



500 WORDS ON LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT

MALE SUICIDE

Please talk.

September 10th was **World Suicide Prevention Day**. Suicide prevention is a global challenge, but it is also a very personal challenge. How many of us know someone or a family that has been affected by suicide? It affects both men and women; however in countries around the world women are more likely to be diagnosed with depression and to attempt suicide.

Why then is the male suicide rate still several times higher than the female?

In the UK, the male suicide rate is its lowest since 1981 – 15.5 deaths per 100,000. But suicide is still the single biggest killer of men under the age of 45. And a marked gender split remains. For UK women, the rate is a third of men's: 4.9 suicides per 100,000.

These are shocking statistics and it is vitally important we all talk about suicide. In a work environment, as leaders we have the responsibility to **see beyond job-objectives and work-tasks and be empathetic** to others. It is a hugely sensitive, complex issue with a tangled multitude of causes – and the very nature of a death by suicide means we might never fully know the personal reasons behind it, but we have to stop this being a silent killer.

On the eve of World Suicide Prevention Day and the start of the Rugby Union World Cup, some of the leading stars of the sport in conjunction with Movember spoke directly to camera, stating that a man will take his own life every minute of every game. **That's 80 men for each game.** That's 80 husbands, dad, sons, brothers, uncles and friends. I am touched by this video, taking rough men and talking about things men don't talk about. They make the valid point that men do not talk enough and so implore those watching to turn to whoever they're with during half time and talk, for the full 15 minutes. No going to the bar or checking the phone, just talk. They end asking those watching to be 'a man of many words' ([see extract](#)).

One of the occurring problems of leadership is listening. And here we don't mean active listening, paraphrasing etc. **We mean real listening**; giving your colleague, peer or direct-report your full attention for a few minutes. Some crucial minutes of being empathetic that could save lives.

A lack of communication is definitely seen as a risk factor when it comes to male depression and potential suicide. From an early age, boys are taught to 'not cry' and 'be strong'. Bottling up emotions can be a contributing factor to feelings of isolation and despair.

It can be perceived as a sign of weakness to admit they are having problems rather than a sign of strength. The workplace is no exception, for men or women. Particularly leaders are expected to be able to deal with anything that is thrown at them. But remember, a real leader is not a counsellor but is **someone who has, at the right time, the right amount of time to listen.**

"We're brought up our entire lives to judge ourselves in comparison with our peers and to be economically successful", says Simon Gunning, the CEO of Campaign Against Living Miserably ([Calm](#)), a UK-based award-winning charity dedicated to preventing male suicide. "When there are economic factors we can't control, it becomes very difficult."

With all of this, suicide remains an incredibly complex issue. But overall, there's a definite shift towards making it okay for men to talk about how they're feeling – and for that to be acknowledged as a sign of strength.

Attention giving, awareness, listening, empathy and showing vulnerability are crucial topics we focus on in our leadership development programmes. Next to strategic topics, humane topics are the fuel that keeps us going.

However, there is more to be done. Collectively, we can all do more to halt the awful loss of life to this silent killer and **the first thing we can do is talk.**

Yours,
Dr. Marcus Gottschalk
CEO at CLP

