

Lights Out

R U OK? When Work is not the Problem...

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As much as we may count down to our next day off or vacation, our work, and people associated with it is for most of us, an important part of our lives. The familiar daily routines of work can provide security, a welcome distraction, comfort when things are not going so well outside of work. Work has a documented positive influence in recovery from injury and illness.

Most people at some point in time will experience a significant work-related stressor. Examples might include but are not limited to: physical or mental illness or injury, loss of a loved one, relationship breakdown, financial pressures or even domestic violence. Such problems can be experienced by any one of us during our working lives.

These days people are more likely to form relationships with, and confide in their work colleagues than their neighbours. If a

workplace is a modern community, and the employees of that workplace its residents or citizens, then the workplace has an opportunity to provide community-like support for its participants during times of need.

In times of personal crisis it may be assumed that the affected individual wants or requires time away from the workplace however this is not always the case or the best option. It is important that when dealing with such issues we ensure we are not cutting ourselves or our employees off from vital workplace support networks. Open communication between the individual involved and their workplace, with consideration of temporary flexible work options has the potential to create a win-win situation for the employee and employer.

Providing a flexible, understanding and supportive work environment has the potential to make all the difference in terms of an individual's physical and mental health during times of adversity. There is little doubt that supporting employees through difficult times has benefits for employers- the retention of skilled and experienced employees, improved workplace morale and employee engagement being the most obvious.

This year R U OK? Day was held on September 8, however don't make it one day a year, ask the question any day. Asking R U OK? In the workplace is a fantastic opportunity to provide support to one another, as well as to breakdown preconceived notions and stigmas surrounding mental health.

The more we ask each other R U OK? The more likely we are to answer honestly, and reach out for help if we need it. These conversations can make a real difference to people going through a tough time.

At HR Business Direction we are proud supporters of R U OK? – a not-for-profit organisation that is dedicated to encouraging all Australians to regularly and meaningfully ask anyone struggling with life, "are you ok?".

