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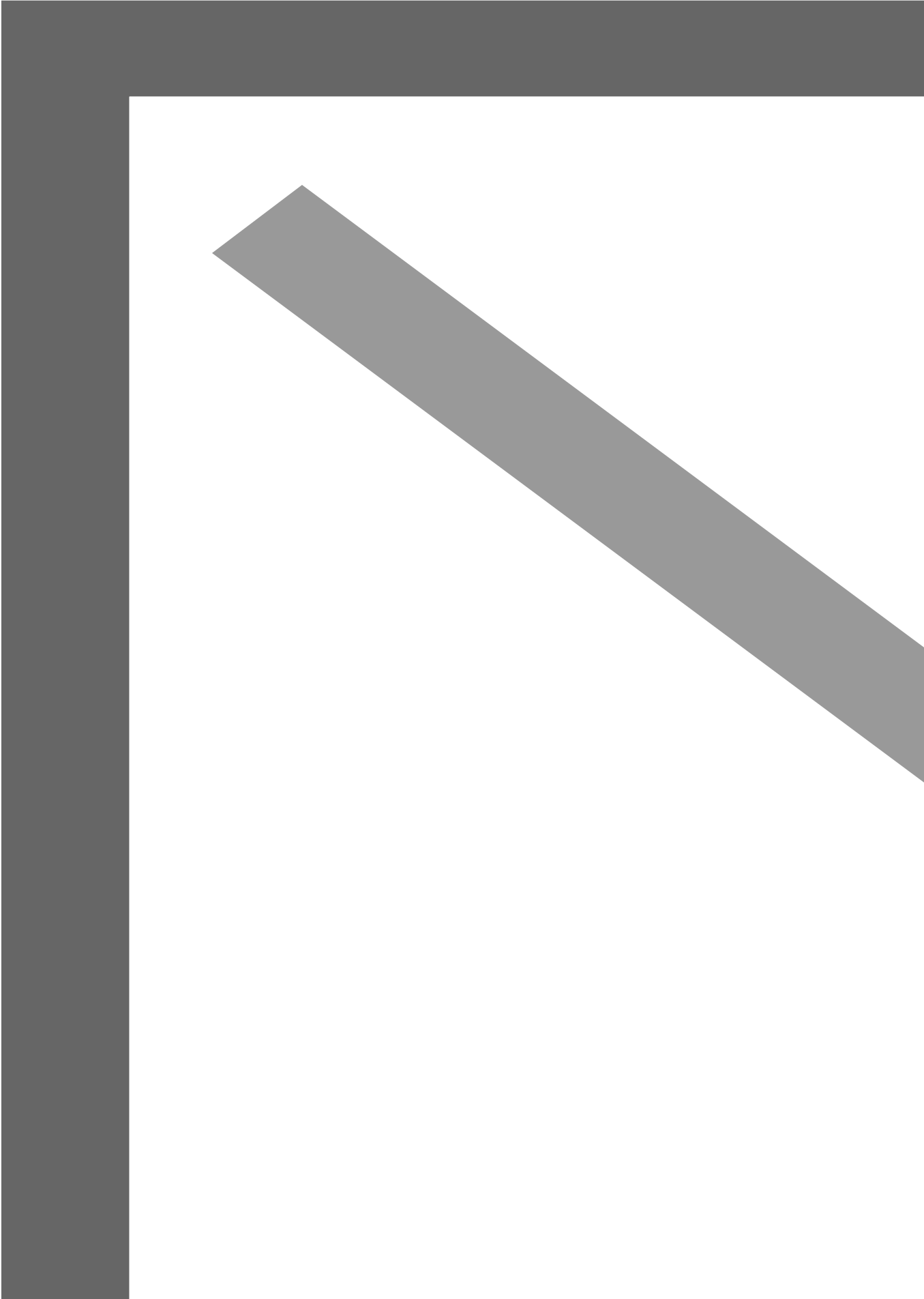
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Monday, January 14, 2019



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**Extensive safety training for all of our employees is a hallmark of our agency and the effort is paying off. In the world of bus, our operations team has won two national safety awards in the past three years for reducing accidents.**

Much of the success can be attributed to extensive and ongoing training. New hires get an 8-9-week training program with behind-the-wheel training, MTS internal testing and revenue service training. The process takes 200+ hours. One of the key outcomes of this rigorous training program is the safety-first mentality instilled throughout Bus Operations.

Then, all 550 MTS bus operators must complete eight hours of Verification of Transit Training (VTT) class every year. This is an annual classroom-based training that must be completed in order to receive VTT certification.

Over the past five years, the MTS Bus Training team has turned VTT into a dynamic program that changes behavior, reinforces good decisions and addresses how to handle challenging circumstances. The bus training team has made it into a lively one-day learning experience, cultivating the team while having fun. It's a way to build camaraderie and a positive reinforcement learning environment. But most importantly, it makes our system safer.

According to Manager of Bus Training Mike Adams, the bus training team has a unique approach to VTT. "It used to be an off-the-shelf course," said Adams. "But it didn't have enough impact. The coursework wasn't specific. It didn't talk about our routes, or our buses. We've changed that. The material now emphasizes on realistic situations and what operators see every day."

"We don't look at VTT as a check-the-box thing," added Bus Operations Training Instructor Mike Perez. "It's important that we give our operators individualized attention. Operators work in a fast-paced environment. We have to match it, otherwise we lose impact."

To match the fast-paced daily life of a bus operator, VTT classes are small but the personality is large. "A lot of people feel more comfortable in smaller groups to participate in the activities," added Adams. "Every year we get more and more customized with the curriculum." This year's VTT is 100% customized and took 6 months to develop.

The training team packs VTT into modules focusing on different topics. "Hot Spots" is a popular module that changes every year depending on where MTS has the most accidents. VTT helps operators understand how to better-handle the scenarios around hot spots. "We also go back to basics sometimes with the modules and drill down into accident trends, such as hitting parked cars, and tips for avoiding it," said Perez.

A few of the newer training approaches include interactive games like "Wheel of Fortune," and onboard videos captured from real-life incidents. "Showing the onboard videos has been the single most effective tool," said Perez. "We can provide a visual. They see someone else going through it. They see what happens to the bus and everything around it."

MTS bus operators are some of the safest transit drivers in the country. A big reason for that is this VTT course that focuses on MTS-specific challenges, an energetic learning environment and creative ways in keeping the operators focused and to retain as much information as possible.

The end result is a thriving bus operations program that keeps safety top-of-mind in the classroom and on the road.

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