

# 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](mailto:theSPARQ@ibew.org)



# Accountability in Extreme Conditions

On most days, in most jobs, accountability runs between sisters and brothers on site and between the company and its employees.

But at the IBEW, we hold ourselves accountable to our customers as well. And when the service we provide can be the difference between life and death, that can require going far beyond the ordinary.

This winter has been extraordinary, with wind chills in parts of the Midwest falling as low as 90 degrees below freezing.

For members of Aurora, Ill., Local 19 who work for Nicor Gas, that's meant weeks in "lockdown." For days at a time after mid-January's arctic temperatures, none of the gas workers were allowed to go home until the company released them from their work location. If there was an emergency—and at those temperatures, every house without heat is an emergency—Nicor had to have people on-hand for rescue missions or people could die.

Keeping homes safe for gas customers often meant workers making a temporary home for themselves from an army cot and sleeping bags. At one point, 20 members worked 18 hours non-stop in minus-21-degree weather to restore gas to customers.

Even with all those extra hours, the Local 19 crew didn't suffer a single incident, despite the exhaustion, the weather and the uncomfortable accommodations.

Nicor, of course, recognizes the accountability shown by our IBEW sisters and brothers. But they know every home should be safe and warm, a refuge, even if it means workers can't get back to their own.

The IBEW knows this, too. That mission, that accountability to the employer, to the customers and to one another, drove those members to a higher standard—the union standard—and we can all learn from their commitment.



Credit: Nicor Gas

## 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.