

# Decency to listen



everyone  
home safe  
every day

Dear all,

I heard someone speak this weekend, and what they said really struck me: “there has never been a single example where silencing certain groups or voices has ever worked out well”.

If we are selective about who we listen to, we place the wants and views of some, above others. More importantly, by suppressing certain voices, we stop the conversations that need to happen. That sets us on a collision course, sometimes sudden, sometimes slow, but always inevitable.



**Rob Cairns,**  
Regional managing director

In safety, the fault line is decency. Problems begin when certain groups believe they know better, or that listening is a waste of time. Worse, they may feel threatened by a view of the world that could change their own. Leadership means having the strength and skill to value the voices of those you lead, and the interest to truly listen to them. If you can’t do that, hand the role to someone who can.

If you are a half-decent safety leader, you need to seek out perspectives that don’t align with your own, because that’s where the fault lines in safety open up quickest. That’s because you will have taken steps to test around the edges and collect information you know is unlikely to match what you want to be true.

For example, last week I told you about my visit to Shrewsbury DU and I shared some of the feedback I listened to from one of our S&T teams, who have been issued vans too small to carry the equipment we ask them to transport. There was nothing comfortable or rewarding about that conversation; it was frustrating for them, and uncomfortable for me. But I owe them that time and honesty. If I don’t have the courage to listen to their problems, then I have no right to ask them to turn themselves inside out, day in and day out, keeping the railway running in such difficult circumstances.

In this instance, I committed to taking this problem and using the tools and influence I have to try to resolve it for them.

How we judge fairness, and how we bring our own experience to it, defines us as leaders. We cannot lead others, nor claim the right, if we can’t make sense of these truths ourselves.

I grew up in a pit village, in a family involved in the miners strikes of 1984. That reality shaped me - it sharpened my belief that decency is a responsibility, not a privilege. It taught me that the measure of a leader is not in status or title, but in how they protect those who have the least room for error. That's why I speak as I do, why I listen, and why I act - because safety leadership demands courage, and it demands we stand up for what is right, every single time.

Safety leadership is about looking out for the people who can influence their own circumstances least. Do that well, and you will see the people following you.

As always, I'd welcome your thoughts - feel free to [email me directly](#).

Stay safe,

Rob

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This update is provided by the Wales and Western Communications team. For any queries, please contact [walesandwesterncomms@networkrail.co.uk](mailto:walesandwesterncomms@networkrail.co.uk)