

Employer Case Study

Preventing and Addressing Substance Use Disorder (SUD) in the Workforce: *Proactive Engagement*

A Conversation with Shaun Carvalho, Vice President, Safety at Shawmut Design and Construction

Background

Shawmut Design and Construction (Shawmut) is a 100% employee-owned, national construction management company that values delivering world-class client service, construction site safety, environmental sustainability, and local philanthropy. The company has a broad portfolio of projects. Most of their clients are repeat clients.

Shaun Carvalho is the Vice President of Safety at Shawmut Design and Construction and has held safety management positions in several companies during the last two decades. He graduated from Keene State College with a BS in Occupational Safety and Health Technology/Technician.

Discussion

Grayken Center: Tell us about Shawmut.

Shaun Carvalho: The company, which is focused on construction site management, was founded in 1982 by Jim Ansara and a handful of employees. Today we are headquartered in Boston. We have about 1,400 direct employees across the United States with \$1.5 billion in annual revenue. From the early days, we built a great culture with hard-working employees who care about our clients, each other and the communities in which we operate. When Jim retired nearly 20 years ago, he sold the company to the employees. Employee ownership furthered organizational cohesiveness. We are very detailed-oriented. However, we also have fun in our work. We are proud of this environment. We have won over 57 regional “Best Place to Work” awards, and have been named one of the nation’s Best Workplaces by Fortune Magazine in each of the last three years. We have great employee loyalty and low turnover.

Grayken Center: How do you approach your role of Vice President of Safety?

Shaun Carvalho: Environmental Health and Safety done well encourages employees to stay informed, to learn from each other so that they can make good decisions that can “maximize their lives.” We started our annual Safety Week 10 years ago and coined the phrase “Work Safe. Play Safe. Live Long.” I think that captures our safety goals. In addition, we always want to be *proactive*, to get to issues before they become major problems.

Grayken Center: Tell us more about the annual Shawmut Safety Week and how it played a role in addressing Substance Use Disorder.

Shaun Carvalho: Each year Safety Week addresses several topics including some that go beyond the standard construction site considerations. For example, we have held sessions on sun-derived cancer, mental health and distracted driving. The presentations have stimulated companywide conversations and awareness. We always invite colleagues to suggest Safety Week topics. A couple of years ago, employees began to express interest in hearing about opioids. We made that a major focus of Safety Week 2018.

Grayken Center: Were there incidents with Substance Use Disorder in the organization?

Shaun Carvalho: To my knowledge, there were not. As I mentioned earlier, we have a commitment to the communities in which we work. We are part of society. Opioids had become an issue for America. We wanted to be *proactive*, to get out ahead of the issue. We may not have had obvious problems in our workforce, but as part of the broader society it would have been foolish to think Shawmut and the people on our construction sites would be immune to opioid addiction.

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Grayken Center: I believe the preparation for Safety Week 2018 led you to the Grayken Center.

Shaun Carvalho: We needed experts. I searched online and found Grayken. I talked with Michael Botticelli (Grayken Center Executive Director) about our company and our interest in Substance Use Disorder. His reaction was to say, “Let’s figure this out!” Michael taught me a lot more than the standard information about the signs of Substance Use Disorder and the basics about recovery facilities. I learned about the breadth of this societal problem and its impact, and how we got to this point and what Grayken is doing. It gave me a complete awareness. We decided that Michael would deliver the keynote speech in Boston for Safety Week 2018. The talk was given to an onsite standing room only audience. We broadcasted the presentation to our offices throughout the country. Following this powerful talk, employees started coming forward to tell their stories about Substance Use Disorder and suggest potential company solutions. Their passion for the subject was now obvious.

Grayken Center: So, what did you do next?

Shaun Carvalho: In July 2018 we formed the “Opioid Task Force,” a cross-functional team of about a dozen people from several departments including Environmental and Health Safety, Risk Management, HR, Marketing, Operations and our Nurse Case Manager. Our job was to pound the pavement and get things done, to find ways to educate our employees and subcontractors, and offer them resources.

Grayken Center: One of the resulting initiatives involved naloxone/Narcan. How was that handled?

Shaun Carvalho: This is another great story about learning from experts. We partnered with Blue Cross Blue Shield and we were a pilot company for their Narcan Tool Kits. They trained our Task Force and our facility teams in each of our company locations on SUD, ways to recognize an overdose, appropriate emergency response, and the use of Narcan. Then we took the knowledge we had gained from Blue Cross Blue Shield to our 300 Superintendents. They oversee entire construction projects. While Shawmut has about 1,400 employees, we also have about 20,000 subcontractors. All subcontractors must attend training on Shawmut's expectations and procedures. We added the Narcan material to that training. As a result, we have spread the word to everyone associated with Shawmut. We also made the drug available at all of our offices and many construction sites. Lastly, Shawmut subsidizes the cost of Narcan for our employees so that they can have access to it outside of the workplace.

Grayken Center: Did you use the Grayken online and/or other resources?

Shaun Carvalho: We did. At each job site we have signage about critical health safety issues, for example stroke recognition, heart attack response and opioid use. On the opioid signage, we include the Grayken website and instruct the reader to photograph the poster/URL and access the Grayken website when they can. Grayken is our reference site for Substance Use Disorder. But I would like to mention another Grayken resource - the people. They are out on the front lines, and ready to lend a hand. I check in with them periodically. They help us maintain our Substance Use Disorder efforts.

Grayken Center: Your internal educational work then had an effect beyond Shawmut, right?

Shaun Carvalho: Yes, it did. We wanted to be a proactive positive influence on the construction industry. And that is happening thanks to some great partners. Awareness of what Shawmut has done spread in part thanks to the education we have provided our employees and subcontractors. Important organizations have joined us. The Associated General Contractors of Massachusetts (AGC) was very open to hearing about addiction and now is actively involved in addressing Substance Use Disorder with its membership. Shawmut and AGC engaged the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) of Region 1, New England. Region 1 leadership willingly pursued the topic. Then, Region 1 drew in the national OSHA organization. OSHA is now very involved across the country in Substance Use Disorder. The Boston Chamber of Commerce has also joined the effort. Many events have been organized by all of these groups. Five years ago, such attention would have been impossible. We would never have heard people in long-term recovery openly describing their experiences to audiences of construction people and telling them how they were helped. Now we do. The SUD stigma in our industry has receded. All of these organizations are working together and things are changing.

Grayken Center: And during this period you had an unusual partner come forward.

Shaun Carvalho: Yes, we did. A major competitor contacted us to learn what we did and how they could get started to address Substance Use Disorder. Shawmut helped arrange a meeting between the competitor and Grayken. Our competitor's willingness to join the battle will have a very good influence on all of us in the construction industry. And this type of collaboration is what we hope to see more of.

Again, this is a societal issue, not any individual company's issue. We are now working on expanding our Opioid Task Force to include members from other organizations and firms.

Grayken Center: You mentioned "stigma" being reduced in your industry. But you no doubt dealt with stigma in Shawmut when you began your Substance Use Disorder work.

Shaun Carvalho: Shawmut's Safety Week's goal is to bring up safety and health issues at Shawmut and in construction. We genuinely want to know about potential problems and be proactive. People in our company focus on finding solutions. Consequently, when Michael spoke during Safety Week, the audience was less concerned with stigma and more interested in positively influencing the situation. Shawmut's workforce was willing to leave stigma behind and move forward. We are fortunate.

Grayken Center: How do you assess the value – tangible and intangible – of the Substance Use Disorder efforts you have made?

Shaun Carvalho: Well, we haven't done an ROI. For us, this isn't a financial decision. It is more of a people decision, a societal decision. We want people to feel better, to do better, to be their best at work and in all aspects of their lives. That is value.

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Grayken Center: If you could offer only one recommendation, what recommendation would you make to a person starting a Substance Use Disorder program and what one major misstep would you hope they'd avoid?

Shaun Carvalho: The recommendation: Have Michael Botticelli address your company at the start of your Substance Use Disorder efforts. It will "open the floodgates," people will then come forward to pursue solutions in your organization. The misstep to avoid: Worrying about the ROI of time and/or money. That's not the goal of this type of initiative. Instead the objective must be to engage people – proactively if possible - so that they can do better in their lives.

For More Information

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