

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



Taking a Values-Based Approach to Excellence

In 2010, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard needed a change. Stagnation was setting in and nothing they tried to improve things was working.

“We were looking for a better way,” said Paul O’Connor, then-president of the Metal Trades Council and a member of Portsmouth, N.H., Local 2071. “Our performance level had peaked, and we were deliberating what to do.”

Much of what they had tried was schedule- or process-driven, O’Connor said. But what if they changed to a values-based model? What if they focused on building relationships based on trust, dignity, integrity and respect instead? And what if they asked the workers for their input?



By doing away with third-party initiatives and bringing employees together with management, they created the Declaration of Excellence, a document that created a permanent relationship based on shared values between labor and management and among the various trades on the yard.

“Labor and management jointly created an environment of trust, and our workforce stepped into that environment believing their voices could and would make a difference. And that’s what happened,” O’Connor said. “It wasn’t the Code of Excellence, but we utilized the same values-based philosophies.”

With this program, everyone—labor and management alike—receives a refresher training; and the Declaration is part of the new-employee orientation and the shipyard’s technical manuals. Since its implementation in 2012, performance has improved dramatically, with all nuclear submarine overhauls completed on schedule and on budget.

Now, as director of the Government Employees Department, O’Connor says he’d like to implement the Code of Excellence across the four Naval shipyards.

“Much of the Code, and the Declaration, could be incorporated anywhere,” O’Connor said. “They’re business models based on values. When you get the relationships right, the rest follows.”

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.

