



# **Guardian of Hope:** **Lessons in Suicide Prevention with** **Sergeant Kevin Briggs**

## **Leading Mental Well-Being**

Module 5: One Conversation at a Time

**WORKBOOK FOR EXECUTIVES, AKA "TRENDSETTERS"**



## The journey continues.

**In the first two modules, we focused on what you can do at the upstream level, focusing on the broader organization.**

In Module 1, “It Starts with You,” we looked at your role as a leader in creating a new norm of mental well-being across the organization. You had the chance to reflect on your leadership style. Is it one that is lifting people up, or is it inadvertently putting people down? We wrapped up with discussing ways that you can leverage daily touchpoints to be “tough on standards and tender-hearted with people.”

In Module 2, “Culture First,” we took a deep dive into the role that culture plays in supporting mental well-being at work. As leaders, you can create an environment that reduces the stigma of mental illness and distress. Moreover, you can build a culture in which people are less likely to become mentally distressed in the first place.

**In the next two modules, we moved down to midstream, focusing on the team level.**

In Module 3, “Oasis of Well-Being,” we looked at what it takes to thrive, and how this is comprised of multiple dimensions of well-being. We explored the power of leaders (especially team leaders) in bringing well-being to their team by modeling well-being, talking about well-being, and creating systems and norms of well-being within the team.

In Module 4, “Safe Harbor,” we dug into the notion of psychological safety, or the belief that it’s OK to speak up. Teams that have high levels of psychological safety are more likely to be high performing, are less likely to have a safety incident, and are more likely to be a place where people will step forward if they’re having a mental health issue.

**Today, we’re going all the way downstream, focusing on the individual level.**

In Module 5, “Guardian of Hope: Lessons in Suicide Prevention with Sergeant Kevin Briggs,” we’ll learn from Sergeant Briggs about how you, as leaders, can save lives, one conversation at a time. How can you spot individuals at risk? How do you say the right things (as opposed to the wrong things)? How can you follow up? What’s the line between what you say and do versus what a mental health professional should? These are a few of the many questions we’ll be looking into today – and we’ll have Sergeant Kevin Briggs here to shed light on them through his heartfelt stories and expert advice.

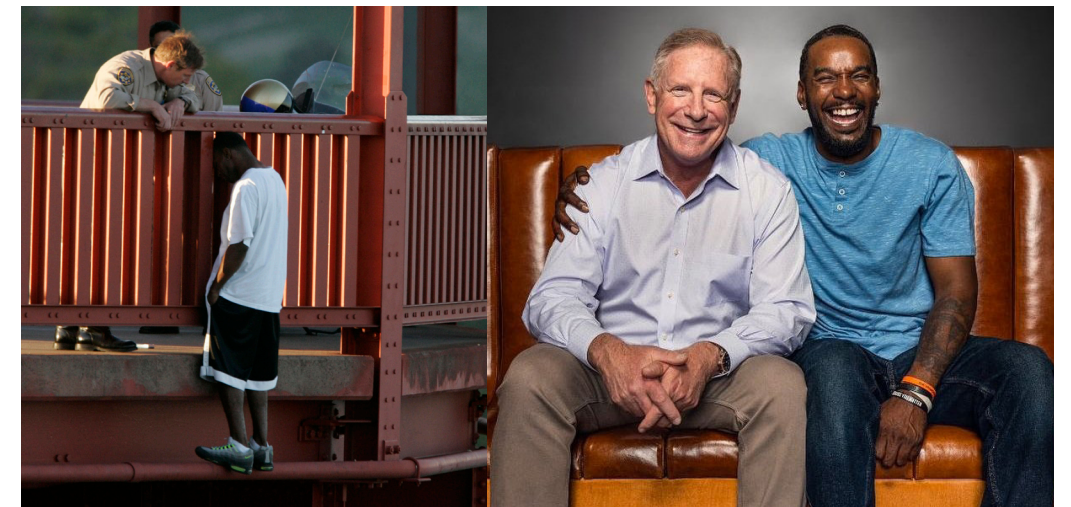
With that, let’s get started on Module 5!

## About Kevin



Meet Sergeant Kevin Briggs, aka, “Guardian of the Golden Gate.” As a California Highway Patrol sergeant, Kevin spent 17 years patrolling the Golden Gate Bridge, which is the iconic bridge that spans the San Francisco Bay. It is one of the most scenic vistas in the world, attracting more tourists than any other site globally, and unfortunately, is also a magnet for people who are at high risk of suicide. It was Kevin’s job to try and stop these would-be suicides from taking place. By identifying potential jumpers and then by engaging with them, one conversation at a time, Kevin literally saved hundreds of lives, helping individuals to choose life and begin anew.

As a trained negotiator and mental health advocate, Sergeant Kevin Briggs’ story and lived experiences have been featured as a TED Talk, and by media outlets including NBC, The New Yorker, Men’s Health, NPR, People, USA Today, and many others. His book, *Guardian of the Golden Gate*, was released in July 2015. Whether speaking to five people in the far outback of Australia, several thousand at an international convention, corporate leaders at a company offsite, or citizens at a local community event, Briggs maps a movement forward as he shares his own story of mental illness and discusses how to reach someone who may be struggling in a manner that allows them to communicate without shame or fear.



## Notice

**“The gap between public triumph and private despair is a treacherous one.”**

Anthony Solomon, “Anthony Bourdain, Kate Spade, and the Preventable Tragedies of Suicide,”  
The New Yorker, 2018

As journalist Anthony Solomon so aptly captured, it is often the people we least expect who die by suicide. Therefore, it is critical that we be prepared, and this begins with taking **notice**.

If it's a case where you don't know the person, here are some potential signs:

- Solo
- Looks lost
- Doesn't "see tomorrow"

In most cases, however, you will be dealing with someone you *do* know. The key thing you are looking for is a change, or anything that is different. Here are the 3 key areas where you might notice a change:

- Talk
- Behavior
- Mood

Source: Kevin Briggs 2024.

**WRAP UP:** It's critical that you pay attention to the signs. Specifically, take heed if you notice any changes or anything that's different from usual.

## Engage

Once you have read the signs, it's time to **engage**, one conversation at a time.. Here's a guide to help you engage the person at risk in a conversation:

- **Ask and listen** – As best you can, find a safe location, ask questions, and then just listen. Your goal is to *really* just listen, avoiding the temptation to give advice.
- **Find the hook** – Your goal is to “find the hook.” What is the thing that matters most, that will help the person at risk to “see tomorrow”? In this step, you want to focus on validating the person and normalizing what they are going through. Be sure to express gratitude that they felt safe in sharing with you.
- **Avoid the pitfalls** – This isn't a time for trite positivity or assurances that everything will be OK. Also, be sure to avoid promising secrecy. The goal is to be genuine.

Source: Kevin Briggs 2024.

**WRAP UP:** All of us need to be ready to engage in conversation. Above all, be ready to ask and listen; find the hook, normalizing along the way; and avoid the common pitfalls.



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## Follow Up

You've had the conversation (or perhaps you've had multiple conversations). It's critical that you then **follow up**. How can you help to keep them safe, not only in the moment of crisis, but over time? You can work with the person at risk to develop a **Crisis Safety Plan**, which is a written list of coping strategies and support for people who may be at high risk for suicide. (See below, noting questions and prompts you can offer.)

### Crisis Safety Plan\*

#### 1. Warning signs that a crisis may be forthcoming:

(Any specific thoughts, places, events, dates, and moods that trigger a crisis for you?)

#### 2. Coping strategies I can use when a crisis does arise:

(What helps you to cope? What are things you can do to help mitigate a crisis? This might include things like breathing, working out, cooking, music, puzzles, meditating, journaling, spending time with friends, or crafts. Avoid drugs and alcohol, and be sure to keep weapons locked away, giving the key with someone else.)

#### 3. Places where I feel safe or that can provide distractions:

(This might include going for a walk, visiting a shopping mall, museum, or coffee house, or having a meal with a friend.)

#### 4. People and organizations I can contact for assistance:

(See resources listed below for ideas.)

#### 5. Goals I have yet to accomplish:

(It's helpful to clarify things that you still want to do, like learning a new language, traveling someplace new, learning to cook, quitting smoking, achieving a desired look, volunteering.)

#### 6. What I value in my life or am responsible for that keep me going:

(This might include pets, family members, responsibility to others, faith.)

Source: Kevin Briggs 2024.

**WRAP UP:** Stepping in and helping is not a “one and done.” Following up is critical, so that you can help the person at risk to be safe in the moment, and over time.

## Resources

Here are some good resources for you to keep in mind:

**988 National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**

**741741 Crisis Text line**

**National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**

**American Association of Suicidology (AAS)**

**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)**

\* This guide is for informational purposes only. Please consult a licensed healthcare professional prior to use.



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## FAQ

What are the top signs to look for?

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What is the line between the conversations we can have versus those of a mental health professional? What is the line between the two?

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What can we, as executives (aka, "trendsetters"), do to help our managers (aka, "permission givers") have these conversations?

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What are suggested trainings?

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How do we get everyone on the same page?

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What are some of the topics that might come up in these conversations, e.g., abuse, child at risk, financial stress, being away from home? And, how might we handle each of these?

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What are the things we need to find out about our people?

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How do we reach someone who is hard to reach?

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What is the appropriate line between being boss vs. being a friend?

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What are the things NOT to say?

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Additional questions that come to mind...

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## Your workshop guides.

### LAURA PUTNAM

CEO and founder of Motion Infusion, international speaker, and author of *Workplace Wellness that Works*, Laura has worked with over hundreds of organizations, and has trained over 40,000 managers and leaders. With a mission to get individuals, teams, and organizations “in motion” and on the path to better health and well-being, she has been featured on MSNBC, New York Times, ABC, FOX News, USA Today, Forbes, NPR and many others. She specializes in creating transformational learning experiences to spark lasting change. A graduate of Stanford and Brown Universities, Laura lives in San Francisco.

### WILL SOUTHERLAND

Manager of Construction, Will has worked in the oil and gas industry for 25 years and joined the Williams Companies in 2011. His experience has spanned major regulated cross-country pipelines, gathering and processing, and tactical projects. His BSBA in management has helped him understand the management of construction and people. He is passionate about improving construction and construction worker mental health. When not at work, Will enjoys spending time with his wife and children.

## Ready to invigorate your company?

Interested in bringing this training directly to your organization? Great! This program can be delivered to your organization through a live training program or through a licensed product that your own learning and development team can bring to your employees.

### About Motion Infusion.

Motion Infusion is a global leader in well-being and engagement programs that actually work. Clients range from Fortune 500 companies to nonprofits, schools, and government entities. Services include keynotes, leadership and team development, and train-the-trainer programs. Additionally, we offer innovative and interactive curriculum products.

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Prepared for

