

maintenance, fleet maintenance, and operations staff are all together on one team focused on the same set of goals.

One of the realities about cultural change is there will be people who cannot make the change. As an organization we realize that this is not only in the management ranks, but also in the rank and file, the front lines. We have had some people who have had to walk away from the process. We said, "Take the opportunity, move aside or move out if this isn't something you can do," because we decided this was going to be a fundamental change in our organization. We have had some turnover, particularly in the management ranks, people who were unable to shift from our previous entrenched bureaucracy.

We involved union leadership in our deliberations right up front. Explaining to them exactly how we wanted this process to work and exactly what it was going to entail. Once this process got going and employees started participating, the pressure was on management as well as union leadership to change. Confrontation was not good enough anymore. We now are in a much more cooperative effort, trying to align everybody and every piece of the organization in the same direction.

True Teamwork

The final element is teamwork. We have made incredible strides there. Employee work teams permeate everything that we do. We deploy employee work teams for major purchases of equipment, for policy decisions, for everything that we do. For example, if you want to be hired into our organization, if you want to be promoted in our organization, an employee team is going to make that decision. We use operators, managers, and union officials to hire employees into mechanic ranks as well as operations. If you want to be promoted in our organization, you are going to have to go in front of not only who you think you are going to be working for but who your peer is going to be. We also allow employees to hire their own supervisors by involving subordinates in the interview process.

The Differences Made

We have had a lot of changes, and it has made a difference. We have seen some significant performance and quality improvements. My division, the Bond Hill operating division, has gone the furthest with this concept. We have made the most radical

changes to the way we do business. We were able to reduce preventable accidents by 38 percent in one year. Miles between road calls increased by 28 percent. Customer service complaints were reduced by 10 percent and, at the same time, commendations for operators were up 10 percent. We reduced early service operation by 24 percent, and customer-satisfaction on-board surveys conducted by employees have seen significant improvements in every area that we ask about. Finally, our ridership increased by seven percent in one year. I believe that, because of the significant improvements that our operators and mechanics are making, our riders not only are staying with us, they are telling their friends, and they are riding more.

TQM AND TEAMWORK IN SPOKANE

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We had our first touch with TQM when Mac MacDorman came on to the Spokane Transit Authority (STA) and asked for a total commitment from senior staff and labor in order for us to participate in a pilot program.

When the initial leadership team began to form, I had an opportunity to ask some pretty tough questions of senior staff. We had two previous programs fail because of a lack of commitment of time and finances from senior staff. These experiments left a lot of people with a bad taste in their mouth and a lot of people with hurt feelings. I frankly put their feet to the fire and asked them just what they wanted out of this program and why they wanted it. Our morale was at an all-time low. I realized we were at the point that we had to do something or we were going to be in all out warfare.

Total quality management is something that I saw as an opportunity to improve working conditions for my members outside the collective bargaining process. I believe in the collective bargaining process, but there are other ways to improve working conditions, and that is what I saw in TQM.

One of the first things we saw as a success was a new, revised, more effective customer service complaint and compliment policy and program. This new program is much more streamlined than our old, burdensome one.

The customer service representatives are empowered to solve the problem at their level. If they cannot, they can move the complaint up. It is working so far.

There are several other examples. In general, labor, and especially labor representatives, have nothing to lose and everything to gain. We have just made some drastic realignments in our system. We are opening up a new transit plaza in the downtown area and we are going from a hub-and-spoke system to a pulse system. Employee teams were completely responsible for new and revised customer schedules, for realignment of scheduling on the different routes, for training programs for the employees, and also for training and information programs for the public. We had employee team members downtown, wearing special hats and badges and carrying brochures. People have been involved and now have an ownership in part of this company.

A year ago we would never have heard a comment like that, "Let's have a team take care of it." TQM, or whatever one might call that concept, is a success in my eyes when it is a way of life, when you no longer have to refer to it by any particular term. We have had a commitment from senior staff and management that has seen us through some difficult times, but we have made some significant changes on the property. We have also made some small changes that probably mean more to the front-line employees than the significant changes because they are seeing a difference.