

9 - JD Schramm: Break the silence for suicide attempt survivors

From all outward appearances, John had everything going for him. He had just signed the contract to sell his New York apartment at a six-figure profit, and he'd only owned it for five years. The school where he graduated from with his master's had just offered him a teaching appointment, which meant not only a salary, but **benefits** for the first time in ages. And yet, despite everything going really well for John, he was **struggling**, fighting addiction and a gripping depression.

On the night of June 11th, 2003, he climbed up to the edge of the fence on the Manhattan Bridge and he leaped to the **treacherous** waters below. Remarkably -- no, miraculously -- he lived. The fall **shattered** his right arm, broke every rib that he had, punctured his lung, and he drifted in and out of consciousness as he drifted down the East River, under the Brooklyn Bridge and out into the pathway of the Staten Island **Ferry**, where passengers on the ferry heard his cries of pain, contacted the boat's captain who contacted the Coast Guard who fished him out of the East River and took him to Bellevue Hospital.

And that's actually where our story begins. Because once John committed himself to putting his life back together -- first physically, then emotionally, and then spiritually -- he found that there were very few resources available to someone who has attempted to end their life in the way that he did.

Research shows that 19 out of 20 people who attempt suicide will fail. But the people who fail are 37 times more likely to succeed the second time. This truly is an **at-risk** population with very few resources to support them. And what happens when people try to assemble themselves back into life, because of our taboos around suicide, we're not sure what to say, and so quite often we say nothing. And that furthers the **isolation** that people like John found themselves in.

I know John's story very well because I'm John. And this is, today, the first time in any sort of public setting I've ever **acknowledged** the **journey** that I have been on. But after having lost a beloved teacher in 2006 and a good friend last year to suicide, and sitting last year at TEDActive, I knew that I needed to step out of my silence and past my taboos to talk about an idea worth spreading -- and that is that people who have made the difficult choice to come back to life need more resources and need our help.

As the Trevor Project says, it gets better. It gets way better. And I'm choosing to come out of a totally different kind of closet today to encourage you, to **urge** you, that if you are someone who has contemplated or attempted suicide, or you know somebody who has, talk about it; get help. It's a conversation worth having and an idea worth spreading.

Thank you.