

VEREDUS TALKS



*Jo MacPhail,
HR Director*



Operated by
West Midlands
Trains

As a contribution to our International Women's Day celebration, we are very grateful that Jo MacPhail took some time out of her very busy working schedule to give us an insight to her experience as a woman in the rail industry. Read on for a small insight into her world...

A precis

Jo has been HR Director at West Midlands Trains since 2019 and before that she was HR Director for CrossCountry Trains. Prior to her time in the railway, Jo held a variety of HR roles for organisations such as Rolls Royce, Openreach, BT and DHL. A champion for high-performing inclusive cultures, with a focus on change management, Jo believes HR should be the catalyst for organisations to succeed.

What are the current challenges for women in your sector?

The Railway, like most forms of transport, is actually much more diverse than many outside of rail appreciate. It involves so many elements, from infrastructure, operations, commercial and customer service. Like many transport-related sectors I think the perception of shift work or unsociable hours can be a deterrent for women considering the sector. In reality, there are probably the widest range of careers I have ever witnessed, and so I think it make a great place for careers for both women and men. I think the challenges for women in rail are broadly the same as in any sector, i.e. balance. By balance I mean being allowed, indeed encouraged, to be as ambitious, or not, in the workplace as women and men want to be, whilst finding meaningful and fulfilling work that makes a real difference to internal and external customers.

Is there anyone (male or female) who has inspired you in your career?

I have been lucky enough to work with some exceptional leaders in my career. The most inspiring was an HR Manager at DHL, Alistair McKinnon. He became my mentor and pushed me to do things I really didn't want to do. He was a huge champion of mine, and gave me self-belief even when I didn't really have it. Such was his positive impact on me, we still meet for lunch, even though he has long since retired. The second is Dame Stephanie "Steve" Shirley. I was lucky enough to hear her give a talk in Birmingham a few years ago, and it remains the most inspiring talk I have ever witnessed. Dame Shirley is one of the most celebrated computer pioneers, not only for building a \$3 billion tech empire in 1960s England, but for doing it with an all-female, work-from-home staff of professionally qualified women who had left the work force after marrying and having children. I was so inspired I went on to do everything I could to improve diversity within whatever sector I was working in.



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In your experience, do women leaders bring different qualities to organisations than their male counterparts?

I think in some ways the issues in organisations are exacerbated by the framing of this question! I have worked in all-female teams where I have felt very excluded and I have also worked in all female teams where I have felt very much included and valued. I think individuals, along with the organisation, have a responsibility to allow the strong and softer sides of both males and females be celebrated and listened to. I think diversity of thought, respectful challenge and open-mindedness are the cornerstones for good business decision-making, and when those principles are in place, it allows for every individual to bring their best self to work.

How do you think the workplace could and should change for the better in the future for women?

I would like to see workplaces change to allow both men and women to consider their families in conjunction with their workplaces more, as I still witness people (myself included) struggle to maintain a good balance at times, and work plus families are two things that are not going to go away anytime soon!

How do you think the workplace could and should change for the better in the future for women?

My advice would be to find what interests you and relentlessly pursue it. Passion shines through, and many organisations recruit for attitude over experience. Don't expect or allow anyone else to dictate your career. Find out what motivates you and what doesn't and then realistically assess what you are going to have to learn to do and what you can successfully ignore long term. I have sometimes met people who tell me they want to be a CEO but don't want to manage people. Most organisations don't work that way, so something will have to be compromised – either the desire to be a CEO, or the ability to manage people.

To read more on the subject of women, other topical articles or to find out about Veredus and our proposition, please visit us [here](#) or email

info@veredus.co.uk

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For International Women's Day, West Midlands Trains are focusing on Equity through a colleague webinar featuring Jo as a panellist. During Women's History Month and throughout the year, their Gender Equality Group is actively promoting women's safety for colleagues and customers including distributing free personal safety alarms and supporting on wellbeing activity and Women's passenger safety events. Wider industry initiatives include collaborating with the Rail Unites for Inclusion group to create belonging industry wide and recent activity involved producing this video to recognise and celebrate women across the rail industry - Click [HERE](#).

