

## **Dan Mott:**

Industries in Canada have done a great job in the last number of years identifying the needs to attracting apprentices. We have done that in spades. We have brought apprentices into many of the different industries, many employers have become more aware of their opportunities and responsibilities associated with being employers of apprentices: the mentoring processes, the training – we have done a great job of that. Now we move into a new era of challenge: how do we avoid disillusionment to enter young people's minds, not only those involved in apprenticeship today, but those who are contemplating it as they go through high school or a career that may not be what they ultimately want to do.

To that end, government, the school systems, employers, and unions have to look at how to maintain the people who may not see as bright a future in their chosen field as they did a few years ago or even a few months ago. One of the key things is to make sure that employers engage their apprentices, make them aware that this is a reality of any business, and that there are economic cycles. We must also create opportunities through the government and schools to put on as much training as we can to broaden their experiences and opportunities regarding apprenticeship.

In the area that I come from, construction electricians, we have 60 people trained in fiber, data, security, building management. We have 40 people that concentrate on the wireless sector – manufacturing, towers, putting all the cell sites in so that people can communicate. And we have 120 people that are trained in the industrial, commercial, and institutional field. 80% of those people are cross-trained and can go to any division in any of the companies that we're responsible for. That is not only the journeymen, that is the apprentices too. And it is not just always the conventional training that an electrical apprentice might have. If we are slow, as we are right now, I send apprentices to different areas within our work – they are going to find out what wireless is all about. Also, we regularly have meetings with the apprentices (of which we have 72 right now) to make sure that they are aware that there are other opportunities in construction electrical, and it is important for them to take the initiative, and look at opportunities. Read industry documentation, go online, see what else you can do.

Something that was mentioned was the silver lining. One of the forums we had here a while ago had a lot of people from the government and one of them was the penitentiary system, and a variety of different sectors. Back in the 1980s when we only had about 40 people working for the company, a lot of them came to me and said they were leaving for a government position, for a static industry, because they saw more long-term career opportunities there. For those groups who have had trouble attracting people to them, this is an opportunity for them to attract people in, to fill the gaps they are going to have, because historically, many of our industries have trained those employees that go to work for government and static industries. So there is a bright side for them during this downturn for people looking for more stability in their career and there are opportunities for these people to go work for government or static industries.

We have a new breed of apprentice out there which I have become acutely aware of as my son just started the electrical apprenticeship system. I struggle with some of the comments from him and many of the other apprentices that we have – they seem to think they have choices. I have to remind them that they work where I tell them to work and they do what I tell them to do. After thinking about it, it reminded me of

someone I knew back in the early 1970s – somebody who looked a lot like me. Up until a few months ago, kids were getting phoned at home for jobs. Kids graduating from high school had choices: 25\$/hour if you knew how to use a hammer. They didn't see the 1980s – they didn't read about it and there's not even a movie about it. They just assume that they can get a job anywhere and do what they want. And they're aggressive. They want to be leaders. We've got great opportunities with some of the apprentices. They're not looking at apprenticeship as a last resort – they see it as 60,000 – 100,000 dollars a year, mobility, opportunity, own my own business. When there is that kind of energy within the apprenticeship system today, that is a huge opportunity that we cannot lose and we must continue to embrace it, and nurture these young men and women along.

One of the areas from history that may have disillusioned apprentices is in the relationship with some of the unions, but that was a number of years ago and today our relationships are much better in just about all cases that I have experienced. I would have to say they are exceptional; it's a good working relationship. The unions need to communicate with the apprentices, let them know that there is a future for them, let them know about the nature of our industry, staying on top of it, getting more cross-training, making your career the best it can be.

Once again, the silver lining scenario, in recent years, there has been so much work to do that we've lost sight of educating people about the efficiencies and how to get the job done in a competitive fashion. I know what we are facing right now is critical. Another area the unions could look at as far as seniority, mobility, is the ratios. Some of the safety standards and collective agreements have stipulated ratios. That is one of the areas that we can look at to try to improve opportunities for apprentices because they will be the succession plan of any organization – whether it is a union or a company.

We have known this was going to happen at some point: there are a number of apprentices who haven't been able to go to school because either their employers have had too much work to make that option available to them or the schools haven't had the seats available. One of the things we need to do now is to make as many seats available as we can. It will, at least, be a stop-gap, if the economists are right, (at least we haven't started using lawyers' jokes on economists, right?) and things improve from latter 2009 into 2010, then it's a stop-gap measure if we can get some of these apprentices that are in the system, get them into the schools now. While I am not a big fan of government subsidies, one of the areas that would help is if we have schools that have seats available, and they are located 300-400 miles from students' domiciles, let's try to soften the blow of having to travel to go to school. We've got all these buildings... Every school should be full when we need it right now, and that is something that I see as a possible solution.

I think that sums up my view on what we can do. Somebody said working together, but educating apprentices, getting that information out to them now about being bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, and now some of them are being told that there is no work, and they don't get that. At least they are resilient, and they know that they need to complete their apprenticeship in most cases. And we are willing to help them out along the way because that is what this apprenticeship game is all about: getting them in, getting them started, and finished, being productive and helping all of us be competitive. Thank you.