

# CONSTRUCTION BUSINESS OWNER

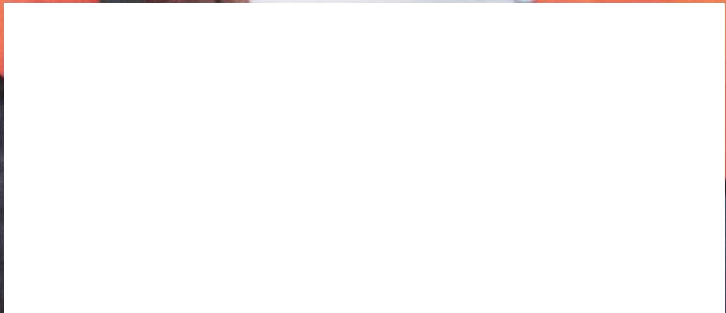
## 8 INDUSTRY WASTES TECH CAN ELIMINATE

Your game plan for ditching inefficiencies & doubling productivity



**IN THE OFFICE**  
10 often-overlooked legal lessons

**IN THE FIELD**  
Examining construction's power alternatives



# How Marital Strain & Divorce Impact Workplace Safety & Performance

4 steps to implement an employee support system

BY PILAR PRINZ, ADAM P. HANDFINGER & RICKY ROBINSON

**D**istracted, stressed and anxious construction workers pose significant risks to safety, productivity and quality. Marital strain, separation and divorce, along with the corresponding consequences, cause extreme stress and may not be readily apparent or noticed by managers. Divorce is considered the second most stressful life event (second only to death of a spouse) and those going through it can feel a whole range of emotions, from fear and anger to relief and guilt. Employees going through these stressful life events pose a significant risk, especially in dangerous industries like construction.

Out of 25 industries surveyed by Monster (monster.com), the construction industry had the 12th highest divorce rate (36.5%), with the office and administrative support industry topping the list (40.6%). According to Zippia (zippia.com), conveyor, dredge and hoist/winch operators have the highest divorce rates.

While the statistics may conflict, one thing is for sure: The last thing you need is a stressed and distracted operator of heavy equipment. The good news is that employers can put a support system in place to help individuals and the business

thrive — even through stressful life events.

## What Marriage Strain & Divorce Look Like in the Workplace

Far too many relationships at home are strained. A survey of 3,000 indicates that six out of 10 people are unhappy in their relationships, and four out of 10 have thought about leaving. We know people are struggling as a result of the pandemic, financial uncertainty and social and global unrest. And as the line between home and work life continues to blur, these issues are having an even more profound effect on couples.

It's no surprise that the effects of our home lives play out in our work lives. In fact, 71% of Americans agree that problems at home have a negative impact on their jobs, leaving them more distracted, less productive and less able to control their emotions. Despite this tangible impact, the majority of workers don't tell their employers what's happening.

## Impact in Construction

Construction is an industry where small mistakes become big problems. A minor mistake (i.e., missed scope on a bid)

can turn a project from profitable to a loss, and, if significant enough, sink a contractor's business. More significant errors can cause costly and potentially dangerous construction defects or catastrophic jobsite injuries.

A contractor making 5% to 10% on a project to cover overhead and profit does not have much wiggle room for error. The successful contractors don't assign risk to achieve great reward, but mitigate risk to maintain steady reward. Whether it be risk of injury at the jobsite, financial risk or legal risk, successful contractors have many protocols and procedures in place to address these risks. However, no matter how perfect the process and how contractually protected a contractor may be, there's always a human with emotion driving the process.

Human performance plays a vital role in construction. Architects intricately design each space, estimators get down into the details calculating project costs, project executives squeeze margins by aggressively negotiating contracts, project managers lead teams to timely delivery, crane operators swing precast concrete joists hundreds of feet in the air and foremen — harnessed to the side of buildings — guide those joists into position. It's a miraculous process that, at all levels, requires intense focus on the task at hand. That is why understanding your employees is key to mitigating the greatest variable in construction: human risk.

An employee suffering through a divorce and feeling emotions such as depression, fear, anger and guilt, may not be focusing at work. Divorce's impact on an employee's psyche can be significant. Even the smartest, most focused employees may be subject to the emotional toll of divorce. The real-world implications of this emotional toll are all too real to be ignored — especially in the construction industry.





## What Businesses Can Do

While more and more businesses are investing in employee wellness, too little is being done to help employees build better relationships at home — or to support them when those relationships suffer. It might feel too personal (“I don’t want to get involved in my employee’s home life.”), but we can no longer act as if home and work life exist separately from each other.

Offering support to workers has many benefits. It can:

- Mitigate productivity losses by helping employees retain attention and reduce workplace errors.
- Increase the safety of the entire team by reducing distraction and stress.
- Reduce absenteeism caused by increased illness, childcare issues and time spent dealing with divorce.
- Demonstrate an innovative commitment to employee wellbeing.
- Reduce feelings of isolation and create a culture of inclusion.

If you want to adopt a support system but aren’t sure where to start, here are

four steps that can be taken:

1. Be aware of signs that an employee may be going through marriage strain or divorce: arriving late, leaving early, childcare issues, changes in appearance (divorce stress can lead to both sudden weight loss or gain), distancing from coworkers, shifting emotions.
2. If possible, offer a temporary or permanent change to or flexibility in schedule. As an example, an employee who is juggling work and co-parenting might find it easier to leave work early on Wednesdays but can make up the time on Thursdays. Ask what limitations or restrictions are making it more difficult to perform their functions, and what schedule shifts might offer improvement.
3. Divorce impacts nearly every facet of a person’s life, from health to family to finances to sense of community and belonging. Resources that help guide an individual through the process, including what to expect and letting them know they are not alone, improve their experience and reduce the overall

4. Often when someone is going through divorce, the first (and sometimes only) person they tell at work is their direct supervisor or a close coworker. Bridging the gap between the home office and the field is key. Regular communications by and between executives, project managers and superintendents can help identify a worker who may need support. Make sure the availability of company resources is communicated to everyone so they can be utilized by those in need.

Marriage issues are personal, and many people don’t feel comfortable sharing the news at work. By providing available outlets where employees can receive support in a private manner, they are more likely to open up with those around them. Knowing that a company has a support system in place can help an employee better transition through this difficult event. ▲

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