

Title: Rail industry leaders share their tips on how to have an R U OK? conversation

Rail R U OK?Day is a reminder to regularly check up on the wellbeing of your staff and workmates. It also reminds us that three words, “Are you ok?”, which we can sometimes be afraid to ask, can make a big difference to wellbeing in the workplace.

That’s why David Irwin, the CEO of Pacific National, believes Rail R U OK?Day is an important initiative not just for his organisation but the whole rail industry.

“It’s a really important initiative for the entire industry and it’s a very important initiative for Pacific National. Over the last three years, I’ve seen many examples where that question, ‘Are you ok?’ has led to great outcomes for our employees that may not have otherwise occurred.

“I’m glad to see that as an industry we’re understanding the importance of identifying changes in our workmates and checking in with one another to see how we’re doing. Because that network of empathy and consideration is one of the most powerful things we can create in this great industry,” he says.

While everyone across the industry is encouraged to check in with their workmates, managers are particularly well placed to identify changes in their staff that might indicate they’re going through a tough time either at work or at home. By simply asking “Are you ok?”, listening to their concerns and linking them in with appropriate support, managers can help their staff members get back on track.

To help build manager’s confidence to ask their staff, “Are you ok?”, we asked leaders across the rail industry for tips and advice on how to respond appropriately if a staff members says, “I’m not ok.”

Nick King, the General Manager of Network Operations for Metro Trains in Melbourne, believes that if someone says they’re not ok listening is key.

“When a staff member shares that they’re facing a challenge, the first thing I do is listen. I always say you have two ears and one mouth so use them in that ratio. You often don’t need to ask too many questions, but a few well-placed open questions can help them share what they’re going through,” he says.

TK Ting, the head of Operational Planning for Metro Trains in Melbourne, believes that building trust with your staff encourages them to be more open during these conversations.

“I make sure my staff know that the door to my office is always open and that they’re always welcome to come in and have a chat. But I also make time to check in with my staff to see how they’re going from a work and personal perspective. I’m always working to be more approachable as that trust makes them feel more comfortable opening up to you.”

Sometimes a staff member needs additional support beyond the conversation. If someone’s really struggling Dr Robert Care, the Strategic Geographies leader for ARUP Australasia, believes encouraging them to take steps to better manage their situation is important.

“Remember you’re not a psychologist but you can help. Be empathetic, don’t judge them and listen to what they’ve got to say. Try to connect them with the employee assistance program or some of the services listed on the R U OK? website. Be positive about the role these services can play because they can help. I know the difference they can make because when I got to the bottom of the pile I turned and got help and it turned my life around,” he says.

Looking out for the staff member shouldn’t end with the conversation. It’s important to check in with the employee regularly to see if they are OK.

“Probably the most important piece of all is to follow up. Don’t leave it at that one conversation. There are so many examples where that mere follow up call or conversation can make the difference,” emphasises David Irwin.

Do you work in the rail industry? Get involved in **Rail R U OK?Day** on Thursday 20 April - a campaign developed by R U OK? in collaboration with **TrackSAFE**. Find out how **here**.

You can find more tips and advice for starting a conversation with a staff member you’re worried about in R U OK?’s ‘How to ask staff R U OK?’ booklet which can be downloaded [here](#).
