

# The IBEW SPARQ

A quarterly newsletter highlighting IBEW values

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## Relationships: Stronger Bonds, Higher Standards

At the IBEW, our relationships—with employers, with customers and with one another—ensure that we remain the right choice for business. Good relationships translate into more work for IBEW sisters and brothers, more money in our pockets, and a safer, more efficient workplace. Strong relationships foster a strong workforce, and IBEW members are leading the way with the Code of Excellence.

It was the Code of Excellence that helped renew the business relationship between a wire company in Massachusetts and a transformer plant in Wisconsin. When Business Manager John Horak of Chelsea, Mass., Local 1499 learned that one of his employers, Rea Magnet Wire, used to have a contract with SPX Transformer Solutions, he reached out to his brother, Milwaukee, Wis., Local 2150 Business Representative Mike Bruening, with an idea.

Horak and Bruening used the Code as a selling point to grow Rea's business. SPX had implemented IBEW's COE around 2011 to great reception, so Bruening suggested that Rea adopt the program, too.

"It's the mark of quality," Horak said. "There's an assurance that you're getting something you can rely on. It's good branding."

The increased work led to a need for more people, and because Local 1499 members were delivering such



a high-quality product, Rea chose to invest \$5 million in their union plant in Connecticut instead of investing in Arkansas, which is a "right-to-work" state. Membership in the Connecticut local increased nearly 50 percent.

In Florida, utility company Florida Power & Light needed to turn things around. Relationships with workers were strained and the number of grievances filed was high. But when the company and its IBEW local unions rolled out the COE, those grievances dropped and OSHA-reportable accidents fell by 50 percent.

"It's a cultural change," said Miami Local 359 member and Line Specialist Laquanta Ransom. "If the company looks good, we look good, and if everyone gets on board [with the Code], we'll be a flawless company."

Other trades are also recognizing the power of the Code of Excellence. When the headquarters of Northwestern Mutual was built in Milwaukee, it was done under a multi-trade version of IBEW's Code called the Code of Distinction.

"It's truly the gold standard in what's going on in Milwaukee building-wise right now," said Milwaukee Building and Construction Trades President Dan Bukiewicz, who initially brought the idea to Northwestern Mutual. "The trades are blending wonderfully."

Effective relationships not only increase job opportunities—they help create the type of workplace that employees want to contribute to. Keep reading to find out how relationships are an essential part of the Code in your branch.



What does SPARQ mean to you? Have an idea for the newsletter? Email [theSPARQ@ibew.org](mailto:theSPARQ@ibew.org)



# Finding Common Ground

At work, as anywhere else, relationships drive the attitudes and behaviors that fuel the organization. We've all seen how poor relationships can create tension and anxiety. We've also seen how powerfully organizations thrive when healthy relationships develop trust, respect and dignity between workers and management. Any policy change, job assignment or interaction can be experienced negatively or positively, depending on the relationships between the parties involved.

"I've seen relationships so damaged that organizations crumble under the weight of mistrust and apathy," said Government Employees Department Director Paul O'Connor. "I've also seen organizations engage in relationship building, with management listening to the ideas of the men and women doing the work. Both of those environments have existed in the same organization. The relationship can make the difference between mere compliance and collaboration."

For O'Connor, a prime example of the power of relationships came in 2005 when the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, where he worked in southern Maine, found itself on a list of potential base closures, endangering the jobs of 3,500 federal workers. Using the bonds the IBEW built in gov-

ernment and in the community, leaders working together were able to rally some 8,000 people into the streets to save the shipyard. It was the power of the shipyard's allies—those all-important relationships—that saved the day, and the jobs.

But not every example is so dramatic. On any given day, relationships are how we find common ground. Imagine waking up each day and focusing on shared interests instead of what divides us. Our Code of Excellence helps to foster these kinds of healthy relationships. Embracing the Code and building strong, productive relationships helps us create work environments filled with trust, respect, and dignity.



## SPARQ GOES LOCAL



Local 37 members proudly wearing SPARQ T-shirts while taking a fitness break at their annual training conference.



Debbie Barry (pictured above right) and other COE volunteer trainers were recognized at the annual Local 37 Training Conference where the theme was "Celebrating Excellence."