



Daily tailboard meetings propel the Zero Incident Program.

Employee Involvement: The Key to Building and Maintaining a Safety Culture

Connecticut Light & Power strives to become “best of the best” in safety by implementing the General Electric WorkOut process.

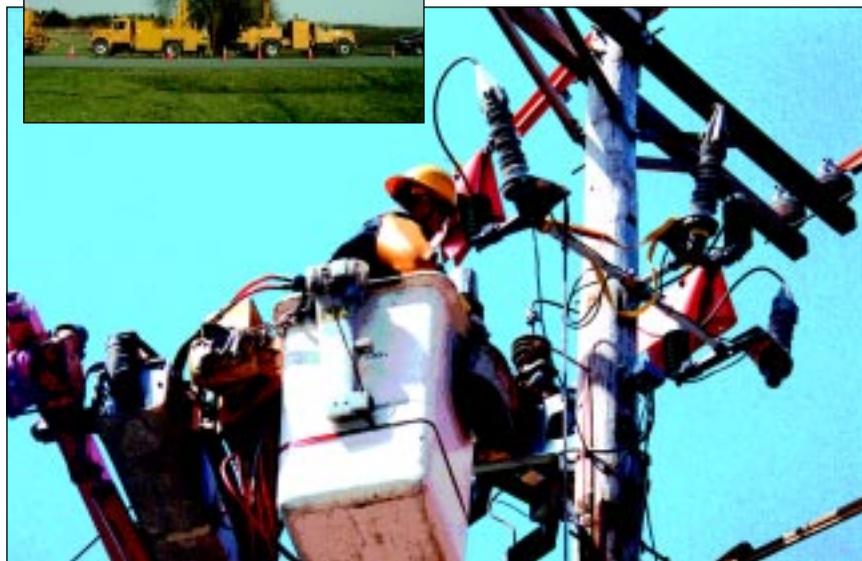
By Bruce Bolger, Connecticut Light & Power

As in any utility company, safety is not an option, it is a necessity. Though a challenge, Connecticut Light & Power (CL&P) takes this requirement seriously and is committed to doing whatever it takes to ensure its employees go home safe and sound every day. However, even though this same commitment appears universal in our industry, results illustrate that success is often the exception, not the rule. In spite of our best efforts, accidents happen. As safety experts, we have no choice but to strengthen our resolve to make our safety programs and initiatives better.

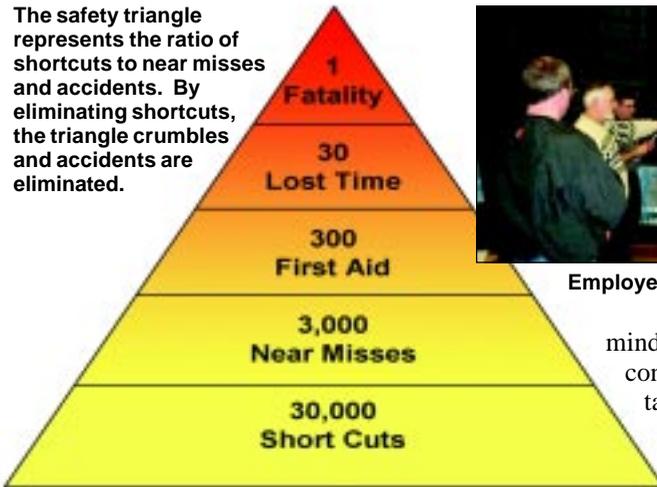
However, strengthening our resolve will carry us only so far. The factors that separate success from just another quick fix are planning, execution, follow-through and involvement. Without these precautions, at every level of the organization, success will be a limited proposition. In order to meet,



Set-up and work processes are critical to safely performing energized work.



The safety triangle represents the ratio of shortcuts to near misses and accidents. By eliminating shortcuts, the triangle crumbles and accidents are eliminated.



Employee participation drives the discussion during WorkOut meetings .



mindset so that everyone consistently follows established safety practices? The answer is simple: employee involvement.

Without employees' help in initiating a culture change, the odds of success are slim to none.

or better yet, exceed safety performance goals, there must be clarity of purpose, ongoing management sponsorship, supervisory ownership and employee accountability. Employee involvement—input, interaction and buy-in—is the single most important factor that ensures programs are properly planned, effectively executed and diligently followed up.

How successfully a company performs is directly affected by how well the sum of its parts communicate with the whole. CL&P employees work hard to promote dialogue, continually assess needs, identify desired outcomes, manage expectations, eliminate barriers and measure performance. Management efforts can fall short of their potential impact on safety if the company fails to bring management and employees together to identify and resolve those issues that are keeping them from staying safe.

The frontline employee is essential to changing the safety culture. Who better knows the real environment in which they work every day than the people splicing cable, stringing lines, setting poles, cutting over services and repairing faults? How effective are those daily tailboard meetings they routinely self manage? Are switching and tagging rules and three-part communications expectations being adhered to religiously? What goes through a worker's mind when performing service restoration on a pitch black winter's night when there's no safety professional or management individual around for miles?

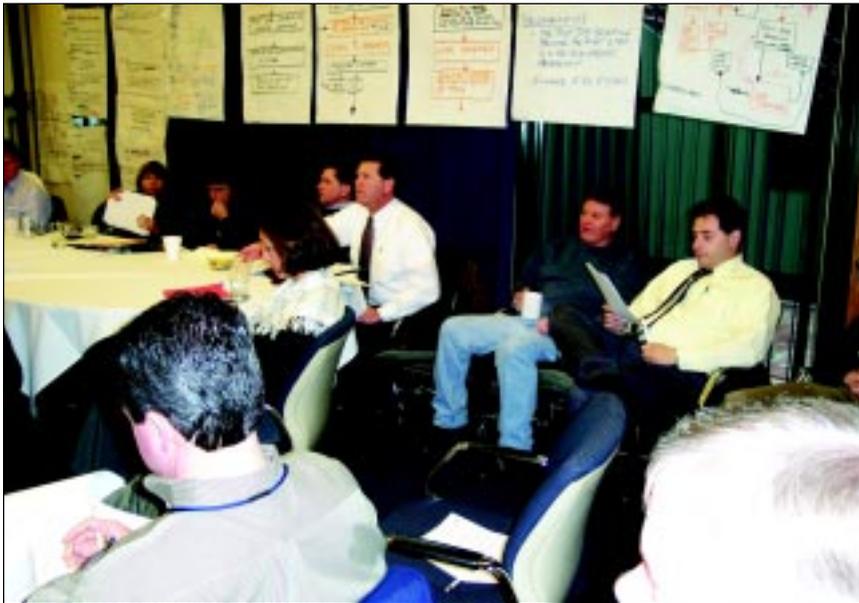
The key question is: Do employees "do the right thing" when no one is looking? If not, how do we change that

Putting the Process to the Test

CL&P (Hartford, Connecticut, U.S.), a subsidiary of Northeast Utilities, serves nearly 1.2 million electric customers in Connecticut. Like most companies, it has used a range of approaches over the years to initiate change. Starting in 2002, the company

adopted the WorkOut process, which General Electric had developed and used with great success.

CL&P has applied WorkOut to several large- and small-scale operational and process improvement challenges. In addition to safety-related initiatives, the utility has used the WorkOut process to address issues ranging from substation maintenance, to installing and using reclosers, to cost accounting and more. Hundreds of employees from nearly every department and level of the organization have served on WorkOut teams. Accountability and follow-through are critical to successful execution of all WorkOut recommendations as well as timeliness, be-



Inter-group discussion where the teams share their ideas.

cause actions are generally expected to be implemented within 90 days.

The goal of WorkOut is to solve significant organizational problems quickly, while at the same time changing an organization's culture. To accomplish that, CL&P knew it would have to emphasize communications, accountability, execution and employee involvement at every level.

The WorkOut process has received widespread support within CL&P. "WorkOut encourages teamwork and a new level of energy and commitment that are key to CL&P's continued success," says Rich Tardif, CL&P's manager of Process Improvement.

CL&P President and COO Lee Olivier underscores that point, saying, "WorkOut is helping CL&P to become a fast-moving, nimble company that bridges boundaries. The process energizes our work environment, strengthens our analytical abilities and builds alignment within our company."

Working closely with CL&P executive management and business unit leadership, Tardif and I collaborated to lay the groundwork for a "meeting of the minds" that would result in signifi-

cantly positive and sustainable improvements in safety performance. From the start, everyone involved with this safety initiative knew it was critical that the process be driven by the line organization—the people performing and supervising the actual field work.

Safety Takes Center Stage

In 2002, CL&P recognized its safety performance was not living up to management's vision of "best of the best." Benchmarking studies identified the company's safety performance as just average and trending in the wrong direction. To counter this, CL&P leaders established a safety improvement plan that included the Safety WorkOut as a key component of the company's journey to excellence.

CL&P realized early on that employee involvement, particularly from first-line supervisors and unionized employees, was vital to a successful outcome. In February 2003, CL&P management initiated a joint Safety WorkOut involving 50 employees made up of the company's first-line supervisors, managers and employees repre-

WorkOut Process Basics

- Identifies a critical business issue/problem.
- Creates a cross-functional team of employees closest to the work.
- Provides the team with three to four days of facilitated, uninterrupted work time.
- Charges the group to develop recommendations that will lead to breakthrough results.
- Has the team present recommendations at a "town meeting," where the organization's leaders make on-the-spot decisions.
- Includes sending 30-, 60- and 90-day progress reports to management.

sented by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW).

The 50 employees were divided into three teams, and each team was assigned the responsibility of developing actionable recommendations for one of three challenges that had been identified by the WorkOut's planning team:

Challenge 1: *What must we do to create a culture for safety that demonstrates safety as a core value across all levels of the organization?*

Challenge 2: *How can current safety rules, programs and processes more properly guide us in achieving exceptional and sustainable safety performance at CL&P?*

Challenge 3: *What behaviors and actions will create an accident-free environment?*

As part of the WorkOut team's initial orientation, there were discussions about the participants' roles and responsibilities, the company's safety performance, and the problem-solving process they were about to embark upon. Dialogue stimulated interaction. As expected, participants had many questions, such as how they were selected, how the challenges had been formulated and what might happen if they couldn't "finish" on time.

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and the process facilitator (Tardif) addressed each of these concerns. As team facilitators were introduced and challenges clarified, the teams moved to their respective quarters to get down to business.

At any given moment, a casual observer looking in on the teams might have witnessed high drama as team members vigorously asserted or defended their perspectives on what needed changing and how it could or couldn't be accomplished. Tensions built as time passed, and when the groups reconvened for their first intergroup discussion late on that first day, the air in the room was crackling with energy.

Over the next two-and-a-half days, the teams wrestled with everything from corporate policies and procedures to personal beliefs and value systems, from management prerogatives to union demands, from fears and doubts to breakthroughs and exhilaration. Through it all, participants and facilitators never lost touch with their commitment to "making it work" and developed an astounding array of thoughtful recommendations.

When the "town meeting" convened at the end of the WorkOut, the teams presented their ideas and supporting rationales with an impressive level of persuasive power. It was no surprise that the company's executives unanimously approved all recommended actions, which include:

- Rewrite the entire Accident Prevention Manual (APM) in one week, using the WorkOut process.
- Telecast the results of the initial Safety Workout using employees and supervisors as the spokespeople for the process.
- Improve timely communications and lessons learned via paging systems, accident notifications systems and safety alerts.
- Initiate a Zero Incident Program (ZIP), which focuses on achieving 0 OSHA recordables, 0 preventable mo-

How Does WorkOut Work?

First, senior management identifies important organizational issues. A planning team then refines the scope; selects employees from a range of affected functions to be on the problem-solving team; provides an appropriate level of background information; and secures the time and physical resources needed to support the problem-solving team.

Next, the problem-solving team identifies and prioritizes issues, determines key solutions and develops detailed action plans to address the issues. At the conclusion of the brief two-to-five day WorkOut session, the problem-solving team presents its recommendations to the organization's senior management and invited guests. This final presentation, called a "town meeting," is where leadership approves recommendations that the team must work to implement within a tight timeframe, usually 90 days.

Where does senior management fit in?

In committing to the WorkOut process, senior leaders initially discuss the strategic direction of their organization and identify the major challenges to achieving organizational success. Understanding the critical importance of managing change effectively, they commit to using the process throughout the organization.

Senior management demonstrates that commitment by leading initial WorkOut meetings and providing ongoing feedback to participants. Appropriate leadership representatives (invited guests) also attend the final day of the WorkOut, or town meeting, where action plans are presented. Senior leaders encourage discussion around these plans and make an immediate decision on approval of each recommendation.

What happens after the WorkOut?

A WorkOut session is just the beginning. After the town meeting concludes, participants enter the implementation phase, where action plans are worked on and completed. Team members take on responsibility to see that the actions are accomplished. Thirty, 60 and 90 days following the WorkOut, a meeting is held with the teams and the project sponsor to identify successes and challenges that need to be addressed.

What results can a company expect?

With adequate pre-planning and decisive executive responses to the teams' recommendations, WorkOut gets noteworthy results. Because the people who live and breathe the issues on a daily basis are involved, the organization's knowledge base is powerfully leveraged. Equally important is that the process creates a closer bond and working relationship among participants that, over time, suffuses the organization with energy and a sense of purpose. WorkOut team members "make things happen," and that's empowering for them and productive for the organization.

tor vehicle accidents and 0 lost-time accidents.

- Establish an employee involvement committee to meet with management prior to the implementation of major safety initiatives to facilitate the



We need a caption here!!!!!!

change through employee involvement.

Success is Measured by Results

CL&P's Safety WorkOut brought employees and company management together in an environment based on

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mutual respect. Beyond the policy changes and process improvements, process outcomes demonstrated that active listening is not a lost art and that seemingly conflicting perspectives (such as operating efficiently versus operating safely) can not only be accommodated but were synergistic. Here's the proof:

The company's APM was completely remodeled in just five days by 25 front-line employees and 25 supervisors/managers working together. The final product, an overhauled APM, was overwhelmingly accepted by management and the employees represented by the IBEW. The remodeled APM included new and updated information, improved content organization, enhanced readability and more rugged construction, while helping every CL&P employee remember that "We always place safety FIRST."

In addition to significantly lowering the CL&P accident rate, the investment made in this initiative has paid huge dividends in employee buy-in, involvement and improved relations across the organization.

Another result of the Safety WorkOut

If it stays true to the WorkOut process, CL&P—employees and management—will attain its desired objective to become "best of the best."

was the formation of an Employee Input Committee (EIC) charged with developing a method for employees to voice concerns or make suggestions about new and revised policies and procedures or any other initiatives that change the way we do business. The EIC solicits input from employees on how best to implement these changes, with the intent of bringing any potential problems to light and addressing them prior to implementation.

Shortly after it was formed, the EIC worked with a group of line workers seeking clarification about a new protective equipment use requirement relating to low-voltage, live-line maintenance work. Several important concerns were brought to light, and recommendations were collaboratively developed that made a good, safety-focused work practice even better.

CL&P Field Supervisor—Lines Ron Ceruti, a member of the team that developed the EIC process, says, "I think this is going to work very well for the company. All the time we put into this process was well worth it. It's great that the company is going to the field to get feedback prior to rolling these initiatives out."

In 2003, CL&P achieved a 27% reduction in OSHA lost workday cases (restricted duty and lost time accidents) and a 34% reduction in preventable motor vehicle accidents when compared with 2002 statistics. Additionally, the WorkOut process resulted in significantly improved levels of ownership and accountability by employees and supervisors.

At CL&P, working safely is where everything begins and ends. Further, having employees, supervisors, managers and executives working together to achieve its objectives produced quality outcomes and accelerated the adoption of needed changes.

Collectively, CL&P employees are taking on challenges and delivering impressive results. With its safety sta-

tistics trending in the right direction, the company is well-positioned to achieve its goals of attaining top-quartile performance by 2006 and top-decile by 2008. Even then, a spotless safety record will be the ultimate goal.

Has CL&P solved all of its safety and operational challenges using the WorkOut process? Definitely not, but the trust and respect fostered by the process have built the foundation for success as the company goes forward. If it stays true to the WorkOut process, CL&P—employees and management—will attain its desired objective to become "best of the best."

WorkOut Process Details

The WorkOut process brings a variety of employees together to address and solve critical business issues and challenges. Ultimately, WorkOut creates a continuous examination of organizational processes, accelerating work effectiveness; instilling core values of excellence, growth and profitability; and building cross-functional capabilities within the company.

CL&P implemented WorkOut with the assistance of C.A. Schiffman and Co., a Michigan-based consultancy with extensive experience in managing and facilitating the WorkOut process. CL&P's WorkOut was based on the highly successful General Electric model. The process has been used effectively within organizations that are steeped in bureaucracy and/or functional silos; reasonably adept at planning, but performing poorly in implementation; inconsistent or slow at making decisions; experiencing union/management alignment challenges.

Typical results from a WorkOut process include reduced costs and cycle times, accelerated innovation, improved revenues, energized workforce and increased collaboration across functions. WorkOut creates a culture that transforms managers into leaders, bridges organizational boundaries, promotes process integration and enhances analytical abilities. ▀

Bruce Bolger is manager, Safety and Health for Connecticut Light and Power. He has 25 years of experience as a safety professional, with 20 of those spent with in the electric transmission, distribution and generation industry. He currently holds the "Certified Safety Professional" and "Certified Hazardous Materials Manager" designations.

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