

Notice to Locomotive Engineer Members of WRGCA

High Quality Job Briefings

A discipline case involving an experienced engineer and conductor was recently handled between General Chairman and Regional Vice President where the focus of attention centered on the lack of a thorough job briefing which may have played a role in the locomotive moving over a derail and onto the ground. In settling this case, the Union agreed to get the word out to our engineer members stressing the importance of what Carrier has labeled “high quality job briefings.” The following represents the content of the review by the parties and Carrier’s expectations:

“This case was driven by an incident in which a competent and experienced crew ran through a switch at the end of their tour of duty. The record in this case shows that the conductor accepted full responsibility for the incident, because he lost track of what he was doing and instructed the engineer to proceed into the misaligned switch.

In conference, this case was dissected and examined in great detail. In the end, what lays at the heart of this case is a weak job briefing. We all recognize that when good competent employees work together, they develop a culture of trust. No one is opposed to that. A culture of trust, based on employees recognizing and respecting each others [sic] skills and abilities, is a good thing. However, that mutual trust cannot be permitted to cancel out the need for top quality job briefings. In this case, the engineer fell into the trap of being a passive receiver of instructions. Had the engineer taken a more active role and requested verification of the switch alignment, this incident likely would not have occurred, and in any event, the engineer would have been cleared of any responsibility in connection with the derailment.

It would be appreciated if you would spread the word among your constituents that the Company expects high quality job briefings. More importantly, please spread the word that in connection with job briefings and instructions received from the conductor or other member of the ground crew, the Company wants the engineer to actively verify the instructions rather than simply robotically complying with them.”

As WRGCA’s principal representative, I felt the RVP’s request was indeed reasonable in light of the unique circumstances presented not only in the particular discipline case addressed above, but other similar discipline cases we’ve handled where a thorough job briefing among crew members would have exonerated our engineers of alleged wrongdoing. While it was the Union who raised its concerns over the culture of trust, especially among experienced crew members, the engineer can nonetheless become a victim of another employee’s inattention or error. In order to enhance safety and to reduce the risk of discipline being assessed to our engineers, the company wants us to “actively verify the instructions” of another crew member before acting upon them. We have been asked to adopt the practice of “trust, but verify” when receiving instructions from other crew members. This is easily accomplished by the engineer simply replying to the instructions with words such as “is everything lined for the movement”, “are you sure” or “please verify this is what I’m instructed to do.” I trust our engineers will do their level best to act in accordance with the expectations illustrated herein.

Tim Donnigan
General Chairman, WRGCA