

LEADERSHIP STORIES

BY CAROLINE WILSON



'I get to make a positive difference'

Caroline Wilson, MD and founder at The Recruitment Story, meets **Colette Casey**, customer experience director at LNER

► Explain your role in 100 words or less

I'm responsible for everything that shapes a customer's journey, from contact centres and service standards to problem solving, passenger assistance, dining, and the overall experience on board and in stations. I lead a team of around 2,800 colleagues. My role is to balance the digital and human sides of service, making sure customers have what they need, whether that's finding their seat, enjoying our first class dining, or simply feeling supported throughout their journey. At its heart, my job is to make travelling with LNER as good as it can possibly be.

What's the most memorable thing that's ever happened to you on a train?

Two moments stand out, one joyful, one unforgettable for very different reasons.

The joyful one is any of our big community celebrations, like Railway 200. Those days remind you why we do what we do, connecting people, creating memories, and celebrating the railway's place in our communities.

The other moment was on a West Midlands service, when a passenger became disoriented due to a medical issue and began undressing mid journey. It was alarming for others, but it was clear he needed help, not judgement. I stepped in, tried to get him water, and helped him get dressed again. It reinforced how vital our on board teams are, their empathy, their ability to read situations, and the reassurance they provide when things are far from routine.

When did you realise you couldn't do it all? What changed after that?

I spent 20 years in automotive, moving through roles where I was the subject matter expert. I'd jump in, fix things, and rely heavily on my own knowledge. Rail changed everything.

When I joined Cross Country Trains, I didn't know the sector. I had to ask more questions, rely on others, and let go of the instinct to control everything. It was uncomfortable, suddenly I wasn't the expert. But it made me a better leader. I learned to focus on enabling others, creating the environment for people to succeed, and stepping outside my comfort zone. Vulnerability became part of my leadership. And I realised that trusting others isn't a weakness, it's essential.



Tell me about a moment when someone in your team stepped up in a way that genuinely surprised you

It wasn't one person. It was an entire industry.

During the Huntington incident last year, I witnessed extraordinary unity and compassion. Colleagues from across operators, depots, stations and TOCs stepped forward without hesitation. People turned up for shifts they weren't scheduled for. Others travelled in just to help. New starters that week said the experience cemented why they'd joined rail.

What surprised me most was the care shown towards me, the leadership team and David Horne. Colleagues came up, hugged us, asked if we were coping. It was humbling. You don't get that in other industries. It was leadership from everywhere, calm, human, instinctive and it reminded me that rail truly is a family.

If you could swap jobs with anyone in your team for one day, who would it be and why?

I have picked two!

First, catering, because shaping the on board food experience is creative, joyful and deeply connected to local communities. I love the tasting sessions, the supplier visits, and seeing customers light up when they discover something thoughtful and regional on board. And yes, I get to eat cake. A lot of cake!!

Second, I'd spend a day in the CEO David's shoes, Not for long though, it's a tough job, but I'd love to understand the breadth of decisions, the stakeholder pressures, and how I could better support him. He's incredibly calm and measured, and I'd like to see how he balances everything beneath the surface.

And finally, why should people join public transport? Why do you love it?

Transport is vital to our country and our communities. We connect people to their lives, their families, their opportunities. Rail offers huge diversity of roles and career paths, you can do almost anything in this industry.

My day is different every day, and I get to make a positive difference. But most of all, I love the people. Kind, passionate, compassionate colleagues who genuinely care about each other and their customers. I've worked in industries that were ruthless. Rail isn't like that. It envelops you. It becomes part of who you are. What's not to love? ■