

Adam...My Story

Adam Biscoe, 43, S&T Team Leader at Yeovil Junction in Somerset. Diagnosed with depression after difficulties at work, during which he found a lack in support and poor attitude from others. Later discovered the depression was causing the work issues, and was re-diagnosed with bipolar.

About me

I am a happily married father of three. I joined British Rail in 1987 as an apprentice and have worked in many roles as an engineer and an instructor throughout my railway career. I continue to enjoy my job with Network Rail on a daily basis, no day is the same and the range of individuals you meet is quite unique to the railway.

I was initially diagnosed with depression in 1999 by my GP. My mood at the time was very low and I had very little interest in doing anything. Some days were spent in bed as it was hard to muster up the physical energy needed to get out of bed. During this time I found people around me had quite a shocking attitude towards how I was feeling, I was told to pull myself together and get on with life. But that's the thing, with mental illness, unlike a broken leg that you can see, people couldn't see my broken mind so the assumption was that I was just feeling sorry for myself.

Support and Managing my mental health

I started to believe what people were saying, that I was just being pathetic and difficult. I was prescribed anti-depressants for the following 13 years up to 2012 and I kept my condition buried deep-down because I was ashamed of it. I frequently took time off work during those years but I lied about what was wrong with me. I was working with another rail company at the time and I received little or no support, not their fault, I mean how would they know what was wrong with me if I didn't tell them?

The reaction I received from others was very mixed. My closest family were very supportive but they had difficulties in dealing with my erratic behaviour. For example I would go out and make an outlandish purchase such as a car that I didn't need, to me that was normal behaviour. Looking back now their reactions were quite subdued, maybe they didn't want to upset me or make my condition worse.

I felt free for a while because now I had a reason for why my mind was acting this way. I started to talk to my colleagues about it and we had a laugh and a joke about being on the 'happy pills'. However, I felt that my immediate manager buried his head in the sand and hoped that this would go away. I couldn't blame him really, he probably knew as much as I did about depression, which was very little.

Sometimes it was difficult for people to support me, when I was in a real 'low' you could have offered me all the possessions in the world but it would not have brought me out of that low. That's how controlling our minds can be, and it was difficult to accept support.

In 2012 my illness had taken a different path, rather than feeling down all the time my mood was on a rollercoaster. One moment I could feel deliriously happy, the next suicidal. I made the decision to go back to my GP. Don't get me wrong GPs' do a good job but they lack the specialist knowledge with any illness and so I asked to see a psychiatrist. I felt I had been popping pills for 13 years that weren't doing anything and I needed an expert opinion. Within the first 30 minutes of my first appointment, the psychiatrist diagnosed me with Bi-Polar Disorder. My medication was radically changed and my condition has been successfully managed now for 3 years.

From my experience I found you are perceived by some as not being able to cope, that you're weak because you can't deal with daily life like others can. You're mind controls everything you do and when it's not working, your body shuts down with it. It's like a car with an engine that won't start. If this did happen to your car you wouldn't be seen as weak for asking for support to get it fixed, so you're not weak for asking for support to help your personal recovery.

Where I am Now

Life is good now. I'm lucky to have huge support from my wife and family. I see my psychiatrist once every three months and I have to have regular blood tests to ensure that my medications are at the correct therapeutic level. I still have off days but not the huge mood swings I had before. My mood isn't like a rollercoaster now and more like a slightly bumpy road! I get good support from my local manager insofar as being able to attend appointments with my psychiatrist and visits to the surgery for blood tests.

Do I have any advice? Well yes as it goes... it's hard, but reach out and ask for help. Start with friends, family who can accompany you to see your GP. I know it's hard to reach out but just try, it's your first step to recovery and believe me, you can recover. The second bit of advice I have is this... if you're feeling depressed, leave alcohol well alone. It may make you feel good again for a few hours, but it wears off and leaves you feeling worse than before. The temptation is then to drink some more and it can spiral out of control. I wish you all well in your journey, there is light at the end the tunnel.

Finally, I think that what Network Rail is doing to highlight awareness of mental illness is a bold and admirable step; it's about time that we all stop pretending this is not happening. Remember, it affects 1 in 4 of us, 25% of Network Rail's workforce.