

# Meet Vikki



Vikki, 52, has worked in distribution logistics for more than 30 years. During this time, she has made it her priority to normalise conversations about mental health and create environments where checking in is a regular occurrence. As Distribution Centre Manager at Coles, she leads a team of 500 people, varying in age, cultural background and each with their own life experience. On several occasions, both herself and her staff have experienced the life-changing power of asking R U OK?



**Vikki:** When I came from the UK to Australia, one of the first phrases I heard at work was 'she'll be right'. I had no idea what it meant. But I soon learnt that it was a way of shrugging off or dismissing people's problems. It didn't sit well with me because I've always believed that if your people aren't running well, then your business can't run well.

Early on in my career I invested a lot of time in getting to know people. I'd frequently check in with them if I knew they were going through problems at home. Back then, particularly when I was a team manager, I was told I was too emotionally involved with team members and should let them deal with personal issues in their own time, not work time. My view was different to this, because we all have a life outside of work, and **if you're going through something tough, it doesn't magically leave your mind when you clock on.**

When I stepped into leadership positions, I made it my mission to build a supportive culture. I started by being honest about who I was. I openly share that I have anxiety and depression and that I take hormone replacements because I'm going through menopause. I can still do my job, but I must do these things to keep myself well. It often takes people by surprise, but it quickly breaks down the barrier and helps them realise we're all human - irrespective of our role.

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**No one is immune to life's struggles.**



Ask

**R U OK?**<sup>TM</sup>  
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**No qualifications needed**



One conversation with a colleague has always stayed with me. He was battling cancer, and it was affecting him mentally and physically. **He didn't want to see a counsellor at the time, so I offered friendship instead. We spent an hour a week chatting about what he was going through, so he could get things off his chest.** One day I got a phone call from my manager saying this same colleague didn't seem himself and they asked if I could speak with him because he had a connection with me. I asked him what was going on and he opened up to me about having a plan to end his life that night. Together we called the local hospital, arranged for him to be with someone that night and made an appointment for the next day. I messaged him in the morning encouraging him to go to the appointment. He replied and let me know that he went and will be going back again. We organised for him to have time off work so he could focus on getting better. I checked in with him once a week to see how he was going. When he returned to work a few months later, **he walked right up to me and thanked me for saving his life that night.**



**Next time you're worried about a work mate, just check in. Don't overthink it.**

**It's not about saying the right things, it's about being available and ready to listen. I was no expert or counsellor, but I knew how to be a friend.**

The best way to support R U OK? in Trucks & Sheds this year is by adding 'check in with colleagues' to your job description – because it's something we all should do. It can, and does, save lives.



Scan the QR code or go to  
[healthyheads.org.au/ruok](https://healthyheads.org.au/ruok)

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