talk about what is going on with your friends and/or family and get help as soon as possible—before your problems become more than you can handle.

A final suggestion is to give and receive more kindness. Kindness is contagious and desperately needed. I am participating in a Random Acts of Kindness (RAOK) challenge this month, and it truly has been a wonderful experience. One particular thing that I have always enjoyed doing is paying for the person behind me. Today I have a tendency to find myself at Dunkin Donuts or as they say in the Boston area “Dunks” more often than I should. Occasionally I will pay for the person behind me. Typically the person is at first confused and then truly happy. They sometimes honk, wave, flash their lights; but almost always they smile. Hopefully you are able to make their day a little better and do the same for yourself by seeing their smile. The price tag? Just a few extra bucks. I especially enjoy doing this with my two kids in the car, and I hope they will follow suit one day. Kindness can reduce stress, boost happiness, lower blood pressure, and inspire more kindness.

Resources:

Contact me as I am happy to assist where and when possible

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CDC Mental Health Guidance: [Mental Health Tools and Resources - Mental Health - CDC](#)

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): [Home](#) | [NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)

National Health Resources (MHR): [National Health Resources](#)

American Psychiatry Association: [Home](#) | [psychiatry.org](#)

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:
[SAMHSA's National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP \(4357\)](#) | [SAMHSA](#)**

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: [\(800\)-273-8255](#)