



NEWS

AUGUST 18, 1997

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MTA'S 'TRANSIT INSTITUTE' OFFERS BUS AND RAIL OPERATORS NEWER AND BETTER TOOLS FOR THE JOB.

In the past, to renew their annual license, Metro Bus and rail operators were required to undergo eight hours of training a year. These hours could be spread out over several months with short intervals either in the classroom or on a bus. To say the least, training lacked focus and impact.

Not any more.

MTA has just introduced the new Transit Institute, an intensive 16-hour classroom program designed to better equip its approximately 4,000 Metro Bus and rail operators for their jobs. Strategies for conflict resolution, successful customer service and cultural diversity awareness are just a sample of the topics covered in the two-day seminar held at the MTA headquarters five days a week, year-round.

"Under the new Transit Institute MTA will provide a highly focused program, which will increase the quality of the learning experience," said Ellen Levine, Executive Officer of Operations. "Additionally, we will double the training given to each operator at the same cost as the previous, decentralized approach."

According to Harvey Brown, an instructor in the Institute, Metro Bus drivers need all the tools they can get to do their job well.

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“Driving a bus is ranked among the top five most stress-producing jobs, even higher than police officers,” he said. “We’re out there dealing with the public between eight and 12 hours a day. We’re exposed to every kind of situation and we’re unarmed. Our only defense is our training. It had better be good.”

In order to make it better, the MTA drew upon the expertise of several authors on successful management strategies, including the renowned Steven Covey, all of whom contributed to the curriculum. Stressing the “Seven Strategies for Successful Operators,” participants learn effective communication skills and how to turn difficult situations into “win-win” propositions.

Bob McAllister’s video series “Strategies for Dealing with Difficult People,” specifically designed for bus and rail operators, also is used. Various scenarios drivers are likely to face on a weekly basis are depicted, teaching them how to diffuse negative situations in a safe and positive way, including everything from fare disagreements to a messy drunk.

“It’s exciting to learn new things,” said Margaret Howze, an MTA bus operator for 18 years. “These situations are real, and I like the ideas they’ve tossed out. It’s been great.”

Offering the course in the Gateway Center not only centralizes the teaching but also brings operators into a building many of them have only driven by.

On the first day, participants are given a tour of the facilities, including the MTA library, the customer relations department, the heliport, as well as the offices of Interim CEO Linda Bohlinger, and Levine.

“It’s easy for operators to feel isolated and disconnected out there on the front lines,” said Levine. “ We hope this program will help them understand the

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bigger picture and where they fit in. Operators play such a key role. We want them to know how much we appreciate them.”

Currently, the Transit Institute is averaging six participants per class but is equipped to take up to 15. Instructors, who are MTA bus service supervisors and fellow operators, are enthusiastic about the course.

“We all care about doing a good job,” said Alberto Hinojos, a Transit Institute instructor. “And this program gives us the tools we need. Drivers have personally expressed to me how receptive they are to the contents because operators just like them are their instructors. I think the impact of the course is going to be tremendous.”