

# 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 Improving Railroad Safety

When workers, union leaders and managers hold each other accountable, the result is a safe and well-trained workforce and workplace.

Nowhere is that more important than on North America's railroads, where the difference between a job well done and one done without accountability can sometimes be measured in human lives.

Our railroad employers know that they can rely on the IBEW's nearly 13,000 experienced railroad workers to perform at the highest level, adapting and evolving to promising advancements in railroad technology.

Over the past several years, many of us have worked to install positive train control systems across North America, designed to take human error out of passenger and freight railroad operation by automatically slowing or even stopping a train before a potentially catastrophic crash could happen.

More than 1,000 railroad branch members have worked to install PTC for Union Pacific, which operates a massive rail fleet throughout the western United States.

Railroad System Council No. 2 Vice General Chairman Rick Reynoso pointed to the more than 8,000 UP locomotives IBEW members have fitted with the system over the past four years.

IBEW members weren't simply handed the work, Reynoso said. "Before we even got started, they tried to contract it out," he said. "But in the end, our reputation for quality and accountability helped us win it."

"Our members have always been accountable for passenger and freight safety," said IBEW Railroad Department Director Bill Bohné, "but PTC puts even more responsibility on us. It's the last line of defense, so to speak, and it's our quality work that will prevent accidents. The Code of Excellence shows us how to operate with accountability, but what could be more motivating than saving lives?"



## 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.