

People



VIA's success is due to the quality of its people — people who have proven themselves to be highly skilled and deeply committed to the well-being of customers, and passionate about the future of passenger rail in Canada. This passion and commitment were evident throughout 2003, as employees were called upon time and again to respond to difficult situations.

Throughout the year, VIA continued to work with employees to strengthen an environment where people are listened to with respect, encouraged to take responsibility for their jobs, and rewarded for exceptional performance.

Increased communication with management

VIA conducted an Employee Opinion Survey in July, 2002, in order to determine how VIA employees themselves perceive the company, and to identify ways to improve the work environment for employees. The results of the survey present a very encouraging picture of the corporate culture at VIA. The vast majority of employees feel that VIA is the best transportation company in Canada. A full 96 per cent believe that the work they do is important to that success.

At the same time, the survey identified important opportunities to improve the way VIA's employees work as a team.

One primary concern raised by employees was the need to improve the quantity and quality of face-to-face communications between employees, managers and senior executives. As a result, VIA launched a series of "town hall" meetings across the country in the summer and fall of 2003. At these meetings, senior management shared the latest progress toward our strategic challenges and invited employees to ask questions, comment and make suggestions.

In addition, VIA's executive team established ongoing "Directors' Town Hall" meetings with senior management throughout the Corporation. These forums are designed to deepen directors' understanding of VIA's business challenges, as well as their own role in communications. Directors are provided with the latest company news, events and progress on VIA's business strategy, so they can in turn communicate these issues to their teams.

Managers are required to meet with their employee teams on a regular basis, and ensure that issues raised by employees are resolved or addressed in a timely fashion, thereby reinforcing the importance and the utility of face-to-face communications.

Training and development

Results of the employee opinion survey, and "town hall" meetings on VIA's strategic plan, were used to enhance all VIA training and development programs. For example, employees identified the need for improved training for Customer Service Managers.

A new 13-day management skills program for new service managers in the Quebec City - Windsor Corridor was implemented in March of 2003. Also, a new three-day refresher program, concentrating on communication and leadership skills, was developed for existing front-line managers.

Several new training and development initiatives focused on advanced management skills were also developed in 2003. For example, director-level managers attended a finance course for non-financial managers, designed specifically for VIA in collaboration with McGill University. Two additional sessions are planned for 2004. As well, high potential young managers are encouraged to enrol in a Masters of Business Administration Program.

E-learning initiative

VIA began developing and testing innovative "e-learning" programs in 2003, to make information and skills development available to all employees across the network. The e-learning program will be implemented in 2004, focusing on modules that enhance safety awareness, knowledge of new VIA products and services, basic management learning aids and desktop systems used at VIA.