

The IBEW SPARQ

A quarterly newsletter highlighting IBEW values

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The Importance and Benefits of Accountability

When your company spreads across some 60 sites and seven states, holding people accountable can seem almost impossible; that is, unless you have the IBEW and the Code of Excellence.

The Tennessee Valley Authority employs approximately 2,500 IBEW members as permanent employees at its worksites that include nuclear, solar, hydroelectric and oil and gas plants. Thousands more work in a short-term capacity upgrading infrastructure and performing maintenance work.

The TVA has long been proud of its relationship with labor, but by partnering with the IBEW and implementing its Code of Excellence, it's made that relationship even stronger. And the partnership is bringing in workers from other trades, making this a multi-trade initiative that shines a light on the importance of accountability.

Surveys have shown that 91 percent of employees who feel valued at their job are motivated to do their best, compared to 37 percent who don't feel valued.

When Tenth District International Vice President Brent Hall began discussions with TVA about the Code, he pointed to the previous success of Florida Power & Light when it



implemented the program. Part of its success came from empowering lower-level union and management representatives to resolve problems.

By empowering people at this level, it sends a message of trust and appreciation, which in turn creates a culture where everyone feels valued—and accountable—to one another. It also creates a sense of ownership. In other words, it fosters a culture of positive peer pressure.

“It's been our experience that when you have onsite labor relations, with mid-level management and the union working together at that site, the problems don't end up downtown,” Hall said. “It's better for management, and it gives workers a voice in the decision-making. It's not some mandate from some office in some building far away.”

At a place as vast and varied as TVA, this becomes particularly valuable.

“Each site has its own specific issues,” Hall said. “A plant manager may be fine letting his guys have a say, except that he's handcuffed by some company-wide letter. We're trying to get back to letting management and local union representatives fix their problems at home.”

Of course, none of this takes the place of top-level leadership. And some things will always have to be handled at a higher level. But by giving people on-site power to handle more issues, they're also allowed more ownership. And that ownership translates to accountability, an essential part of the Code of Excellence.

Whether you work at a sprawling site like TVA, or a small, mom-and-pop shop, accountability matters. It's a way of allowing people to show they're responsible, which in turn makes every worksite, and worker, better.



What does SPARQ mean to you? Have an idea for the newsletter? Email theSPARQ@ibew.org



Accountability Builds Excellence

On a construction site, success or failure is determined by how well we deliver on our promises every day. When a contractor bids a job, determining the number of electricians needed and the journeyman–apprentice ratio is as important as figuring how much cable or conduit to order. It’s a careful balance that requires members to be accountable for their work.

During the construction of Detroit’s Little Caesars Arena in 2016, more than 500 IBEW members worked the project on any given day alongside nearly 70 apprentices. Absenteeism was an issue for all crafts on the project, measuring roughly the national average for the industry. But in the IBEW, average isn’t good enough.

The arena was a Code of Excellence project, which meant that every member working had to attend a Construction COE class. So, when Local 58 leaders and training staff learned of higher than acceptable absenteeism, particularly among apprentices, they called a meeting. Because they had the Code, it didn’t need to be a lecture. Apprentices were reminded about their training and that they’d made a commitment to the job and to their IBEW sisters and

brothers—and change was almost immediate. IBEW members started showing up on time every day and ready to work. Those who did continue to show up late or not at all were confronted by their peers and told they would be held accountable. Sometimes that accountability translated to assistance, such as helping a sister or brother with a transportation issue.

In the end, it was that accountability, of committing to being there for one another, and to the IBEW and the Code of Excellence, that changed a challenge into a success story.



SPARQ GOES LOCAL



Sheffield, Ala., Local 558 demonstrated its commitment to the IBEW’s core principles with Code of Excellence training in February.



Local 558 Business Manager Tony Quillen spoke to construction members about the Code and its benefits.