

Title: The four words to lift a workmate's spirits

Rail R U OK?Day encourages rail workers to deepen their conversations with their colleagues. Because checking in with our rail workmates can help them better manage the pressures they face both on and off the job.

Wes Gordon is a pastoral carer who's worked in the rail industry for over forty years. He understands the pressures and stresses rail workers face.

"Rail staff are involved in a whole range of stressful incidents – fatalities, injuries, passengers collapsing – but they're well trained, focussed and handle it extremely well. On top of that they have the problems that everybody has - family problems, family illnesses, anxiety issues, depression. We have all of that and we deal with it. But these things can take their toll," he says.

Wes believes that chatting through stuff with colleagues can help a workmate through life's ups and downs.

"That's why programs like R U OK? which encourage our people to ask each other, 'Hey, are you going ok?' are really important.

"I've found that phrase is one of the most powerful phrases around. It saves lives – I've actually seen it save people's lives," he says.

Throughout his time in the rail industry Wes has witnessed a number of life-changing conversations but he says there's one moment that stands out.

"There was an incident at one of the stations, a near miss and a very traumatic incident. I sat and talked to a staff member who was very shaken. While I'm sitting and talking to him the phone in the station kept going off. He was answering the phone and each time he answered you could see him settling down more and more. What was happening was people in the system had heard about the incident and were ringing him up, going 'How you going?' Are you ok?'. You could actually see it working.

"I think there were about seven or eight phone calls and by the time the final phone call came through he had settled right down and he was in control. It's a fantastic example of what that question, 'Are you ok?' can do."

Wes believes we've all got what it takes to start a conversation with a workmate we're worried about.

“You don’t need to be an expert to ask that question, ‘Are you ok?’ You just need to be a human being, a person who has an interest in their fellow person.

“Start by asking the question then listen. It’s very important to listen - people pick up when you’re not listening. Then help them tap in to the support that’s out there, and there’s a lot out there in the rail industry. You could suggest they go and talk to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Or you could say, ‘Let’s go and talk to your supervisor, or your friends, or your family, or your doctor.’ The next steps you suggest don’t have to be complicated.”

Wes believes that it’s important to not just have a one-off conversation with someone you’re worried but to keep checking in with them.

“Over the years, I’ve seen some really bad stuff with people badly affected and I’ve seen, the only word I can use is, miraculous recoveries, with people coming back - that’s because they’ve had all this ongoing support. So, don’t go and ask someone if they’re ok and then just walk away. That doesn’t work. Check in with them again,” he urges.

Finally, Wes reminds us that these types of conversations aren’t just for the workplace.

“We all rely on each other. We are not an island. So, it’s important when you see one of your friends, one of your workmates, one of your neighbours having problems to go up and ask them if they’re ok. It makes a big difference. It lifts people’s spirit.”

Find more tips and advice for starting a conversation with a colleague you’re worried about at ruok.org.au

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](#).
