

M. CASE STUDY

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A SMALL ACT OF ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR: ACTION TAKEN BY THE SOCIÉTÉ NATIONALE DES CHEMINS DE FER FRANÇAIS (SNCF)

Mickaël Picart, Executive Director, Social Engagement and Prevention, Groupe SNCF

“Verbal aggression, false alarms, cigarettes on trains or in stations, noise pollution, littering: the Groupe is committed to fighting these behaviours, which demonstrate a lack of respect towards individuals and rules. In 2017, 6 outreach events were organized in train stations to combat anti-social behaviour towards SNCF customers.”

- Excerpt from Groupe SNCF's 2017 Corporate Social Engagement Report

It takes courage to address anti-social behaviour, but it's fair to say right from the start that this is a social issue much broader than a company, regardless of who or how big the company is. This truth allowed Groupe SNCF to address the issue with a more open mind, according to Mickaël Picart, Executive Director for Social Engagement and Prevention. “Human relationships have changed a great deal, both in terms of the relationship with authority and with time (in this digital era). The Société nationale des chemins de fer (SNCF—French National Railways) is far from being the only company facing this problem, but building a sense of community is a value that we are committed to.”

In 2017, the SNCF introduced a program to raise awareness among its employees about preventing anti-social behaviour, as a way of addressing the “building a sense of community” theme at all levels of the organization and in all daily interactions. Mickaël Picart generously agreed to be interviewed by *Global-Watch* about the two lines of action developed by SNCF to focus on ordinary civic-mindedness, which can make all the difference in the day-to-day lives of its employees and the passengers they encounter.

First line of action: online training

“First we created a MOOC (massive open online course) course on building a sense of community that could be taken on a volunteer basis. This course was taken by 5,000 agents in five weeks. We offered it on a volunteer basis to remove the notion of it being a requirement and to stimulate interest. We believe that the success of the module is based on a few important concepts such as:

- 1- We recognize that this is a social issue and not an issue specific to the SNCF. We live in a hypersensitive society where tense situations escalate

- more quickly into aggressiveness in the absence of sound procedures for managing them.
- 2- We used actual situations that had occurred in stations, trains and offices to illustrate best practices.
 - 3- Open discussion forums allowed participants to interact and discuss ways of managing situations. By interacting, the participants themselves were able to identify best practices on the spot. This way, we were able to avoid adopting a preachy tone because employees saw that their environment was properly understood and addressed.
 - 4- Our approach was intentionally very practical rather than intellectual. We live in a society that's short on common sense, so this was an opportunity to promote it!"

"Moreover, the very existence of the MOOC was itself a communication tool for addressing anti-social behaviour. Misconduct is bound to occur. We wagered that we could say "it exists and we're aware of it" but we can handle it differently. We work upstream of the aggressive behaviour. We don't wait until it happens, we have shifted from a punitive approach to a preventive one."

Second line of action: anti-social behaviour forums

"It all started in Marseilles. The forums were an opportunity to bring together all SNCF stakeholders, have them sit around a single table and let them interact. Organizations often operate in silos: this was the opportunity to show employees that they are only one element in a service chain. That even if the employee works for a certain sector, it's still part of a single organization. All the passenger sees is the SNCF."

"These forums were held across France, led by local people who want to own the project. It's not a project created in Paris that is then adapted in the regions of France, and this is an important point because Paris isn't the regions and the regions aren't Paris. For example, during the Clermont-Férand forum, there were spokespeople from different organizations such as La Poste (postal service), local public transportation, etc., creating interesting possibilities for discussions about best practices."

"During the Internal Forum in Marseilles, attended by 400 people, we discussed the importance of reducing anti-social behaviour among colleagues. Respect is a must at all times, for example, when agents were themselves travelling off-duty. The agents noted how painful it was to experience anti-social behaviour from their colleagues. Above all, it's important to talk about it without stigmatizing anyone, with respect for all our employees. We did this by, among other things, creating coffee cups and pins bearing the slogan 'A good day starts with a hello!' This serves as a fun, non-punitive visual reminder to treat people with respect and civility."

“Lastly, I believe that the most important thing to remember is that the anti-social behaviour issue is never ‘settled.’ We constantly have to find ways to talk about it differently, to come back to the topic by tailoring our messages to a new generation and a changing world.”

The SNCF is one of the world's leading passenger transportation and freight logistics groups, with annual revenues of 33.5 billion euros, a third of which is generated internationally. Its goal is to be a standard-setter for mobility and logistics in France and around the world.