

# APPRENTICESHIP TRAINING IN CANADA POST

THE UNION'S PERSPECTIVE



# Program Launch

- Joint CUPW / Canada Post Program was launched in 1995

# Why This Initiative was Significant

- 30 previous years of intense antagonism between the 2 parties.
- Neither party had experience with apprenticeship training.
- Recent Canada Post behavior indicated they preferred to hire trained workers (or contract out the work).
- The union had always considered development of workplace training a management responsibility.

# The First Apprentice

- In place as a vehicle mechanic apprentice in the Canada Post Garage in Halifax a year after discussions began.
- Since then more than 300 CUPW members have participated.

# Origins of the Program

- It started as a union demand during collective agreement in 1994.
- Canada Post wasn't interested
- (But they were interested in a negotiated contract).

# The Power of Collective Bargaining

- Canada post eventually decided they could live with the program.
- The union also secured its involvement in program development and implementation.
- Program is funded entirely by Canada Post.
- Canada Post and CUPW have equal decision making authority over the program.

# Program Design Issues (1)

- Curriculum (What should the program teach?)
- Access (Who should enter the program?)

## Program Design Issues (2)

- The parties agreed that the program should teach technical skills that were required in the workplace.
- The required skills overlap 3 distinct but overlapping areas.
- Canada Post was very much against specialized trades in each of these 3 areas.
- They indicated they would rather contract out the work than go in that direction.
- Agreeing to a “multi-skilling” training program has resulted in criticism in the labour movement.

## Who Gets Into the Program

- The union was wary of favouritism and wanted seniority to govern selection.
- Canada Post was concerned that every postal worker who applied would not be a suitable candidate.
- They were also concerned that seniority favoured older workers who would retire shortly after completing their training.

# What Was Agreed To

- A formula – the senior applicant who was able to pass an aptitude test gets the job.
- The test measures only the ability to learn the skills taught in the program.
- No restrictions to exclude older workers.

# Upgrade Training for Existing Technicians

- They attend training to broaden or update their existing skills.
- Classroom space not filled by apprentices is made available for existing technicians.
- Upgrade participants attend only the individual training components that they need.
- They don't attend training they've already received but are given program credit for it.

# Involvement of Women (1)

- Women's involvement in the apprenticeship program was a particular goal of the union.
- In the early 90's only 1 or 2 out of the 900 technicians were women.
- collective agreement language required the joint committee to encourage women's involvement

## Women's Involvement (2)

- Seniority provisions had the effect of blocking women's access to apprentice positions.
- To overcome this problem the union made a major departure from its practices.
- In the 1999 round of bargaining 2 gender based seniority lists were created.
- Despite these measures and periodic outreach initiatives it was still a fact that very few women were applying for apprenticeships.

# Program Implementation (1)

- Canada Post and CUPW have equal formal authority over the program.
- As a result program responsibilities and workload should be shared. This hasn't been the case.
- Canada Post's commitment to the program has seemed weak.
- This is perhaps because the program was a union initiative (not a Canada Post initiative).

## Program Implementation (2)

- Canada Post's failure to carry its load has created a positive outcome for the union.
- For all intents and purposes the union drives the program and ensures it's delivered professionally and meets union objectives.
- To the trainees the union is seen as the program leader.
- As a result the program has been an organizing vehicle for the union.

## Program Implementation (3)

- A program weakness has been its dependence on front line managers and supervisors.
- High levels of support in some Canada Post plants have been contrasted with low levels of support in others.
- In some instances local managers have had to be forced to provide required learning opportunities to apprentices on a timely basis.

# Impressive Results

- Most trainees by all reports have performed well on the job.
- Most have also scored extremely high marks in the college part of the program.
- Colleges have consistently commended the trainees for their strong motivation and hard work.

# Troubles Ahead (1)

- Program's future, especially its current form, is not secure.
- Senior Canada Post management now want a program that produces apprentices faster and for less cost.
- It's their opinion that the program needs to change due to new technology now being introduced.

## Troubles Ahead (2)

- Rather than just curriculum changes an entirely new format for the training has been proposed.
- The proposed format would send trainees to an out of the box 2 year college program.
- The only workplace training would occur during school breaks.
- The discussions continue.

# Breakthrough in the Involvement of Women

- A breakthrough occurred in 2007
- Large numbers of women applied for apprentice positions.
- The goal that 50% of apprentices were to be women had finally been achieved (and quite easily).
- 12 women finish their apprenticeships in 2010 or 2011.

# My Experiences as an Apprentice at Canada Post

By Maynor Lee



# My Experiences (1)

## **Before Applying**

- Initially not convinced I should apply.
- Thought my limited technical knowledge would be too difficult to overcome.
- It was encouragement from co-workers that convinced me to apply.

# My Experiences (2)

## After Applying

- There was a huge response to the program from interested applicants.
- This made the anticipation while waiting for the results of the aptitude test a bit overwhelming.
- Before the aptitudes test results were known there was much talk and speculation. I don't think I ever recall such a "buzz" on the plant floor.
- Other program applicants who hadn't passed the aptitude tests were so upset they wouldn't speak to me.

# My Experiences (3)

## **The First Days on the Job**

- On the 1<sup>st</sup> day we were all assigned to different areas of the work floor and introduced to the daily tasks we'd be required to do.
- It seemed that 100% of the current maintenance and technical staff wanted to aid us in our learning.

# My Experiences (4)

## **On the Job for Awhile**

- Eventually we did discover that not all of our co-workers wanted the woman to succeed.
- One individual made it a point to give the “girls” the dirtiest jobs he could find hoping we would quit. I’m happy to say that he failed miserably.
- Now on the floor, if you want a job done, “Get one of the girls to help you,” is commonly heard. We are known as the ones who want to learn.

# My Experiences (5)

## **Going to School**

- Going back to school was an adventure, especially for those who hadn't been to school in many years.
- Most of us were committed to learning but it also became clear that not all had the same level of commitment.
- In terms of perception back on the work floor, the hard work of most of the apprentices was negatively overshadowed by 1 or 2 individuals who did not share the same level of commitment.

# My Experiences (6)

## Reflections

- I've learned that I love to work with machinery such as lathes and milling machines.
- I've also learned that I'm a pretty good welder.
- I am now  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the way through the 4 year program and have completed 33 of 42 weeks of in school training.
- I've just finished the Electronics 1 course (Transistor Circuits) and it wasn't as tough as I expected.

# My Experiences (7)

## Reflections

- On program completion I will have a guaranteed job as a maintenance technician, a job that pays the highest postal worker wage.
- I also have portable skills that can be used in other jobs
- My best experience is the friends I have made – other trainees from across the country.

# My Experiences (7)

## **Its Been a Rewarding Journey**

- I've discovered that whatever your age or interests opportunities to learn should not be ignored and are worth the challenge.
- The apprenticeship program has rekindled my passion for learning and has enabled me to embrace new concepts.
- I now know that if you believe in yourself, success as an apprentice is truly possible.