

TRANSPORTATION

BNSF improves quality—and quality of life



THE CLIENT'S CHALLENGE

Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway Company operates one of the largest railroad networks in North America, running about 32,500 route miles in 28 states and two Canadian provinces. Although the company was achieving solid financial results, including increases in revenue and operating income, management was concerned about the stress and long hours being incurred by a key group of supervisors, the division trainmasters or "DTMs."

Each DTM is responsible for virtually everything that occurs on a given section of BNSF track—typically several hundred miles—including maintenance, safety, on-time performance and operating efficiency. These wide-ranging responsibilities, coupled with long work hours and continuing growth in traffic, were

driving up employee turnover rates in this critical position.

Proudfoot was asked to address this concern by initiating a program to improve the DTMs' work/life balance. This was a unique assignment, because the client insisted that immediate cost savings were not to be considered as a measure of the project's success. Instead, the goal was to develop and install best practices for the trainmasters and superintendents so that they could work significantly fewer hours and improve their effectiveness as it relates to cost, service, asset utilization and safety.

WHAT WE DID

Proudfoot's effort began with a two-day working session to develop the best practice task and activity models and outline the best practices manual. Over the next eight weeks, the project team developed the Best Practices Manual and training materials. After the initial installation, the Division Trainmaster Best Practices Manual was further refined by a task team of general managers and superintendents in preparation for an eventual system-wide rollout.

Also, a DTM Work/Life Balance Survey was developed, which established a baseline of DTM

satisfaction so that continuous improvement can be measured and tracked in future years. Nearly 80% of the affected DTMs responded to the survey, which was administered via the Internet.

MEASURABLE RESULTS

Financial indicators of the project's success are found in such measures as reduced overtime, operating penalties and crew penalties.

For the client, however, the key measure was not cost savings, but rather the measure of improved work/life balance. Using one simple measure alone, the project targeted reducing the trainmaster's average hours worked per week, producing immediate benefits to these key frontline supervisors and allowing for more focus on cost, service, asset utilization and safety. Long-term benefits to BNSF as a whole include a decrease in staff turnover and more motivated employees. The project's success in achieving these benefits prompted David Dealy, Vice President of Transportation, to call the effort "one of the most significant undertakings BNSF has ever accomplished."