

RU OK?™

in Trucks & Sheds

meet Isaac



Isaac, 26, was born into the fifth generation of the family transport business, De Bruyn Transport. From a young age Isaac got his hands dirty loading containers, sweeping floors and painting pallets. In time, Isaac started to recognise the challenges that come with working in the industry and after experiencing his own mental health struggles, he went on to complete his counselling certification. Today, Isaac's role as the Wellbeing Officer focuses on transforming the family business into one that prioritises the mental health of over three hundred employees.

Isaac: Working in transport is not your average eight hours a day. As a truckie, you work long hours, away from home, family and friends and you are alone in a truck – it's tough stuff. On top of that, our timelines are often tight, and clients and customers have very high demands, which adds pressure to the job.

It's not just truckies who face challenges though – there's a chain effect to warehouse and management staff. Particularly during COVID-19, management were struggling to find new staff and we were working with skeleton crews, which meant the workload was higher and a lot of people experienced burn out. When everyone is under the pump, the ripple effect is obvious – tension is high because customers are experiencing delays and staff make more mistakes because they're rushing to meet the demand.

The work we do can be a matter of life or death. We're playing with heavy-duty machinery and we're on the road for long periods, so being mentally switched on is important for our safety, and our mental health contributes to that.

“**For me, the tell-tale signs a work mate isn't doing well is when they suddenly have a short fuse, their attention is elsewhere or there's a shift in their attitude. You get to know one another well because you spend a fair bit of time together, so little things like the way they're talking to other people can be enough to realise they're not OK.**”

It's remembering that everyone has a story and can be fighting different battles, no matter how big or small. Don't get me wrong though, some people hide their battles well. Especially the fellas who start at 3am – they're in before management and loaders and they're back late at night, so they're seeing less people. That's why being proactive and regularly checking in with a work mate is so important.



It can be hard to get people to talk openly. Right now, our industry is predominantly males in their late 40s who've grown up with an attitude of 'get stuck in and get it done', closely followed by 'suck it up' when things go south. They work really hard, never take leave and don't really chat about their personal life. I'm sure you can think of at least one bloke who fits the description. But it's slowly changing, and it needs to. As a business we're pushing to support the mental health of staff because we want people to be able to talk about where they're at. We don't want it to reach crisis point.

I think the key to creating a culture that makes difficult conversations easy, is trust. And trust needs to be earned. Take me as an example – I'm the Wellbeing Officer of a family business where my Dad is the big boss. I've had my own mental battles as a young bloke, so I understand mental illness, but for staff to feel comfortable speaking to me, they need to trust that what they share with me is private and won't impact their career. That will take time.

I know I won't be everyone's go to man, and I shouldn't be. In fact, it's often better coming from someone you know.

“ **We all have the ability to start a conversation with someone we're worried about.**

I've experienced my own health issues which impacted my energy levels and elevated my anxiety. I felt very alone and misunderstood at work, and because no one checked in with me, they just assumed I was lazy. My Mum was my rock, and it made a huge difference. But if people at work were more aware of the signs and took the time to reach out, it would have made my journey a lot better.

It really is as simple as asking 'how have you been travelling?' and being ready to listen. But also, being armed with resources to connect them to further help if they need it, whether it's a support service, your company Employee Assistance Program (EAP), local GP or trusted family and friends.

If you're reading this and reminded of someone who hasn't been themselves lately – just check in. Help them get the support they need so they don't fall through the cracks. It could change their life.

**Drive conversations
and ask
'are you OK?'**



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