

The IBEW SPARQ

A quarterly newsletter highlighting IBEW values

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The Power of Working Together

As union members, we believe there is nothing more powerful than people standing arm-in-arm behind a collective cause. It's what won working people basic things like a 40-hour work week, weekends, paid holidays and sick time and an expectation of safe working conditions. It's why we are able to negotiate contracts that ensure quality health care and higher wages than nonunion counterparts.

But the idea doesn't only apply to working people standing with one another. We understand that our success is dependent on the success of our employers and that cooperative relationships built on dignity and respect aren't just a good idea—they work. Companies that respect their workers and workers that respect their companies make better choices—and both sides do better in the long run.

That's why relationships are at the heart of the Code of Excellence. But what about when the relationship between the company and its workforce isn't going well? Not every company, or worker for that matter, believes that collaboration and success go together. What then?

There might be a misunderstanding that the Code of Excellence only works where relations are already good.

For those willing to embrace it, the Code of Excellence is much more than just a list of best practices for the best workplaces. People like incoming St.

Louis Local 1439 Business Manager Jeremy Pour understand that.

Local 1439 represents nearly 700 workers at the utility company Ameren, and, in recent years, the partnership with the company was, in Pour's words, "Contentious. Litigious.

1439 to ask if their directors, the direct supervisors of our members, could attend the Code of Excellence trainings as well. A month later, 50 directors joined 50 stewards to look at how a joint commitment to excellence could transform the company.



Every dispute became a grievance. Every grievance became a fight. So, we proposed to do something different."

Local 1439 introduced the Code of Excellence and received permission from the company to begin training stewards while on the clock. The stewards then fanned out across the utility, spreading the word about what our commitment was—to ourselves, to the company and to one another. And it got the company's attention.

Soon after, Ameren came to Local

"We are seeing a difference already," Pour said. "This wasn't built on a foundation of trust. The Code is the foundation."

Read on and then send us your stories about how the Code of Excellence is building and transforming relationships between sisters and brothers, fellow unions and our partners and employers.



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



Relationships Put Us On the Right Track

Like most organizing stories, this one starts with a group of workers fed up with company policies. Five signalmen on the New England Central Railroad knew that a union was their best option, but there was concern among them about how much difference it might make, said Railroad Department Director Bill Bohné.

“Relationships between unions and rail companies have been deeply contentious recently,” he said. “We had similar concerns to the employees, but we were optimistic we could help.”

The most important step in any organizing drive isn't the vote or collecting cards: It's the moment the men and women decide to stop accepting their plight and begin to believe that a union can change their lives.

This is where relationships made the difference.

Two of the signalmen had been IBEW members already. One was a former wireman, the other a former Albany, N.Y., Local 770 railroad member. They'd seen the difference a union contract makes. Their experience convinced the others that a union could change things, and it led them to seek help from the IBEW.

But even after conversations with organizers and New Haven, Conn., Local 747 President Brian Schultz, one

burning question remained: Could the IBEW deliver?

That's when good relationships paid off again. NECR is a subsidiary of Genesee & Wyoming, and the IBEW has a productive relationship with Buffalo & Pittsburgh Railroad, another G&W-owned railroad.



Photo credit: Flickr user Emmett Tullos

“Because they knew us, these workers came to us; and because they knew we could work with the company, they stayed,” Bohné said.

When election time came in April, all five signalmen voted “yes,” and they're working on a first contract. The relationships along the way made all the difference.

SPARQ GOES LOCAL

IBEW Locals 1245 and 396

Two IBEW locals and their employer have won the inaugural Edwin D. Hill Award for their expansive efforts to protect good jobs and Nevada power customers, a campaign that led to the landslide defeat last November of Question 3, a deceptive state ballot measure.

The ability to work with NV Energy was essential, Business Manager Jesse Newman said, noting that the partnership didn't originate with the campaign. “If we didn't have the relationship we have through the Code of Excellence, I don't think Question 3 would have been defeated,” he said.

CEO at the Local

Building a strong partnership takes commitment. NV Energy's CEO Doug Cannon is committed to continuing the practice of meeting with members and leaders of IBEW Local Union 396 twice a year to answer questions and discuss solutions to issues on the job. No surprise, these meetings are the most well-attended of the year.

