



CASE STUDY

A FORCE FOR GOOD:

HOW KIEWIT BUILT A MORE RESILIENT
WORKFORCE THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS
AND EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS

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AT A GLANCE

Kiewit is a leading construction and engineering company with locations across the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. From providing comprehensive engineering solutions to executing complex building projects, Kiewit delivers on some of the industry's most challenging engineering and construction feats, including turning rivers into energy, boring tunnels through mountains, and building bridges that connect communities.

Kiewit represents a diverse workforce of 31,100 staff and craft employees (i.e., those skilled in a particular trade) across North America. Kiewit's workforce is not only large but also geographically dispersed, with many employees engaged in daily field operations and projects across the continent.

Although Kiewit has a long history of offering mental well-being benefits to its employees, in 2021, it re-envisioned its offerings when it introduced [“Under the Hat: Building Healthy Minds.”](#) The strategies driving Kiewit's successful approach to workplace mental health support are:

- » Embedding mental health in the corporate culture.
- » Leveraging broad and nontraditional partnerships to address mental health.
- » Focusing on integrated work/life mental health.

Kiewit's approach has paid off:

- » Kiewit has increased its employee assistance program (EAP) utilization rate from **2.2%** to slightly less than **10%**, significantly higher than the average EAP utilization rate of around **4%**.¹

“In our industry, we focus on what we can measure — progress, schedules, materials, and the tools that keep our people safe. But some risks aren't as visible. Mental health is just as critical to safety as any physical hazard. That's why Under the Hat isn't an initiative — it's a commitment. It's embedded in how we work, from jobsite operations to meetings and training modules for human resources, safety leads, and management. Mental well-being is now part of every safety conversation, every day.”

— Alicia Edsen, Senior Vice President and Head of Corporate Safety at Kiewit

¹ [How Can We Promote Our EAP to Increase Its Usage?, Mental Health America, 2025.](#)



EMBEDDING MENTAL HEALTH IN THE CORPORATE CULTURE

As a construction and engineering company, Kiewit makes sure that safety is central to its corporate culture. The company ingrains its commitment to safety in everything it does, including its approach to mental well-being. In fact, the company has made conversations around mental health and well-being a core element of its day-to-day safety focus and strategy. As a result, mental well-being has become synonymous with safety at Kiewit, dismantling the stigma associated with mental health in the workplace and ensuring that support for employees' mental well-being permeates all levels of the organization.

Addressing stigma is key. Although discussions about mental health have become more prominent than in the past, it can often remain a taboo topic in the workplace. While the pandemic prompted many organizations to acknowledge the importance of providing more mental health resources, not as many have successfully paired these resources with a supportive culture that encourages regular discussions about mental well-being. Consequently, even when organizations make mental health resources available, concerns about stigma may prevent employees from using them in times of need. In fact, **half (50%)** of U.S. workers do not feel comfortable using or asking for the mental health resources their organization provides.²

In contrast, Kiewit's Under the Hat focus is actively breaking down that stigma. Under the Hat's diverse slate of mental health resources has been transformational for the company. At Kiewit, Under the Hat isn't just a name — it's a way to simplify access to mental health resources across the company's workforce. With employees spanning staff, craft, and three different countries, each with its own EAP services, navigating support options was complicated. Kiewit knew it needed something more than an initiative or program — it needed a recognizable name that serves as a one-stop shop for all available resources. The Under the Hat website makes it easy for employees to find mental health support, benefits providers, and helplines, breaking down barriers and making help more accessible than ever.

² [Employee Mental Health in 2024: A Research Series, SHRM, 2024.](#)



What makes Under the Hat unique is that it is a continuous focus for the organization and integrates mental health discussions into daily work conversations with the recognition that a supportive culture is essential to mental well-being. “Our Chairman Emeritus Ken Stinson said it best,” said Carrie Chambers, senior communications manager at Kiewit. “Ken was an early driver in these conversations within our communities and in our industry. He says, ‘Our focus on mental health is not just a safety topic du jour for Kiewit. This focus is every day and forever.’ ”

Kiewit has cultivated a culture of mental well-being that permeates all levels of the organization, from frontline employees to the C-suite. Notably, some of the strongest advocacy for mental well-being has come from the executive level, with Kiewit leadership actively participating in organizationwide conversations. For example, alongside its annual shareholders meeting, Kiewit hosts an annual event where employees can hear from the leadership team. This event sets the tone for business goals, and Under the Hat is prominently featured each year. Additionally, new Under the Hat messages are typically delivered by the CEO or vice president of safety, reinforcing employee mental well-being as a core business goal. “One of the main by-products of executive leadership talking about mental well-being has been that it has encouraged people to come forward,” said Selma Santin, human resources director at Kiewit. “We went from a predominantly silent workforce around mental well-being to many people coming forward to tell their stories.”



Kiewit also recognized the importance of building support among its employee base. This meant fostering a sense of ownership by involving them in every step of the process and in the shaping of mental health solutions. To achieve this, Kiewit invested time in training members of their Craft Voice in Safety (CVIS) program to understand the mental well-being tools available and to communicate these resources to craft employees in the field. Members of the CVIS program have a direct line to Kiewit's Under the Hat steering committee, ensuring employees always have a voice at the table when it comes to important conversations around supporting their mental well-being. "We knew as we created more visibility to Under the Hat, our CVIS team were truly the right people to be the frontline voices," Santin said. "These individuals work in crews, and they bring any concerns of the crews to leadership. As they do their rounds, Under the Hat is a continuous part of the conversation. They bring solutions back. When we roll out something new, we know we can rely on CVIS members to reach the hearts and minds of our craft employees."

Kiewit has set minimum visibility standards to ensure Under the Hat information is always readily accessible in the field. The company posts information about the initiative in bathrooms and port-a-johns, includes posters and wallet-size cards with contact information in every break room, and features an Under the Hat sticker on every hard-hat brim. "There are a million ways to reach our staff employees, but being able to get to our craft employees is huge for the organization," Santin said. "Because craft workers are in the field, we can't use traditional communication methods, so that has been a huge win for us."

Lastly, when Kiewit's safety professionals do a project safety assessment, there is an entire section dedicated to Under the Hat. The focus is also included in all project initiation checklists as a key safety component. "We have something called an operations start card. Before every single operation starts, all the risks for the day must be analyzed. On that card, there's a section on mental well-being. You do a crew check to ensure everyone is mentally fit and healthy and physically ready to do the work that day," Santin said. "Conversations around mental well-being happen every single day across the organization from the very lowest levels to the very highest levels, so people are constantly looking out for one another in the field."



LEVERAGING BROAD AND NONTRADITIONAL PARTNERSHIPS TO ADDRESS MENTAL HEALTH

While most organizations turn inward to solve mental health challenges and only temporarily engage outwardly, Kiewit leverages both internal and external resources to enrich its strategies. This approach has opened the door to innovation and collective problem-solving, which is especially beneficial for addressing an industrywide challenge like mental health.

Whereas the fear of sharing proprietary information or losing competitive advantage may deter some companies from collaborating with others, Kiewit is approaching partnerships, including those with its competitors, with an open mind, seeing them as meaningful opportunities to address mental health and well-being challenges more broadly and to create solutions across the industry. Kiewit President and CEO Rick Lanoha has joined other industry leaders as a founding member of a newly established CEO Advisory Council dedicated to tackling the construction industry's high suicide rates by developing industrywide mental health and suicide prevention solutions. Just as an individual should not have to tackle their mental health concerns alone, Kiewit also recognizes there is strength in numbers. "Partnering and talking with our competitors about mental well-being has been huge for getting us where we need to be. Our work has not been done in a vacuum," Santin said.

"Nothing we do on mental well-being we feel is proprietary. We want to be a force for good in the industry, so we work regularly with our competitors to share ideas."

— Selma Santin, Human Resources Director at Kiewit

Kiewit has also partnered with industry associations and other key organizations.. For example, it's worked with the Construction Safety Research Alliance (CSRA), Canadian Construction Safety Council (CCSC), National Construction Safety Executives (NCSE), Nebraska National Guard, Union Pacific Railroad, EA Roundtable, and Construction Working Minds to share best practices and ideas. This collaborative approach has not only helped Kiewit design comprehensive solutions for its own workforce, but the company has also contributed to industrywide mental health solutions, ultimately benefiting all parties involved.



Kiewit has even partnered with its clients on mental well-being efforts. For example, a Kiewit client recently wanted to pilot wellness hubs on one of its projects. These wellness hubs served multiple purposes. First, they provided a space for employees to have quiet time. Second, the project took place in a “food desert,” or a geographic area where people have limited options for affordable and healthy foods. Kiewit and the client partnered to bring nutritious food to the jobsite each day of the week to ensure employees had access to healthy food to eat. Third, the hubs also had an exercise area and some small green spaces to support overall health and well-being. By partnering, Kiewit and the client were able to share joint knowledge and resources to develop an innovative solution to well-being challenges. “Nothing is off the table,” Santin said. “We’re very open-minded as an organization to taking those partnerships and trying those things. And we’d like to do more of those in the future.” Through these partnerships, Kiewit is setting a new standard for how businesses can work together to foster a healthier, more supportive work environment, all while maintaining a culture of safety.



FOCUSING ON INTEGRATED WORK/LIFE MENTAL HEALTH

An employee's mental health is intrinsically linked to their family's well-being, yet **less than a third (32%)** of workers globally experience high work/life integration (i.e., they feel they can balance their work and home commitments).³ Kiewit has smartly adopted an integrated work/life approach to mental well-being that takes into account the broader context of employees' lives.

As part of the Under the Hat focus, Kiewit recognizes that employees juggle multiple roles or wear multiple "hats" both at work and at home, which influences how they show up in both spheres. "We say the family's mental health is the employee's mental health," Chambers said. In recognition of this important link, Kiewit launched a focus called "Under the Hat, Under Your Roof," expanding mental well-being resources to encompass diverse family supports.

Kiewit includes families as a part of the broader mental well-being of its employees in several ways. It sends "Under the Hat, Under Your Roof" mailers to employees' homes and includes key information in newsletters that go to the entire organization monthly. Additionally, Kiewit hosts monthly webinars through the Under the Hat steering committee. These webinars address current and pertinent mental health topics, such as adolescent mental health, handling distressing events, men's health, and substance abuse. In fact, Kiewit dedicated an August webinar to adolescent mental health in anticipation of employees' children going back to school.

The integrated work/life approach to mental health support is paying off:

- » The launch of Kiewit's "Under the Hat, Under Your Roof" focus in 2024 generated such demand and interest among the employee base that Kiewit saw **7,100** unique visitors to the Under the Hat website in *just a single day* when it had previously seen about **4,000** visitors *per month* in 2022.
- » Kiewit's very first monthly webinar had over **2,000** employees in attendance, and ongoing webinars continue to draw **700-2,000** attendees per session.



"You have to understand what people are dealing with to communicate in a way that resonates with them, and we are learning every day. We talk about families, we talk about things beyond crisis and stress. We talk about building resilience and having resources for all the everyday life challenges," Chambers said. "When people hear 'mental health,' they often only hear 'mental illness' or 'depression,' so they might not realize there's so much more to it. That's why we're very intentional about communicating our programs and resources in a way that reflects life's daily challenges — because every part of life, from daily stress to building resilience, feeds into overall mental health."

³ [The State of Global Workplace Culture in 2023, SHRM, 2023.](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUSINESSES

Kiewit's approach to supporting employee mental health offers insights for other employers:

- » ***Incorporate mental health into your company's culture.*** By connecting employee mental health and well-being to a core corporate value, companies make it part of the culture and ensure mental health is integrated into their larger organizational strategy.
- » ***Create regular opportunities for employees to discuss their mental well-being.*** Fostering regular opportunities for employees to discuss their mental well-being without fear of judgment helps organizations normalize these conversations, reducing stigma and increasing employees' comfort in seeking and using available resources.
- » ***Encourage leadership to openly discuss and advocate for mental health.*** Having senior leadership openly discuss and advocate for mental health can help organizations set a positive tone, model good mental health practices, and foster a supportive environment, providing a strong foundation for ongoing and future mental health efforts.
- » ***Establish minimum visibility standards for mental health resources.*** Creating minimum visibility standards for mental health resources across the organization helps break down barriers to employees accessing these resources when they are needed most.
- » ***Collaborate with external partners on mental health to achieve a greater collective impact.*** By looking outward and partnering with external groups on mental health and well-being — even competitors that may be experiencing some of the same challenges — organizations can pool resources, share best practices, and create a more significant impact than they could have achieved alone.
- » ***Prioritize family mental health alongside individual mental health.*** Prioritizing family mental health alongside individual mental health allows organizations to address the interconnected nature of employees' personal and professional lives, fostering a more integrated approach to mental well-being support.
- » ***Address anticipated mental health needs proactively.*** Addressing anticipated mental health needs (e.g., focusing on adolescent mental health) can help organizations stave off mental health problems before they arise.



RESOURCES

» **Embedding Mental Health in the Corporate Culture**

The U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy's ["Mental Health at Work: What Can I Do?" Workplace Guide](#) highlights the role everyone plays in promoting well-being, whether they're a company leader, manager, co-worker, or someone with a mental health condition. The guide also outlines steps people can take to promote a mental-health-friendly workplace.

» **Leveraging Broad and Nontraditional Partnerships to Address Mental Health**

[Business Roundtable's Mental Health Initiative](#) offers member companies broad resources, expert and peer insights, and CEO engagement opportunities as they expand their workplace mental health programs and address common challenges.

» **Focusing on Integrated Work/Life Mental Health**

This SHRM article, [Don't Overlook the Mental Health of Workers' Children](#), highlights the impact that family challenges can have on working parents' well-being and provides recommendations for employers to better support the needs of workers and their families.





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