

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



Strong Relationships, Stronger Voice

In homes across the United States, service technicians at GE Appliances repair the same stoves and refrigerators, washers and dryers and other household essentials.

But until recently, they did so under 27 separate contracts that the IBEW and five other unions negotiated with the company. That created disparities and hindered service techs from speaking with a more powerful, collective voice.

Good relationships, forged through union brotherhood and the values set by the IBEW's Code of Excellence, helped change that.

The six unions came to the table in solidarity in late 2016, after the company was sold to Haier. Many GEA managers stayed on, bringing continuity to the talks; and both sides pledged a respectful tone, knowing they'd all benefit from a single national contract.

The service techs also needed a contract specific to their jobs, instead of being part of agreements for their union sisters and brothers who manufacture GE appliances.

"Almost all the language pertained to the factories," said veteran technician Tom Foley, a Chicago Local 134 steward who served on the bargaining team. "We wanted to address things more relatable to us, like safety and driving issues."

Unity came easily when IBEW negotiators met their counterparts from the IAM, IBT, UA, UE and IUE-CWA. "There wasn't any 'my union's better than yours,'" Foley said. "It was almost like a high school reunion where you're talking to old friends."



Those bonds remain strong two years into the contract they hammered out over the course of five months. Foley compares notes with some of them regularly to ensure that workers across units and regions are being treated fairly.

"I like to check in and see how things are going, to make sure that we're all still on that same field," he said.

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.

