

To Whom It May Concern,

As a co-founder and coordinator for Joint Workforce Investment (JWI), I offer the strongest possible endorsement of Balance.point Strategic Service's (BPSS) approach to workforce programs. It is a method that brings health and wellness training into close alignment with professional development.

JWI is a labor/management partnership between Amalgamated Transit Union Local 265 (ATU) and the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) that was begun in 2005, and continues to the present. JWI has a noteworthy record of innovative and successful workforce development programs. As a neutral third party, BPSS facilitated the identification of common ground between ATU and VTA, and despite a history of strained relations between the two institutions, led them to establish this highly effective partnership.

Along with a successful Bus Maintenance Career Ladder Training Program, JWI established the first project in the mass transit industry that addresses a long-standing training gap for bus drivers. While well-trained in large vehicle operation, bus drivers have traditionally been left to define and develop the core human skills of the job on their own - often with results that are unhealthy for the employee and unsatisfactory for the riding public. Balance.point's approach made JWI's Operator Mentor program possible.

An important key to BPSS's success lies in its highly-attuned active-listening and facilitation skills. Rather than impose a pre-conceived service delivery curriculum on harried front-line transit employees, BPSS artfully guided them in the identification of their own worthiest and deepest knowledge of a stressful craft. The effect was like a mirror being held up to a group of workers who suddenly realize that they possess an impressive body of skills: "Hey! We're not *just* bus drivers! We're professionals! We know a lot!"

BPSS understood early in the process that to be most effective, professional development had to be closely integrated with health and wellness training. Everyone needs healthy habits in order to thrive, of course. But for bus drivers, they are an especially key professional tool. Stretching and breathing are critical to staying personally centered and self-possessed. Every boarding passenger and every traffic incident has the potential to throw the operator off balance, and challenge professional judgment. Without the physical component, the core theme of the bus driver learning curve will not achieve its best potential: *Encounter, Defuse, Let Go, and Re-Center*. While BPSS drew those four stages out of the experience of bus drivers, they are useful for any person who wants to achieve greater effectiveness on the job or in life.

The results of training new bus drivers were impressive. VTA aggregated data from a number of key performance metrics, and compared results for drivers who received training and a control group that did not. Mentored drivers always did significantly better. Statistics were very similar for all four quarters of FY 2008-09:

- Retention was 100% for trained operators, compared to 87% for the control group.
- Absenteeism for trained operators was about half the rate of the control group.
- Passenger complaints per trained operator were a fourth the rate of the control group.
- No grievances were recorded for trained operators, while control group operators generated 0.1 per grievances per operator.

Subjective evaluations of both groups showed similarly better performance by trained operators in the areas of confidence, job satisfaction, and personal and inter-personal skills.

The training program works, and again, I recommend Balance.point in the strongest possible way.

Sincerely,

Tom Fink
Co-Founder and Coordinator
Joint Workforce Investment (JWI)