meet Genevieve

Genevieve is the Head of Health, Safety and Environment at Pacific National, and a Board Director of TrackSafe Foundation. As one of Australia's largest private rail freight operators with over 3,500 staff, Pacific National operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Genevieve touches on some of the challenges rail workers face and shares how building an R U OK? culture that's organisation-wide has benefited their employees, leaders and the company.

Genevieve: **The rail industry can be really unforgiving.** While there's a lot to love about it, there's no denying that some parts of the job are challenging. Working in isolation, being away from family and doing shift work can be difficult. Our train drivers specifically, may be exposed to traumatic incidents and fatalities which can significantly impact their mental health.

At Pacific National, prioritising employee mental health doesn't just sit with me or my portfolio of health, safety and environment. **It sits with everyone, but it starts from the top.** Our CEO has a very strong focus on mental wellbeing which is mirrored through our Executive Team, and their leadership has helped make it important for all employees.

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Building a supportive culture, where people feel empowered to check in with one another, across the organisation didn't happen overnight. It occurred over many years and with a concerted effort to implement initiatives that resonate with our rail community, such as Rail R U OK? Day. We have a solid set of values which all employees believe in and work by – two of which are kindness and curiosity.

> **I think they align well with the R U OK? message, as it's through curiosity we can spot the signs a colleague might be doing it tough and our approach to checking in should always be gentle and kind, not forceful.**

Everyone's comfort level is different when it comes to talking about their struggles, which is why we make sure our rail workers are given options when faced with challenges. We have an Employee Assistance Program that extends to family members because we know traumatic events can impact entire family units and communities. Our People and Culture team and all managers are also skilled in having meaningful conversations and supporting their staff.

> **During my time here, I have found that people tend to lean on others who have experienced a similar situation. Because of this, we developed a network of Mental Health First Aiders who are available for peer-to-peer chats.**

Outside of initiatives, what's really apparent at Pacific National is that everyone is so willing to offer an ear or word of support. They genuinely are 'here to hear'.

Even though we are a national company, a lot of our work is regional, so we are connected to hundreds of local communities. When something happens in a community, it affects the whole team. **Having our leaders and workers understand the importance of looking out for one another expands the support network during these difficult times and reminds people it's OK to not be OK.** I love visiting regional sites because I will often see R U OK? information displayed all year round and can hear people checking in with each other. It's part of their DNA.

For us, getting behind Rail R U OK? Day is a formal reminder to our people to check in every day and to let workmates know you're here to hear, if they ever need someone to chat to. I don't see it as a day, but rather a message to consistently share in the workplace. It might be years before an employee needs the tools and resources, but if they are exposed to them daily, knowing the simple steps and having the confidence to ask 'are you OK?' could change (or save) a life one day.

If you ask me, that's worth being a part of!

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