

Better, not bigger: employee wellbeing in rail freight

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The latest guest writer article from Oliver Schepisi, head of operations at Nuclear Transport Solutions (NTS) Global.

How can rail freight organisations attract and retain the talent they need to thrive? It's something we've been asking ourselves at NTS Global - and we believe the answer lies in employee wellbeing. Fair pay is one side of the coin - but company culture also matters. It's not about slides and office ping-pong tables, but rather identifying the factors that will have a meaningful impact on people's work lives.

In the following article, I'll take a closer look at these factors - from safety and security to flexible working.

Choosing safety

As a nuclear rail freight specialist, NTS Global is focused on becoming better rather than bigger - a goal reflected in the business's mantra, 'safe, secure and reliable'. Simply put, it strives to deliver nuclear rail freight services of the highest quality - which means safety is key.

It goes without saying that my team and I work to comply with regulations and relevant legislation. But, in the rail freight industry, safety must be about more than processes and box ticking. We believe that creating a 'culture of safety' – as part of which employees choose, rather than are told, to work safely – should be the priority.

This kind of thinking represents a step change in the industry. At NTS, we're currently looking at how we can create a 'safety culture', which will involve helping people to understand the consequences of their actions, and to become more risk aware.

Ultimately, we believe that adopting a 'behavioural safety' approach will enable the industry to improve service delivery – and empower and protect employees. Every individual should feel safe at work, and it's a conversation we look forward to beginning with NTS Global's wider team.

The right support for rail freight workers

And, because rail freight professionals face a range of unique challenges, employers must ensure that they have access to the right mental health resources. While many companies opt for general occupational health methods, we recognise that specialist workers need specialist support – and have introduced tailored trauma counselling for our team. It's another step the freight industry can take to protect its people.

Working more flexibly

And, just as attitudes to mental health are changing, so too are working practices. According to recent Office of National Statistics data, around **40 per cent of professionals reported having worked from home at some point in the past seven days.**

The rail freight industry must recognise that today's employees want to work flexibly – and that 'office-based' (with an hour's commute either way) doesn't necessarily mean 'more productive'. Similarly, the idea of nine-to-five working is now outdated, and inflexible hours make it difficult for individuals to maintain a work-life balance.

At NTS Global, we want people to achieve this balance, finding a hybrid-working arrangement that meets their needs. Productivity will follow.

The right working environment

Employers should also strive to create a positive working environment for staff, whether they're based in the office, or at home. In a sometimes-old-fashioned industry, it can be easy to overlook the simple things – ensuring that workspaces are comfortable, well-lit, and thoughtfully designed, for example. And, when team members carry out their duties from home, employers are obliged to ensure that they have access to a safe workspace and the right equipment.

At NTS Global, we're in the process of redesigning our offices, with a focus on layout and equipment. We're also looking at automation, and plan to introduce booking-on-and-off systems and driver portals that will

make life easier for our operational staff.

And, with hybrid working now the norm, technology is more important than ever. We're still establishing how communication platforms like Teams and Zoom can help disparate teams to connect – or how we can bring staff from our numerous maintenance and driver depots together. Technology has its limits, and those in-person relationships remain incredibly important.

My ops team and I may not have all the answers – but I'm confident that we're asking the right questions about employee wellbeing.

Today, we have a range of opportunities in everything from frontline management to planning and resourcing. We've also launched our own apprenticeship programme – meaning that, whatever your level of experience, there's a role for you at NTS Global. Visit <https://nucleartransportsolutions.com/> to learn more.