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in this issue



20 The next big thing in training

Today's workforce training might not look or feel like it used to, but that's a really good thing. Micro-credentials are taking the training world by storm, and they're the key in keeping your people competitive and engaged.

- 4 Editor's Notebook
- 6 The Human Factor
- 8 Economic Roundup
- 14 Saskatchewan Spotlight
- 24 Women in Manufacturing
- 46 5 Questions

8 **Don't be complacent about diversity**
Especially at a time of critical labour shortages, manufacturers need to be proactive in attracting under-represented groups into their workforce. The Prairies is doing alright, but there is still work to be done.

12 **Be proactive with personal pronouns**
How to respond to employee's pronouns and chosen names is both a practical and legal issue facing employers, but both employers and employees have responsibilities when dealing with matters of personal identity.

24 **Women making it in manufacturing**
While many women go into manufacturing, not many stay. Meet three women who are blazing their own trails and making a go of it in the male-dominated manufacturing industry.

28 **All a(board)!**
Getting new board members up to speed is critical to the success of your organization but getting there can feel like drinking from fire hose. Check out the essentials of a good onboarding process.

34 **Meet the new guy**
New regional leadership at a major industry association is an opportunity to reinvigorate the organization and its membership. Hear from Terry Shaw about his plans for CME's new Prairies division.





It's time!

Coming together has never been more important

By Jeff Baker

Welcome to June, everyone! Now how did we get here already?!

There's that saying, 'time flies when you're having fun,' but I think we can all agree that time just flies, so we should try to find the fun while it's in flight.

Take pride

As a country, as a region, and as an industry, there's a heck of a lot for us to be proud of and celebrate. Whether you're marking Pride Month, National Indigenous History Month, Filipino Heritage Month, Portuguese Heritage Month, or any other important time for your community, be proud of who you are, what you and your community are doing, and how we live in a country that not only allows for this multicultural mosaic, but empowers us to celebrate it and share it with everyone around us.

We live in a time when so much of the information that bombards us is filtered through algorithms that are actively trying to sway public sentiment in not innocuous ways. Whether it's through click-bait headlines, TikToks that never get to the point, or misinformation disguised as 'news,' it feels like the lack of good news can take us to a very dark place.

It's important to realize the world is not all doom and gloom, that people are

generally coming from a place of good intention, that all is not lost, and that overt partisanship and politicking is not how to solve what really ails us. We need to come together as people - not parties or factions - to start making positive change in all parts of our world.

What's old is new again

Celebrating their 153rd year in 2024, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME) is marking the occasion by going into the archives and digging up some 'golden oldies' of structure from their organizational history (with different people, of course!).

In 1919, CME established a Prairies division to serve manufacturers in the three provinces, then, in 1962, the division was split into Alberta and Manitoba/Saskatchewan regions. For 25 years, that structure stayed in place, but then Saskatchewan and Manitoba parted ways. At some point, the Saskatchewan division rekindled the flame for Alberta, and both provinces shared a regional vice-president.

This region accounts for less than one tenth of one per cent of the world's population - 0.0926 per cent, to be exact. In 2018, there were nearly 50 metropolitan areas around the world with more people than the Prairies, some

And now we're in 2024... CME just re-formed its Prairies division under the leadership of a new-to-the-industry VP. It only took 105 years for the pendulum to make a full swing, so in geological

It's important to realize the world is not all doom and gloom, that people are generally coming from a place of good intention, that all is not lost, and that overt partisanship and politicking is not how to solve what really ails us.



of which had more people than all of Canada. Small fish, big pond anyone?

Yes, the Prairies are hitting well above their weight in a variety of fields, and yes, there are tremendous home-grown success stories finding markets in every corner of the globe that we most definitely should be proud of. But let's not think that we're ready to compete with the best of the best in every arena, because we're not.

It's time to pull together

As the Bank of Canada recently said, productivity and innovation in Canadian industry is at crisis levels - it's time to break the glass and sound the alarm bells. We're under-employing such large swaths of our population - Indigenous people, new Canadians, women, people with disabilities - while still complaining we can't find people to work. We're not taking climate change nearly as seriously as it needs to be, while the rest of the world is starting to make dramatic leaps of improvement in carbon emissions performance. We're spending too much legislative time and energy trying to fix problems that don't exist or causing problems by 'othering' members of our own communities.

If there ever was a time when we needed to come together as a region, as a country, and as a world, it's now.

We need to stop the 'othering,' stop trying to sow seeds of distrust and hate that serve only to generate 'clicks' or 'views,' and stop thinking that we have nothing to improve. We need to start doing better as individuals, as communities, as governments, and as businesses by embracing our fellow humans, the challenges we all face, and the opportunities that we can create and employ to our collective advantage. That's how the Prairies will thrive into the years and decades ahead.

What a downer!

Okay, I'll admit that I've been a bit 'doom and gloom' here, but sometimes we need to remove ourselves from our happy little ruts, and really explore what we might be leaving on the table when we focus on things of little to no importance in the grand scheme of things.

There is still room for optimism, and in these pages we're bringing some of it to you. From a conversation with a new regional industry champion and advocate, to the need for continuing education - at all levels from board to entry, and from

We can definitely be proud of everything that Prairie manufacturers have accomplished, as well as the positive impacts they have in our region and on our people. In fact, we should be proud.

the importance of nurturing a culture of safety for your people, to celebrating women who are finding success in manufacturing by doing things differently.

We can definitely be proud of everything that Prairie manufacturers have accomplished, as well as the positive impacts they have in our region and on our people. In fact, we should be proud.

But let's also be proud of the ability of this region and its manufacturers to embrace the 'different,' to make it work because of (not despite of) the challenges faced, and to see through the distractions trying to pull focus from what really matters. That's the power of Prairie manufacturing.

I hope you enjoy the read.



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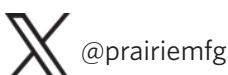
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The financial impact of the literacy gap

Single-digit literacy lift could add tens of billions to Canadian economy

By Kara Finney

The importance of literacy feels like it has been lost in our fast-paced world. Truth be told, it has, and this loss has significant and long-lasting impacts on the Canadian economy.

The Canada West Foundation, in its report, *What Now? Opportunity Lost*, explains that in today's context, if Canada's literacy rate increased by just one per cent on average, GDP would rise by three per cent - or the equivalent of \$57 billion in additional economic output annually. This increase, however, would not be immediate but over a period of time as the skill-gain takes hold.

When I started in this role in 2010, conversations on literacy and numeracy gaps in Canada were taking place, and it was noted that if we could resolve the literacy gap there would be a direct positive impact to Canada's GDP, healthcare systems, and future workforce. Fourteen years later, the narrative has not changed - but then, neither have we really moved on resolving the literacy gap.

In my opinion, literacy gaps in our country are purely related to access; access to what many of us take for granted. Examples include access to appropriate education systems including local schools that go beyond Grade 8 and, of course, reliable high-speed internet. There is a connection between lower literacy levels and poverty, but literacy, when looked at as "having the literacy levels to perform in their current occupation" - the statistics are clear. With the required workplace reading level being Level 3 (a range

equating to Grades 10-12), the 2011 OECD Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) results showed a range of 38 per cent to 65 per cent of the population of individual provinces and territories did not have the required reading levels to perform successfully at work.

The PIAAC's Study of Adult Skills has performed another assessment with the current data to be released soon. The question remains, are we moving the needle?

Now in the mix, we have Artificial Intelligence (AI) generating systems becoming more mainstream. AI certainly has its place if used appropriately, but the question is, how does this affect our literacy levels in the long term. In conversation with a co-worker about this article, the topic very quickly moved to how some would use AI to write this article. So, we put into an AI generator the topic "The Importance of Literacy." This is what was provided.

Literacy is a fundamental skill that plays a crucial role in our everyday lives. It goes beyond just being able to read and write, but encompasses a wide range of skills and abilities that allow individuals to effectively communicate, comprehend, and critically analyze information. From a young age, literacy is essential in laying the foundation for learning and development. It allows children to understand the world around them, express their thoughts and emotions, and navigate through various academic and social settings.

In my opinion, the cause of literacy gaps in our country are purely related to access; access to what many of us take for granted.

As individuals grow and progress through their education and careers, literacy remains a vital skill. In today's society, where technology and information are constantly evolving, the ability to read and understand complex texts is essential. It enables individuals to stay informed and engaged in their communities, make informed decisions, and actively participate in the democratic process. Literacy also opens up opportunities for personal and professional growth, as it is a key component in acquiring new knowledge and skills.

It becomes very tempting to just use AI when it provides this level of writing. With this though, are we only creating a growing population of Canadians with lower-level literacy? We assume that those using AI would want to read the article produced by AI for comprehension, but will we?

Based on the research article, *From Poverty to Prosperity: Literacy's Impact on Canada's Economic Success*, the cost to resolve the gap as of 2011 was estimated at \$18 billion, with a likely result in generating

an additional \$100 billion in annual earnings across Canada. Of course, the cost is higher now just due to inflation.

What does it do to us as a society and our ability to relate to one another? What does it do to our ability to be successful within our own work and life? We will soon see how we are doing as the PIAAC results are analyzed and provided publicly and it will allow us to compare where we are now to where we were in 2011. Whether we've improved or not, there remains work to do. ↗

Kara Finney is Chief Executive Officer of three partnering organizations: Workplace Education Manitoba (WEM), Essential Skills Manitoba (ESM), and Workplace Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (WPLAR) - organizations that directly support both Skills for Success and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) across Manitoba and Canada. With extensive experience in manufacturing and supply chain, Kara understands the benefits and opportunities of integrating Skills for Success and RPL into the workplace and beyond.

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Diversity in Prairie Manufacturing: There's No Time to Be Complacent!

By Jayson Myers

The Prairies have some of the most diverse manufacturing workplaces in Canada – except when it comes to hiring women.

In proportion to the size of their workforce, manufacturers in the Prairies employ twice as many Indigenous people as the average business in Canada, 31 per cent more immigrants, and 23 per cent more visible minorities. They employ 94 per cent more indigenous workers, 12 per cent more immigrants, and 24 per cent more visible minorities than the average manufacturing company in Canada.

However, conditions aren't as positive for women. Women account for less than 25 per cent of the Prairie manufacturing workforce. That's about half Canada's overall employment rate for women and 13 per cent below the manufacturing average across the country. For the Prairies as a whole, women occupy a lower percentage of senior management, mid-management, and lower management jobs than in either the average Canadian business or the average manufacturing company in the country.

The situation doesn't look that rosy for Prairie companies trying to attract under-represented groups into the manufacturing workforce either. They generally underperform their counterparts elsewhere in Canada. Manufacturing accounts for about nine per cent of all Canadian employees, for about 11 per cent of all jobs for immigrants, nine per cent of all visible minority workers, but again only five per cent of all women employees across the country. Prairie manufacturers, on the other hand, employ only seven per cent of the total workforce,

nine per cent of immigrants, seven per cent of visible minorities, and three per cent of women working in the region.

Each of the Prairie provinces has a slightly different diversity profile, but the overall complexion is about the same. Generally speaking, when it comes to women, the province doesn't matter – manufacturers simply under-hire.

Manitoba Relies on Immigrants

The story for Manitoba manufacturers is mainly about newcomers to Canada. Immigrants account for a full 42 per cent of all manufacturing jobs in the province, compared to 24 per cent for the average Manitoba business. That's also a much higher share than the 27 per cent average Canadian immigrant employment rate or the 32 per cent rate for manufacturers across the country. While manufacturing accounts for almost 10 per cent of Manitoba's workforce, almost 17 per cent of all newcomers employed in Manitoba have a job in manufacturing.

Reflecting the importance of immigrants, visible minorities also represent 42 per cent of Manitoba's manufacturing workforce whereas the average for all businesses in the province is 36 per cent. The Canadian economy and Canada's manufacturing sector both average around 29 per cent. Manufacturing employs over 11 per cent of all visible minority workers in Manitoba.

Women have a tougher time getting a job in Manitoba manufacturing. Only 26 per cent of manufacturing jobs in

the province are held by women, which is lower than the 28 per cent average for manufacturers across the country. It is also significantly lower than the 48 per cent averages for women's employment in all sectors of the Manitoba and Canadian economies. Only five per cent of female workers in Manitoba are employed in manufacturing.

Women are under-represented in manufacturing management jobs in Manitoba as well. Just over 22 per cent of senior management positions and 35 per cent of mid-management positions in the provincial sector are held by females. The averages for those positions across all Canadian manufacturers are 27 per cent and 37 per cent respectively.

Saskatchewan Not as Diverse

Manufacturers in Saskatchewan are notably less diverse than their other Prairie counterparts. Women occupy only 21 per cent of manufacturing jobs in the province, which is ironic because the 49 per cent overall rate of female employment in the province is higher than the national figure. Female representation is somewhat better in manufacturing management positions where 27 per cent of senior management roles and 35 per cent of mid-management positions are filled by women. While manufacturing accounts for just over five per cent of Saskatchewan's workforce, the sector has attracted just a little over two per cent of working women in the province.

Immigrants account for 19 per cent of Saskatchewan's manufacturing workforce, slightly higher than the 15 per cent average for the provincial economy, but 12 points lower than the Canadian manufacturing rate. Visible minorities are also under-represented. They hold 23 per cent of manufacturing jobs in Saskatchewan, which is lower than both the 26 per cent provincial average as well as Canada's overall manufacturing rate of 29 per cent. The sector has attracted seven per cent of the province's immigrant workers, which is better than average for the sector, but less than five per cent of visible minority employees.

Women account for less than 25 per cent of the Prairie manufacturing workforce. That's about half Canada's overall employment rate for women and 13 per cent below the manufacturing average across the country.

Alberta is the Biggest Employer

Job prospects for some under-represented groups are brighter in Alberta where manufacturing accounts for six per cent of total provincial employment but close to 60 per cent of the entire workforce for Prairie manufacturers. The province also accounts for around 58 per cent of all women, immigrant, and visible minority employees in Prairie manufacturing.

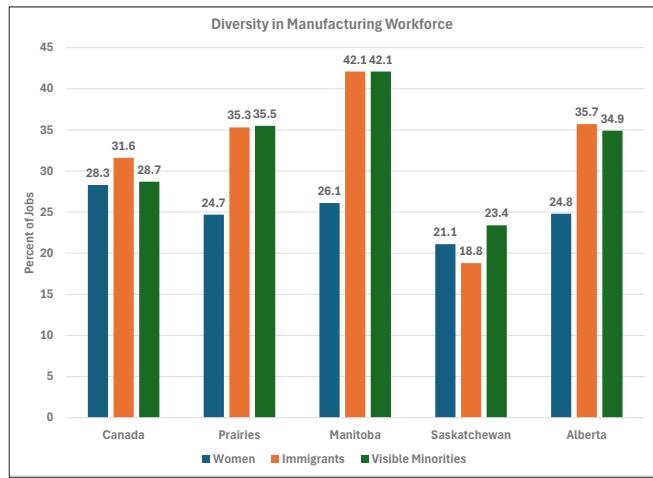
Immigrants represent 36 per cent and visible minorities 35 per cent of all employees in Alberta manufacturing. However, manufacturing still attracts a lower proportion of immigrants (eight percent) and visible minorities (seven percent) than other economic sectors in the province.

The situation for women also remains a challenge. Alberta manufacturers have hired only three per cent of female workers in the province. While women represent 48 per cent of Alberta's total workforce, they account for only 25 per cent in the province's manufacturing sector – well below the national average. They are better represented in manufacturing management positions though. Just under 30 per cent of senior management positions and 36 per cent of mid-management positions in Alberta manufacturing are occupied by women.

Indigenous Employment

Indigenous employment numbers are only available for the Prairie provinces as a whole and for the manufacturing and construction sectors combined. They indicate that 287,200 Indigenous workers were employed across the Prairies last year. They accounted for just over 38 per cent of all Indigenous employment in Canada, but for only about eight per cent of the overall workforce across the Prairie provinces. Prairie manufacturers employed 44,000 Indigenous workers in 2023. That's also about eight per cent of their workforce and represents almost 35 per cent of all Indigenous workers hired by manufacturers across Canada.

Especially at a time of labour shortages, manufacturers need to be proactive in attracting under-represented groups into their workforce.

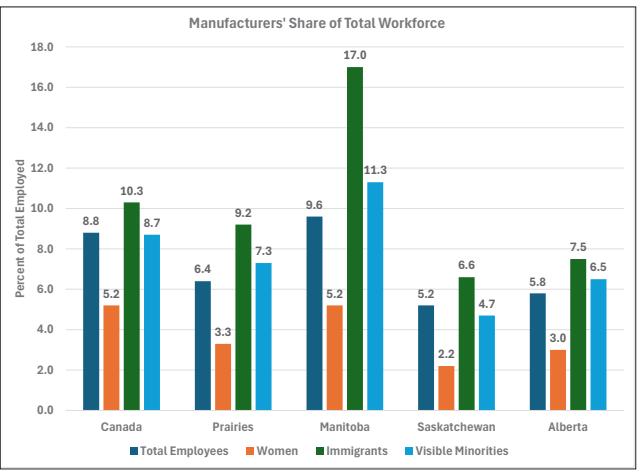


However, in several respects, Prairie manufacturers are under-hiring when it comes to Indigenous workers. Only 15 per cent of Indigenous workers go into manufacturing and construction jobs.

What's more, Indigenous people represent a much larger proportion of the Prairie provinces' population than these employment statistics suggest. They account for five per cent of Canada's total population but for almost 11 per cent of all people living across the Prairies. Over 18 per cent of the population in Manitoba, 17 per cent in Saskatchewan, and seven per cent in Alberta is Indigenous. The Indigenous population is the fastest growing demographic group on the Prairies, and it is also the youngest. The average age of Indigenous people is 30.4 years in Manitoba, 29.6 in Saskatchewan, and 31.3 in Alberta – that's respectively 8.9, 9.7, and 7.3 years younger than the average age in each province. The Indigenous workforce in the region will expand rapidly over the next decade. It will be a challenge for Prairie manufacturers to keep up – and a significant lost opportunity if they can't.

Diversity Matters

Of course, the number of under-represented groups in the workforce tells only a part of the story about population dynamics and the productivity potential of Prairie manufacturing.



Employment equity considerations also need to be taken into account. As should the competencies of workers, the conditions in which they work, the tools and technologies at their disposal, and the leadership and management strengths of their employers.

But diversity statistics do tell a lot about hiring practices, labour and capacity constraints, and the vitality of industry sectors across the country. Especially at a time of labour shortages, manufacturers need to be proactive in attracting under-represented groups into their workforce. No one should think that it will be easy. A whole lot of recruitment and training will have to be done.

In many respects, Prairie manufacturers are leading the pack. In other important ways they lag far behind their counterparts in the rest of Canada. That's particularly the case when it comes to attracting and hiring women. But it's also the case in competing for workers. As skills requirements become more pressing in the face of accelerating technological change, no manufacturer on the Prairies should feel complacent about the road that lies ahead.⁶

Jayson Myers is CEO of Next Generation Manufacturing Canada – the country's Global Innovation Cluster for advanced manufacturing. An award-winning business economist and leading authority on technological change, Myers has counselled Canadian prime ministers and premiers, as well as senior corporate executives and policymakers around the world.



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Be Proactive with Personal Pronouns

Employers and employees both have responsibilities when dealing with matters of personal identity

By Peter Mueller & Allison Kilgour

How to respond to employee's pronouns and chosen names is both a practical and legal issue facing employers. In this article, we explore the importance of correct pronoun and name usage in the workplace, its impact on employees, and the potential legal implications for employers.

Understanding Pronouns in the Workplace

Pronouns—words we use to refer to people without using their names, such as "he", "she" or "they"—play a critical role in affirming individuals' gender identities. Respecting an employee's self-identified pronouns demonstrates respect for their identity, contributing to a positive work environment.

Similarly, a chosen name is the name a person wishes to be called by others. For non-binary and transgender employees, a chosen name is not merely a nickname – it is the name that aligns with and reaffirms their chosen identity. For some, the name they were assigned at birth, if used, can cause feelings of harm and trauma, and invalidate their gender identity.

The Importance of Policies Concerning Pronouns and Chosen Names

Implementing inclusive policies around pronoun and name usage in the workplace is essential for creating a welcoming environment for employees of all gender identities. Simple actions, such as including pronouns in email signatures or during introductions, and ensuring employment documents (such as business cards, internal announcements, etc.) use and respect chosen names can make a significant difference. Employers can also provide training and resources to staff about gender diversity and the importance of pronouns and proper name use to prevent harmful misgendering and foster a culture of inclusivity.

Legal Implications for Employers in Manitoba

The *Human Rights Code* protects against discrimination on the basis of gender identity. Pronouns and chosen names

are fundamental to one's gender identity and an employer's failure to acknowledge and respect an employee's pronouns or chosen name, or failing to take reasonable steps to intervene in workplace harassment connected to an employee's pronouns or chosen name, may be in breach of the Code.

Using the correct pronouns and an employee's chosen name is not an accommodation to be made – it is a legal obligation that must be respected.

Potential Legal Consequences

Failure to respect an employee's pronouns could lead to complaints under human rights legislation. This can result in legal proceedings before human rights tribunals, where employers could face orders to change practices, pay compensation, and undertake human rights training.

Similarly, whether or not an employee's legal name is the same as their chosen name, failure to respect and abide by it can result in the same potential consequences. Deadnaming – the act of calling a gender-diverse person by the incorrect name (usually the name they were assigned at birth) – when done intentionally, has been found to be a human rights violation and has resulted in compensation awards.

These legal outcomes not only have financial implications for employers but can also negatively affect the employer's reputation and workplace morale.

Best Practices for Employers

Employers can consider adopting the following best practices when addressing pronouns and chosen names (and by necessity, gender identity) in the workplace:

Using the correct pronouns and an employee's chosen name is not an accommodation to be made – it is a legal obligation that must be respected.

Implement and Enforce Clear Policies: Develop policies that respect employees' gender identities, chosen names and pronoun preferences, integrating these policies into employee handbooks and training programs. Also consider policies for changing pronouns and chosen names and put in place a process for employees to do this confidentially.

Educate Employees: Offer training to all employees on the significance of pronouns, chosen names, and gender diversity. Include information on the legal obligations of the employer and individuals under Canadian human rights laws.

Adopt Gender-Inclusive Practices: Make it a company practice to incorporate gender neutral language in greetings, emails and conversations. Instead of "Hey, guys!" or "Welcome, ladies!" try "Hey, folks!" and "Welcome, everyone!" Similarly, instead of "Dear Sir/Madam" try "Dear [Company Name] Team" or "To Whom it May Concern". Lastly, to avoid misgendering, instead of addressing correspondence to "Dear Mr. Doe", omit titles completely and use full names instead, such as "Dear John Doe".

Encourage Self-Identification (But Don't Mandate It): Allow employees to voluntarily share their pronouns and chosen names in ways that feel comfortable to them, such as in meetings, on name tags, or in digital communications. Similarly, confirm with employees upon hire whether they wish to be referred to by their legal name or a different name, and confirm their pronouns. In all cases, respect an individual's privacy and consent in these matters.

Let Employees Lead: Some gender-diverse employees may be out and proud, while others may not be comfortable with the whole office being aware of changes to their gender identity. In either case, employers should ask what the employee is comfortable with and how the employer can support them at work. Respect, consideration, and employee autonomy in their choices go a long way towards creating a safe and respectful workplace.

Address Mistakes Appropriately: Create an environment where mistakes in pronoun and name usage are corrected in a respectful and educational manner, distinguishing between unintentional errors and intentional disrespect.

Simple actions, such as including pronouns in email signatures or during introductions, and ensuring employment documents (such as business cards, internal announcements, etc.) use and respect chosen names can make a significant difference.

Stay Informed: Keep up to date with legal and societal changes related to gender identity and expression. Laws and norms continue to evolve, and employers need to adjust their policies and practices to remain inclusive and compliant.

Tips for Employees

Employees of all genders also have responsibilities when it comes to gender inclusivity in the workplace. There is no legal obligation on an employee to inform their employer about details concerning gender identity – but if you have chosen to be out with your identity, it is important to share this information with your employer. Employees who change their pronouns or names and want this reflected in the workplace should inform their employers about the changes and how they want other employees to become aware of it. Let your employer know what does and does not work for you and be open to dialogue about how to make the workplace safe and respectful.

Co-workers of gender-diverse employees must follow any policies or practices their employer adopts and should make efforts to support and respect the pronouns and chosen names of their colleagues. Individuals can also face liability under the *Human Rights Code*, and harassment of co-workers can have real and significant consequences for individuals.

Conclusion

In Manitoba, the respectful use of pronouns and chosen names in the workplace is more than a courtesy; it's a legal obligation under human rights law. By fostering inclusive policies and practices, employers can create a work environment that respects and values all employees, mitigating legal risks and improving workplace culture. ↗

Peter Mueller and Allison Kilgour are lawyers at Taylor McCaffrey LLP in Winnipeg.

Saskatchewan is Open for Business

New Investment Attraction Strategy and Website Aim to Grow Provincial Economy

Saskatchewan will build on its recent economic successes with the release of *Securing the Next Decade of Growth: Saskatchewan's Investment Attraction Strategy*. The strategy focuses on the Saskatchewan Advantage, which includes the province's global reputation for having the food, fuel, fertilizer, and critical minerals that our growing world needs.

Saskatchewan is building on its reputation as one of the best places in Canada to do business. The province boasts a competitive business environment and has much to offer potential investors. This includes a strong suite of incentive programs to support investment attraction and economic growth.

The new investment attraction strategy focuses on three key pillars: building opportunities in new and emerging sectors to diversify the provincial economy, growing existing sectors, and connecting the world to Saskatchewan.

As home to 23 of the 31 critical minerals that make modern life possible, the province is currently seeing a generational opportunity to attract investment in new high demand areas like rare earth elements, lithium, helium, and base metal processing. Saskatchewan is also driving innovation in sustainability and clean technology. Building opportunities in these key sectors is vital to the future of global energy security.

Growing existing sectors also remains a priority for the province. Saskatchewan is known as a global powerhouse in agriculture, potash, uranium, oil and gas, and forestry production - and will continue to capitalize on these strengths. In 2022, for example, Saskatchewan was ranked first in Canada and third globally by the Fraser Institute as the most attractive jurisdiction for mining

investment. This mining-friendly environment makes the province an ideal location for investors within the resource sector.

Sharing Saskatchewan's story on the global stage is another key aspect of the province's investment attraction strategy. Saskatchewan's network of nine international offices has been vital in introducing local businesses to new markets and potential partners, as well as promoting opportunities and driving investment in the province. These international engagement efforts have been hugely successful in connecting the world to Saskatchewan, with almost \$50 billion in goods exported in 2023 to over 160 countries.

"The opportunities for investment in Saskatchewan are bountiful," Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce CEO Prabha Ramaswamy said. "This investment strategy will serve as a catalyst to stimulate investments within the province, attract investments and businesses from outside the province, and boost economic growth."

To support the investment attraction strategy, the provincial government launched a new trade and investment website at investSK.ca, which provides an overview of the world-class investment opportunities in Saskatchewan. The website serves as a gateway to the province for international businesses and investors. It also provides potential stakeholders with an opportunity to connect with the Ministry of Trade and Export Development's investment attraction team and international offices.

Overall, both the new investment attraction strategy and website are vital tools in ensuring the ongoing economic success of the province. Saskatchewan has never been more ready to show the world what it is made of.



Saskatchewan is Open for Business

The new Saskatchewan Investment Attraction Strategy and trade and investment website, InvestSK.ca, provides an overview of the world-class investment opportunities in Saskatchewan.



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Saskatchewan 

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Strategic energy management: A holistic approach to energy reduction

Strategic energy management supports a holistic and planned approach to saving energy that empowers large industrial facilities to optimize their energy use, reduce costs, and minimize environmental impacts. It's a practice that's becoming increasingly more important to help meet corporate sustainability goals. To maintain a competitive edge in today's complex and dynamic business environment, organizations need to consider all options that can help them meet their energy goals. Strategic energy management looks beyond immediate cost savings and reducing energy consumption — it focuses on optimizing operations and helps position organizations for long-term success.

Industrial manufacturing processes use a substantial amount of energy. By implementing strategic energy management practices such as energy audits, demand side management strategies, and taking stock of existing equipment and consumption, manufacturing companies can identify and implement energy-saving opportunities to significantly reduce costs and save money on their energy bills. They can also realize improved efficiency and enhanced operational performance by upgrading equipment or installing energy-efficient technologies to optimize production and reduce energy waste. By continuously monitoring energy use, setting targets for improvement, and investing in ongoing employee training and engagement, industrial customers can ensure energy savings are sustained and realize long term environmental benefits.

Efficiency Manitoba, an organization dedicated to helping Manitobans reduce their energy use, lower their energy bills, and have a meaningful impact on the environment, is here to help manufacturing facilities in this pursuit through their Strategic Energy Manager Initiative.

Efficiency Manitoba's Strategic Energy Manager Initiative

Dedicated for large manufacturing facilities, Efficiency Manitoba's Strategic Energy Manager Initiative helps industrial customers adopt a culture of conservation and fosters a forum for continuous improvement. Efficiency Manitoba supports participants in hiring an on-site energy manager committed to planning and implementing sustainability initiatives. The energy manager develops a comprehensive strategic energy management plan, which prioritizes and quantifies energy-saving opportunities and initiatives for the facility. The program provides funding for Certified Energy Manager Training, ongoing third-party coaching for the newly developed energy management team, financial incentives for the implementation of energy efficiency upgrades, as well as a variety of other supports. It's an extensive and multi-faceted approach that affords large industrial facilities the opportunity to set and achieve their energy-saving goals and increase competitiveness.

Early success

One of the first participants to express interest in Efficiency Manitoba's Strategic Energy Manager Initiative was Amsted Canada, a large rail wheel manufacturer in Winnipeg.

"Without the support of Efficiency Manitoba's Strategic Energy Manager Initiative, we may not have been able to identify and implement projects that are expected to provide significant electricity savings," said Roy Kirkwood, General Manager at Amsted Canada. "The attention provided by our dedicated energy manager ensures opportunities for further

electricity reduction improvements are constantly being monitored and evaluated."

Supporting large industrial customers in saving energy & money

Efficiency Manitoba is excited to be working with several other large industrial manufacturing and processing facilities who are taking leadership roles in saving energy and shaping a more sustainable future by participating in this program. They're seeing the positive impacts energy managers are having in their organizations as they take the necessary steps to address their energy consumption and contribute to reducing overall energy usage in Manitoba.

Strategic partnerships are paying off

Winpak Ltd., a global sustainable food packaging group with 12 manufacturing facilities in North America and headquartered in Winnipeg, is also participating in the Strategic Energy Manager Initiative. The company is seeing success through this program at its Winnipeg headquarters located in the Moray Industrial Park. Through the development of their strategic energy management plan for this facility, several projects were recently implemented.

One project involved an energy efficiency upgrade to one of their packaging lines that reduces heat loss, saves energy, and increases production output of recycle-ready packaging film. This project, along with the installation of a new energy-efficient chiller, will not only save Winpak Winnipeg over \$50,000 in annual energy costs through the improved efficiency, but was also eligible for over \$125,000 in capital-based incentives through Efficiency Manitoba's Custom Energy Solutions Program. On top of this, they also received a bonus incentive for participating in the Strategic Energy Manager Initiative, which helps them offset the cost of hiring a dedicated energy manager.

But the Strategic Energy Manager Initiative goes further to reward other energy efficiency upgrades that are considered lower-cost initiatives and are often part of maintenance

procedures. One project Winpak Winnipeg undertook was a large changeout of over 100 standard v-belts with energy-efficient synchronous belts, or cogged belts. This project earned Winpak an incentive of over \$12,000 from Efficiency Manitoba and these energy-efficient belts are expected to deliver over \$23,000 in annual bill savings. Measures like this often go unaddressed or don't get implemented without the oversight of a dedicated energy manager to see them through.

Winpak Winnipeg has even been working to engage with their employees to bolster this culture of conservation and continuous improvement through contests and other communications initiatives. They recently ran an energy efficiency campaign at their Winnipeg facility where their employees uncovered an energy-saving opportunity that was later successfully implemented, illustrating Winpak's commitment to energy efficiency.

"Working with Efficiency Manitoba and having access to the support, workshops, coaching, and financial incentives available through the Strategic Energy Manager Initiative is helping us create a culture of energy efficiency and prioritize projects that will save energy and money in our operations," said Christian Cuyno, Energy Manager at Winpak Ltd. "We look forward to continuing our partnership to work towards achieving our sustainability targets."

Other companies Efficiency Manitoba is working with through their Strategic Energy Manager initiative include Boeing, Malteurop, Maple Leaf Foods (Brandon), McCain Foods (Portage la Prairie and Carberry), and StandardAero, all with a goal to reduce their energy consumption.

If you're interested in learning more about Efficiency Manitoba's Strategic Energy Manager Initiative or would like more information on their programs, financial incentives, and technical support, visit efficiencyMB.ca/industrial.



Micro **CRE**Dentials

the next **big**
thing in training

By Beverlie Stuart





PHOTO COURTESY: MITT

One of the most pressing challenges facing employers in today's workplace is the widening gap between the skills required for the job and those possessed by the workforce. In the rapidly evolving education and professional development landscape, micro-credentials have emerged as a powerful tool for reshaping traditional learning paradigms. Gaining attention for their flexibility, accessibility, and immediate applicability, micro-credentials offer short-term, accelerated training opportunities in many disciplines. Micro-credential benefits are abundant, from upskilling the workforce to fostering lifelong learning and career advancement.

In concert with countless partners, post-secondary institutions the world over are developing hundreds and thousands of micro-credentials in response to the urgent needs of business and industry's skilled workforce. Because their design responds to specific needs, micro-credential programs can significantly range in length, including both practical theory and hands-on learning and have the potential to be stackable. While typically non-credit, micro-credentials can sometimes be combined and recognized as credit toward a certificate or diploma program.

For example, MITT has created several industry-responsive and demand-led micro-credentials for the manufacturing sector, including Foundational Skills for Manufacturing, Manufacturing Fundamentals,

Print Press Operator, Gas Turbine Disassembly and Assembly, Workplace Essentials for Welding, Work Skills for Manufacturing, Welding Fundamentals, and Success@Work Skills.

Bundling micro-credentials allows learners to acquire targeted skills and knowledge in a relatively short period, and by harnessing the power of micro-credentials, stakeholders can invest in transformational approaches to rapid skill acquisition.

Micro-credentials can be used at all career stages, including entry-level positions, specifically focusing on career pathways and technical and essential skills relevant to a specific industry. Work-integrated learning provides real-world exposure to the industry and potential employment opportunities. Programs can be designed and targeted specific cohorts such as those who identify as women, including individuals from designated equity groups such as Indigenous, newcomers, persons with disabilities, and women with a prolonged detachment from the labour force.

And that's one of the key benefits of micro-credentials: granularity. This makes them particularly valuable in today's job market, where employers increasingly prioritize skills over credentials. From manufacturing to health care, employers are turning to micro-credentials as an effective way to assess and develop their workforce. Organizations can adapt to changing market demands because they offer a

more agile and cost-effective approach to upskilling and reskilling employees and can address specific skill gaps. Additionally, employers can provide their workforce with more opportunities for career advancement and mobility as they acquire new organizational skills and credentials.

When Friesens Corporation in Altona, Manitoba, desired to support the development of a skilled workforce in their region and upskill existing employees to fill a need within their printing press department, the Press Operator micro-credential was born. Through this training, participants gained the knowledge and skills necessary to recognize the differences between quality and sub-par printing processes and materials and the differences between being a technical press operator and a print craftsman. They also gained an understanding of the science of printing and the elements of craftsmanship in the lithographic printing process.

In addition to working with businesses and industry to create custom training options, educational institutions are also developing ready-to-deliver solutions that focus on knowledge gains with supported practice. Through extensive engagement with employers to discover and ascertain the essential skills and competencies

required in 21st-century organizations, micro-credentials can focus on the key skills identified, introducing learners to practical concepts to better understand and demonstrate these critical skills and competencies to employers.

An advantage of the micro-credential structure is that training providers can offer individual segments — or micro-courses — separately and can tailor the learning to be extremely business- or industry-specific. Additionally, there can be multiple levels of training for each micro-course that vary on the depth or intensity of support required or the career stage of the learners.

As the educational landscape continues to evolve, micro-credentials are poised to play an essential role in shaping the future of learning and career advancement. Offering flexibility, rapid skill acquisition, formal recognition, cost-effectiveness, and opportunities for lifelong learning, micro-credentials represent a transformative approach to education that aligns with the dynamic needs of today's world of work, and educational institutions are listening and responding to business and industry to meet those needs. 

Beverlie Stuart is Vice President, Business Development and Community Initiatives, with the Manitoba Institute of Trades and Training (MITT) in Winnipeg.

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Manufacturing opening the door to opportunities for women entrepreneurs

By Sherlyn Assam, for Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada

Pam Grahame fell into the manufacturing industry. She was a single parent who needed to support her two-year-old child and there was a steel factory just 10 minutes away from her house.

While she went into her new job thinking that manufacturing jobs were dirty, loud, and required heavy lifting, she ended up building a successful 25-year career in the industry. She went on to found Shop Floor Leadership, a Manitoba-based company that provides facilitation, coaching, and leadership expertise for businesses, helping them meet industry demands and survive organization challenges. The business has a large female client base and Grahame explains that many people she works with have unintentionally found careers in manufacturing.

"There's so much more that the actual ecosystem of manufacturing provides for so many different things that nobody talks about," says Grahame. Her job was customer-centric and involved optimizing and integrating commercial and operations planning.

There are an estimated 10 million vacant manufacturing jobs around the world, and Canada's workforce is following the same shortage trend. Ontario alone has more than 18,000 available manufacturing jobs and another 7,000 confirmed to open in the next two years. Insufficient skills, less diversity, and the perception of low-paying jobs all contribute to these vacancies. As it happens, women only represent 29 per cent of the manufacturing workforce.

"A lot of women go into manufacturing. Not a lot of women stay in manufacturing," says Grahame. She says the industry can be difficult for women because it is dominated by men and the hours can be difficult to manage, but it did shape her self-reliance and taught her new skills.

"You're not your job title," says Grahame. "You learn so much more and transferable skills is something that's so important. You are all of those things that then can go into other areas."

Manufacturing Success

For three entrepreneurs whose expertise started outside manufacturing, joining the industry seemed like the next natural step.

Evelyne Nyairo, Kristyn Carriere, and Jessica Bosman all launched manufacturing businesses to fill gaps they saw in the market. But they were not strangers to financial, educational, and entrepreneurial hardships and have found support through programs within the women's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Nyairo and Carriere are Stacy's Rise Project winners and Bosman is part of StartUp Canada's Startup Women Advocacy Network (SWAN) cohort, as well as a WEOC National Loan Program recipient.

Stacy's Rise Project provides business grants, mentorship, networking and brand visibility to promising businesses. Since launching in Canada in 2022, the pita chip company, itself founded by a woman entrepreneur, has partnered with Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada (WEOC), an organization that champions women's entrepreneurship

through resources, education and the WEOC National Loan Program to reach diverse women entrepreneurs.

SWAN connects women entrepreneurs and highlights their work across the country. Since launching in 2012, StartUp Canada has supported more than 130,000 entrepreneurs in growing their businesses.

Paths into manufacturing look different depending on individual experiences and aspirations. Here are some of the journeys they took:

Evelyne Nyairo - Founder, Ellie Bianca

Ellie Bianca is a natural, environmentally sustainable, and socially conscious women's skincare company.

"When you think about innovation, manufacturing skincare or manufacturing essentials really is not often seen as innovation," says Nyairo. "Because when they think about innovation, they're thinking [about] technological gadgets, but not looking at innovation as improving something that already existed."

As a Black business owner, Nyairo often has to prove Ellie Bianca manufactures for more than one race.

"That assumption, that bias that because I'm a Black woman, the products that we make are for Black people is something that I have to answer at least once a week," says Nyairo.

But Nyairo is confident in Ellie Bianca's place in cosmetics. She points out the large gap between Canadian and American beauty markets and the opportunity to sell Canadian products instead of exporting. The United



Evelyne Nyairo, Ellie Bianca Founder.
PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF
EVELYNE NYAIRO, ELLIE BIANCA

"That assumption, that bias that because I'm a Black woman, the products that we make are for Black people is something that I have to answer at least once a week" - Evelyne Nyairo

States' cosmetic and beauty products manufacturing industry made \$42.9 billion in 2023, while Canada's made \$4.2 billion.

Despite the funding challenges, Nyairo's company continues to grow. It started with lip balm in 2015 and now has more than 40 different products ranging from soaps to face serums and lotions. Shea is the central ingredient, and it is sourced from co-ops in various countries in Africa and the commitment to quality ingredients and processing is at the core of her business. "The manufacturer or the supplier needs to be able to be aligned with our quality requirements," she says.

Kristyn Carriere - Co-Founder, 7 Summit Snacks

Carriere's 7 Summit Snacks came from her desire to make satisfying snacks that taste great while making athletes feel energized. Carriere has a food product

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development background and says her experiences with men-led businesses and male-dominated assembly lines are less collaborative. But 7 Summit Snacks, which she leads with her sister, Leanna, relies on community startup groups and other women entrepreneurs to help strengthen their business.

For example, Edmonton-based 7 Summit Snacks partners with Cocoa Community Confections in Calgary, an independent, women-owned business, to source the chocolate for their bars.

Carriere suggests entrepreneurs seek business support groups to ease the burden of launching a business.



Kristyn Carriere, 7 Summit Snacks Co-Founder.
PHOTOGRAPH BY ALISSA MAY PHOTOGRAPHY

"I've grown a business without a business degree, without a marketing degree, to service over 200 businesses within Canada. My benefit is that I have at least product knowledge, so I'm okay with that." - Kristyn Carriere

This can provide access to resources such as networking programs and brand storytelling experts. Other gaps are not as easy to fill.

"Twenty percent of my time is probably spent on trying to find money," says Carriere.

Carriere seeks financial support through federal or organizational loan programs, such as Stacy's Rise Project. Given the difficulties, she says the most surprising thing she's learned since joining the manufacturing business is that she still has a business that's growing after four years.

"I've grown a business without a business degree, without a marketing degree, to service over 200 businesses within Canada," says Carriere. "My benefit is that I have at least product knowledge, so I'm okay with that."

Jessica Bosman - Co-Founder, DOUBL

Bosman is the co-founder of DOUBL, the first made-to-measure bra company that can be ordered and fitted through a smartphone. DOUBL uses two licensed technologies to meet the anticipated

demand of curated bras. With a 3D measurement application to capture an avatar of the chest and secure measurements and a secondary AI pattern-making software that can shape patterns in 3D, DOUBL hired a technical patternmaker to create a soft, body skin to replicate the way breast tissue behaves.

"[Bras are] really challenging garments to create, especially because the breast is such a unique body part that really changes in weight and density," says Bosman, who is based in British Columbia. "There just wasn't a supply chain in place to create this at scale."

Bosman has a background in fashion and merchandising and her business partner Bryn Davis Williams' background is in brand management. Together, DOUBL launched their Kickstarter campaign on April 30 and reached their \$10,000 goal in less than 12 hours.

In addition to Kickstarter, Bosman says they also turn to grants to cover startup costs but have difficulty being recognized as a manufacturer. Bosman says she has been denied grants because they do not

own the facilities where they manufacture and they are denied tech-based grants because their tech isn't proprietary, despite being a tech-based company.

Though this pattern continues, Bosman says she is constantly filling out grant applications. Her advice to other female founders is to go into their business like a bull – confidently.

"There's lots of products that are recession-proof," says Bosman. "We believe that our product, a foundation garment that literally every woman wears and is used on a daily basis, is a needed product."

Betting on yourself

Despite the gender parity or direct experience industry, women are making the transition into the manufacturing industry – and leadership too.

Canada's manufacturing sector makes up \$174 billion of Canada's total GDP, and it's only going to grow as the current workforce ages out and more products and labourers are in demand. ↗



DOUBL co-founders Jessica Bosman (left) and Bryn Davis Williams (right).
PHOTOGRAPH BY KATIE CRANE PHOTOGRAPHY

"Bras are really challenging garments to create, especially because the breast is such a unique body part that really changes in weight and density. There just wasn't a supply chain in place to create this at scale." - Jessica Bosman

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All a(board)!

Board orientation critical to success of new (and existing) directors

By Linda Wood Edwards

We need new blood, new ideas on this board!" Then one day, through a magic process, a new director appears! That new director needs to be onboarded so that they can be impactful as soon as possible. This is a big job that shouldn't be left to magic.

I like to imagine that a potential new board director did some homework about the company's values, vision, mission, and financial situation. I also like to imagine that the board's Nominating Committee did some serious vetting and interviewing before the potential new director was even put forward for election. Assume nothing! An organization needs to approach onboarding as though the new director knows nothing.

At least half of an onboarding program (board orientation) is delivered using the "drinking from the firehose" approach (i.e., receiving an overwhelming amount of new information while simultaneously attempting to understand, remember, and apply it). I have experienced hundreds of board orientations and not once has the firehose been avoided. This is especially true with a director who has never sat on any board. Take heart, however, because after the initial blast in the face, the contents of the firehose will taper to a slow and manageable drip.

An effective onboarding program should be shaped to the needs of the organization AND the needs of each director. A good board Chair will take time to ask a new director about their own goals. This is a good way to identify synergies (win/win) and to confirm people are there for the right reasons. If it wasn't a good fit after all, it's better to find out early!

If your company has a board buddy system in which new directors are linked with experienced directors, the Chair can use that meeting to determine who would be a good match. This could be a full-on mentoring system, or just a few calls to touch base and field

questions. Board buddy systems adds even more time and responsibility to a director's workload, so if you love this idea please proceed with caution.

Before a new director even gets to the first board meeting, a certain amount of information should be provided. Cue the firehose! This is where we blast out a million things and pray that some information soaks in. You've heard the expression "you don't know what you don't know"? A new director can't possibly know and grasp until they see the board in action. Except the action doesn't all happen in the first board meeting. Boards work on annual cycles and so there will always be new information presented for the director to understand, remember, and apply. Count on it taking a full year before a new director will see everything the board expects to see. By then the director will be better equipped to deal with the things that the board has NEVER seen (e.g., disruptions, disasters, etc.).

Ground rules for board service are usually documented. This means there are many board documents! A new director doesn't have to learn everything at once - they just need to be able to access the information where and when it is needed. In the old days, it was called the BOARD BINDER. Now, most often, access to every document you will need is found in a board portal with a secure login.

Exactly what does a new director need to know?

Information:

- About the company/organization
- About the people on the board
- About the staff and other stakeholders
- About the facility, if any
- About the industry/sector
- About your their and responsibilities as a director
- About their rights as a director
- How to find more information

Before a new director even gets to the first board meeting, a certain amount of information should be provided. Cue the firehose! This is where we blast out a million things and pray that some information soaks in.

If a new director understands the Fiduciary Duty and the Duty of Care, the board is well on its way to having a productive new member. Boards and directors need to be reminded of these duties often. Seriously, often.

The answers to all of this will be found in:

- a) personal introductions and organizational charts,
- b) tours,
- c) governing documents, and
- d) board meetings themselves.

People. The people a new director needs to meet right away are the Board Chair, the CEO, and the Corporate Secretary (or whomever in the organization supports the board with logistics, documentation, etc.). That individual is GOLD to a director, and especially a new director. Eventually a new director will also want to meet the Finance Director (staff). For everyone else on the board and senior staff, a list with contact info and bios should be provided.

Place. The new director should tour the physical space of the company. It may be just an office, it may be a plant or factory, or it may be virtual. Just make sure the director gets a sense of the "place" (i.e., number of employees, working environment/conditions, even environmental impacts of what the company does, etc.).

Governing documents. There is a hierarchy to governing documents. A new director doesn't have to read the *Canada Business Corporations Act* (*Canada Not-For-Profit Corporations Act*, *Cooperatives Act*, *Societies Act*, etc.), but they should know the piece of legislation under which the company is registered/incorporated.

The new director should read the *Articles of Incorporation* (aka Constitution, Constitution and Bylaws, Charter). The Articles/Constitution will tell a new director why the company exists - what did the founders hope to achieve? Next come the bylaws, which tell a new director how the organization will govern/run itself.

After that, share the strategic plan. Where does this company plan to go in the next five years? What does it want to accomplish? How will we know we're successful? This is the big picture for the organization that a previous board approved and that the CEO uses to guide its operational decisions.

Then have a look at the operational/business plan, which is one year of the strategic plan and is generally staff-focused because it is tactical and ground-level. The annual budget funds this one-year plan, so a new director needs to see that!

Next, encourage the new director to look at the last audited financial statements - go back a few years. If they are contained in the company's annual report, the narratives will be as interesting as the financials.

Then look at the board's governance policies. The new director doesn't need to worry about the content for now but should get a sense of what is there. At a minimum, a new director should pay attention to a) how the board and CEO communicate; b) how the board holds the CEO accountable; c) how the board deals with its own business, collectively and from director-to-director; and d) what board committees exist and how far their authority extends. If there is a director job description, it will be found here.

Then come the roles and responsibilities. It's not just about the expectation to attend, prepare, and participate in board meetings (Note: include a calendar of board and committee meetings a year in advance). It is so much bigger! Here is what a director must know because it is Common Law and applies to every company and non-profit in Canada.

Fiduciary Duty - A director must act honestly and in good faith with the best interests of the



corporation in mind (loyalty), must avoid conflict of interest, and must subordinate all personal interests to those of the corporation.

Duty of Care - A director must act as a reasonably prudent person would act in similar circumstances.

If a new director understands the Fiduciary Duty and the Duty of Care, the board is well on its way to having a productive new member. Boards and directors need to be reminded of these duties often. Seriously, often. If it hasn't come up before this, a director should be told about any directors and officers liability insurance held by the company.

Tied to these duties, the company should have a conflict-of-interest policy. Conflicts arise with regularity, so boards (and new directors especially) need a way to deal with them. I recommend "declare, decide, record."

Declare if you have a conflict (or might); get out of the room.

Decide: let the rest of the board decide if you do or don't have a conflict.

Record: The fact that you left the room goes in the minutes, and so does the board's decision as to whether you do or don't. If you are in conflict, the board will handle the matter without you (it's not about abstaining - you're just not there). If the board says you are not in conflict, the minutes should reflect that as well. This paper trail in the minutes is required for when something hits the fan. Minutes are legally compellable, so make sure the trail of actions/ decisions around conflict of interest is clear.

Attestation: A director may be asked to sign a declaration attesting that they understand their duties, that conflict of interest will be properly addressed, and that they will uphold the values and mission of the company. This might be requested annually, or it might be a one-shot deal for a new director. If there is no attestation, it is because the organization has assumed the director is a person of character and will do these things anyway.

Vote. A director has been put on the board (elected or appointed) to make the best decisions on behalf of the company. A director cannot abstain for conflict of interest because that director is not in the room (see above) and the minutes reflect this. In my experience, the only other time directors (try to) abstain from voting is because they didn't do their preparation and/or they don't understand the issue. That's garbage. It is imperative that a director asks questions until the situation is understood. If it means holding over a decision to the next meeting, then that's probably

in the best interests of the company (you won't be popular, but it leads to a better decision). Questions only serve to clarify the matter for others. Also, a director should never abstain because they think disagreeing is impolite. If a director cannot support a recommendation, then vote against it. The world will keep turning, I promise.

The Catch: A director must keep in mind the "One Voice" principle. A board can discuss and debate as much as it needs to, but once the decision is made (either by vote or consensus), all directors on the board must speak with one voice in support of the decision, no matter how they voted. Let that marinate. The One Voice principle is a cornerstone of governance and if it is broken, trust on the board is broken. It can take years to get that back.

Now that the firehose is down to a trickle, a director needs to understand the difference between governance and operations/management. Many directors on boards are managers themselves, so the temptation is great to just "do what you know." Being a director on a board requires a different mindset because the job of governing is different. We talk about the board taking a 30,000-foot view versus being "in the weeds." The board's job is to use their best insights and skills to look ahead for the company. The management's job is to take that view and implement it on the ground now, with the best information and people it can muster. So, the board decides "what" (with management involvement) and management decides how (with no board involvement).

I believe that board orientation should be annual, and that it is not just for new directors. Continuing board members (even very senior directors) should also be expected to go through it again. Like "you don't know what you don't know," there is an element of "I've forgotten more than you'll ever know!" Expect resistance from senior directors and persist anyway.

As is obvious by now, an article that tries to distill the essentials of a good onboarding program still ends up like a firehose! There's no getting around it, so grab it with both hands and hold on tight. As always, do your best. ↗

Linda Wood Edwards, owner of LUE-42 Enterprises, is a Certified Association Executive and a Fellow of the Chartered Governance Institute of Canada (CGIC). She holds a Bachelor of Administration degree, a certificate in human resources management, and the Accredited Director designation. Linda consults on board governance to organizations across Canada, serving as Corporate Secretary to several. She is CGIC's Chief Examiner for Corporate Governance and a facilitator in the Directors Education and Accreditation Program.

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For manufacturers navigating the complex terrain of Industry 4.0 and digital transformation, Hannover Messe serves as an invaluable compass, guiding towards innovative solutions and strategic partnerships that can catalyze their journey to excellence. By participating in this event, manufacturers gain access to a dynamic ecosystem of industry pioneers, thought leaders, and technology disruptors, all congregated under one roof. From AI-powered automation and IoT-enabled smart factories to sustainable energy solutions and advanced robotics, Hannover Messe showcases the latest advancements poised to redefine the future of manufacturing. Moreover, the event fosters unparalleled opportunities for collaboration, enabling manufacturers to forge strategic alliances, explore joint ventures, and co-create solutions that address emerging challenges and capitalize on untapped market opportunities. In essence, Hannover Messe isn't merely a trade fair; it's a crucible of innovation and collaboration, where manufacturers can cultivate the partnerships and insights needed to stay ahead of the curve in an increasingly competitive landscape.

The Canadian Presence at Hannover Messe

In August 2022, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the Chancellor of Germany, Olaf Scholz, announced that Canada had accepted Germany's invitation to become a partner host country at Hannover Messe in 2025. What does this mean? Canadians will be centre-stage, supported by a high-powered delegation including the Prime Minister and other Ministers on key economic files such as innovation, science, and international trade.

"It is an honour and a great opportunity for Canada to partner with Germany in hosting HANNOVER MESSE in 2025. This partnership will help deepen the already strong economic, political and cultural ties between Canada and Germany. We will work hand in hand

with local and global partners to provide a platform for Canadian companies, industry associations and institutions to showcase Canada as a leading industrial innovation economy at HANNOVER MESSE."

- The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry

"Canada is a globally growing and innovative country and an important economic partner for Germany. Deutsche Messe AG and Germany's leading industry associations are convinced that Canada's prominent role at HANNOVER MESSE 2025 will expand its economic policy goals in Europe and further strengthen bilateral relations between Canada and Germany."

- Dr. Jochen Köckler, Chairman of the Managing Board, Deutsche Messe AG

Since 2021, NGen has led the Canadian presence at Hannover Messe. In 2023 we hosted the very first Canadian Pavilion alongside 17 exhibitors from across the country. In 2024, the Canadian delegation will include over 80 Canadian exhibitors and 40 delegates.

With 2025 on the horizon, NGen is thrilled to be leading Canada's charge as partner country which will involve high-level political delegations and limitless opportunities to forge new business and innovation partnerships with the decision-makers from advanced manufacturing companies across Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

Why should you consider joining NGen at Hannover in 2025?

Global Networking Opportunities: Hannover Messe attracts industry leaders, investors, and decision-makers from around the world, providing Canadian companies with invaluable networking opportunities to forge partnerships, explore collaborations, and expand their international reach.

Access to Cutting-Edge Technologies: The event showcases the latest advancements in Industry 4.0,

automation, robotics, artificial intelligence, and other key technologies, allowing Canadian companies to stay abreast of industry trends and discover innovative solutions to enhance their manufacturing processes and products.

Market Insights and Trends: Hannover Messe offers a platform for Canadian companies to gain insights into global market trends, consumer preferences, and regulatory changes, enabling them to make informed business decisions and tailor their strategies to meet evolving market demands.

Business Development Opportunities: With thousands of exhibitors and attendees from diverse industries, Hannover Messe presents Canadian companies with unparalleled opportunities to identify potential customers, investors, and distribution channels, facilitating business development and market expansion efforts.

Showcasing Canadian Innovation: Participation in Hannover Messe allows Canadian companies to showcase their technological innovations, research capabilities, and manufacturing prowess on a global stage, enhancing brand visibility, credibility, and competitiveness in the international market.

Knowledge Sharing and Learning: The event features conferences, seminars, and workshops covering a wide range of topics relevant to the manufacturing industry, offering Canadian companies the chance to gain valuable insights, best practices, and expertise from industry experts and thought leaders.

Access to Funding and Investment: Hannover Messe attracts venture capitalists, angel investors, and corporate financiers seeking investment opportunities in innovative technologies and manufacturing solutions, providing Canadian companies with access to potential funding and investment partnerships.

Collaboration Opportunities: By engaging with international counterparts, research institutions, and technology partners at Hannover Messe, Canadian companies can explore collaborative research projects, joint ventures, and technology transfer agreements to accelerate innovation and drive business growth.

Visibility on the Global Stage: Participation in Hannover Messe elevates the profile of Canadian

companies on the global stage, positioning them as leaders in technology and manufacturing excellence, and opening doors to new business opportunities and partnerships worldwide.

Want to learn more? See you on the Road!

In June 2024, NGen will kick off its 2nd Hannover Messe Road Show. Join us in a city near you to hear firsthand from local companies that have been to Hannover. Learn about their experiences, and the results that they achieved through participation in the world's largest industrial trade show. NGen will be joined by our partners in government and from Hannover to discuss business opportunities and funding mechanisms to support your travel and marketing costs for Hannover.

Visit ngen.ca for more information.

What's New at NGen?

Sustainable Manufacturing Challenge - In March, NGen announced its latest \$100 million funding program which will see the cluster invest \$35 million in global innovation funding and leverage \$65 million from industry to launch sustainable manufacturing projects. Projects must be collaborative and transformative, promising to push the boundaries of advanced manufacturing and world-class cleantech.

Looking for more information about the funding program or interested in finding project partners? Sign up for our virtual collaboration day on May 15th at 12pm EST for an opportunity to meet with NGen staff and hear project pitches from NGen members seeking collaborators. Visit ngen.ca to register.

NGen to Lead Canadian Homebuilding Technology and Innovation Fund - On April 5, PM Trudeau announced the creation of a new \$50 million technology and innovation fund to support the scale-up, commercialization and adoption of innovative housing technologies and materials. The fund will be led by NGen and will seek to leverage an additional \$150 million from the private sector and other orders of government to execute the program.

Visit ngen.ca and subscribe to our newsletter for the latest updates on our funding programs and other opportunities for our members.



Pioneering the Path: A Conversation with CME's New Regional Vice President for the Prairies



In late April 2024, Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME) announced that Terry Shaw was coming on board in the newly created role of Regional Vice President for the Prairies. With a long history in Canada, CME's focus is to ensure manufacturers are recognized as engines for growth in the economy. A member-driven association representing over 2,500 companies accounting for an estimated 82 per cent of manufacturing output and 90 per cent of Canada's exports, CME has regional offices across Canada.

Nicole Sinclair, Prairie Manufacturer contributor, sat down with Terry less than two weeks into his new role to dig deep into his vision, ambitions, and what drew him to the manufacturing industry.

This conversation took place on May 8, 2024 and has been edited for length and clarity.

Nicole Sinclair (NS): Congratulations on your new role as Regional Vice President, Prairies. How did you get here?

Terry Shaw (TS): Most of my professional life since the 1990s was spent in the trucking industry, most recently as the Executive Director of the Manitoba Trucking Association. I tried a few similar roles over the past few years, but I was looking for a role like this one. My years in trucking brought me in contact with manufacturers as the industries go hand in hand, so I had contacts in the industry. My predecessor, Ron Koslowsky, was retiring and CME recognized opportunities for growth in Alberta and Saskatchewan, which resulted in my role which is control and care of the three provinces. Today is my 13th day on the job.

NS: How have the first 13 days been? Where do you see you will be able to provide the most value to manufacturers?

TS: The learning curve for me is figuring out our members as my job is to tell their story. I have been having conversation after conversation, getting to know the people, the businesses, and the challenges. I am

good at nonprofit management, program development and delivery, government, and public relations — I am comfortable in those spaces and with that work. Many of the current issues are similar to those of other industries: human resources, safety, cost considerations, government policy, and red tape. I understand those issues, so it's the manufacturing perspective I am learning.

NS: Were you handed a strategic plan and told to get to work, or will you bring your own vision to the role?

TS: Both — and they lined up incredibly well. The interview process involved developing and sharing a five-year vision for manufacturing in the Prairies. What I put forth as a five-year vision was parallel to what CME had already been working on with the new strategic plan; the alignment was very clear. What has been built by CME in Manitoba serves industry well, and it can be replicated or expanded in both Alberta and Saskatchewan. CME exists to serve its members, not to generate revenue. If members need an event, we will host an event; if members need training, we will deliver training. No matter what, it is driven by member needs. That is the vision for the Prairies region for the next few years.

NS: Regarding staff and services, what does CME in the Prairies look like in three to five years?

TS: Collaborative. I like the idea of a Prairies team with local, dedicated staff. Currently, there are staff in Saskatchewan and Alberta, plus we are servicing both provinces from afar. In the future, all three locations will be staffed similarly to the Manitoba office, which has 40 employees. Part of my role is to empower our staff to bring back member concerns and help capture both context and unique voices around high-level policy items. I have always had success with collaboration of that nature, and it has always served the members I exist to serve very well, and I look forward to doing more of it.

Canada has been experiencing a productivity crisis for 40 years. To paint a clear picture of what that looks like — there is one single U.S. state with a lower per capita GDP than Manitoba — one.

NS: This sounds like rapid growth over a vast territory. Do you have any concerns?

TS: No, I do not. It doesn't change my job. Members are won or lost one conversation at a time; policy is improved or removed one conversation at a time. The team in every single one of their roles supports that on every level with everything they do, I just support them and get out of their way.

NS: You are from Manitoba, specifically Winnipeg. What is your plan to build a network in Saskatchewan and Alberta akin to what you have here?

TS: I'm not starting from zero on that front. My previous roles have provided me the privilege of meeting many people across the region, and I can leverage those existing contacts and relationships. Plus, I love getting out and talking to people; I love a good conversation with a member. We have already been in Edmonton, where we hosted a Deputy Ministers' dinner to formally deliver our *Manufacturing Alberta's Future* report, and

the report recommendations will be followed up on from here.

NS: The Bank of Canada recently said that Canada is in a 'productivity crisis' and that we need to dramatically improve our productivity performance in order to sustain our standard of living and regain our competitive advantage. Do you agree?

TS: Canada has been experiencing a productivity crisis for 40 years. To paint a clear picture of what that looks like — there is one single U.S. state with a lower per capita GDP than Manitoba — one. This issue has not been taken seriously enough in Canada, and it shows in the numbers. I know the exact speech that was said in: it was Carolyn Rogers, Senior Deputy Governor at the Bank of Canada and she said "I want to talk about Canada's long-standing, poor record on productivity and show you how big the problem is. You've seen those signs that say, 'In emergency, break glass.' Well, it's time to break the glass," and she is absolutely correct.

ABOUT CME

CME is Canada's oldest and largest industry association. Our mission is to help manufacturers grow. More than 150 years strong, we have earned an extensive and effective track record of working for and leading manufacturers from coast to coast to help their businesses grow.

PROGRAMS & SERVICES

Support members through an extensive suite of programs and services created specifically to address manufacturers' top concerns, such as labour shortages, improving productivity and adopting technology.

PEER COUNCILS & NETWORKING

Facilitate opportunities for manufacturers to learn from each other, work with each other, and grow together through peer councils, and other B2B networking opportunities.

ADVOCACY & RESEARCH

Influence decision-makers at the federal and provincial levels as the strong voice of industry, whether on behalf of one company or the entire sector, to create a competitive environment for manufacturers.

EVENTS

From workshops and training to conferences and industry tours, CME provides opportunities to meet business leaders, share best practices and generate new business. CME also hosts other special events throughout the year such as industry awareness workshops, roundtable sessions and more.

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NS: How did Canadian productivity drop to the point of being a 'break glass' crisis?

TS: Our problem is that we don't think we have a problem. The first step is acknowledging there is a problem at all. Our members are looking to expand, and too often it's too costly and too cumbersome to expand in Canada. What I've heard from one Prairie manufacturer, and I don't believe they're alone, is they are being actively courted by jurisdictions in the United States that are offering free land, expedited permit issuances, and free training for the first 100 employees so that when the plant is built, everyone can hit the ground running. That is the approach to economic development a mere 90 minutes south of where I'm sitting, and I am not aware of anything similar happening here in Canada.

NS: What solutions will you advocate for to increase Canadian productivity?

TS: The industry is not looking for grants, funding, or capital — governments need to create long-term policies that manufacturers can create a business around. Policy uncertainty at both the provincial and federal levels is an issue for businesses. When coupled with party philosophy that must be responded to, it is neither simple nor inexpensive. All three levels of government (municipal, provincial, and federal) need to look at investment in industry as an investment in the economic success of our nation: workforce development, workforce access, and collaboration on productivity improvements; be it automation, technology, or process. Lastly, the government needs to level the playing field around economic policy

relative to what our competition in the US or elsewhere are receiving.

NS: What roles do artificial intelligence and robotics play in the productivity solution?

TS: Both robotics and automation are tools to equip workers or, for some positions, allow manufacturers to increase productivity in the absence of workers. The reality is that there are jobs that are quite difficult to fill with people, and the reasons for that may be varied such as the job being dangerous in nature, or the tasks involved being generally unpleasant. Such jobs can be filled, or at very least supplemented, with tools such as robotics that mitigate both safety concerns and errors. Productivity increases do not displace people, rather they can enhance the opportunity for people.

NS: The manufacturing industry's workforce, particularly in the Prairies, doesn't necessarily reflect the diversity of the people who call this region home. How will you be working to increase the participation of underrepresented populations in the industry?

TS: I can suggest manufacturing is a male-dominated industry. I don't have the hard data just yet; however, I did visit a member this week which made me optimistic. They have 100 staff, many new Canadians, plenty of youth, and based on what I observed a roughly 60/40 male/female split. Once we do have the data, it will be interesting, but we do know that workplaces and cultures are being built that reflect the modern reality of the communities and regions in which they operate.

Many of the current issues are similar to those of other industries: human resources, safety, cost considerations, government policy, and red tape. I understand those issues, so it's the manufacturing perspective I am learning.

NS: Prairie people can be modest to a fault. Do you suspect that will make it more difficult to highlight the impacts manufacturing has?

TS: I would not say difficult per se, as CME has internal resources that gather data to support ideas. Having an economist on staff is exciting for me because the combination of good ideas and hard data is undeniable. In turn, my role is not about compiling numbers—it's to build context through conversations and connection with our members.

NS: What about the manufacturing industry has excited you the most in the first couple weeks?

TS: It has to be the absolute scope and scale of the manufacturing industry in Canada. One in ten dollars in Canada's economy is courtesy of a manufacturer—that is exciting to be a part of. On a significant economic and human scale, I get to be the spokesperson for that impact across three provinces. I'm looking forward to telling our members stories to the Prairies, governments, and the public. I'm also excited to tell the current workforce to be proud and encourage the future workforce to check us out.

CME's mandate is to support a prosperous Canada through an innovative manufacturing and exporting sector.

What we're doing is capturing the needs, opportunities, and challenges that manufacturers are experiencing, delivering it directly to government, and saying, 'fix it—here's why, and here's how'. This is a diverse industry with diverse issues and opportunities, and for me that is exciting.

NS: It appears that you have a natural drive to be a champion for people and groups. Is that accurate?

TS: I like to do good in the community. My new role here at CME is doing good in and for a community, a very large community at that. Outside of my professional role, I feel the same passion for community involvement; I have been involved with a youth services organization in Winnipeg called Marymound for about six years. Having grown up in Winnipeg, I was familiar with the organization most of my life. Once I was (much) older and (slightly) wiser, I felt the need to give back and started there. I am the past chair and serve on both the governance and finance committees; I am a proud Marymounder.

CME has been around for 150 years, almost as long as the country. We can capture the real voice, and real needs of the members we exist to serve, and that is all we do. I'm proud to now be a part of that service and the organization serving these businesses for so many years.

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Drea's Magical Journey

WITH THE DREAM FACTORY



At The Dream Factory, our goal is to inspire children facing life-threatening illnesses to dream big! While we are best known for making big Dreams come true, did you know local families spend an average of 5 years involved with our programming? **These are families of kids like Drea**, a fun-loving girl with a heart of gold. **Drea's Dream Factory experience has been full of magical experiences, from her dream come true and beyond.**



Dream Discovery

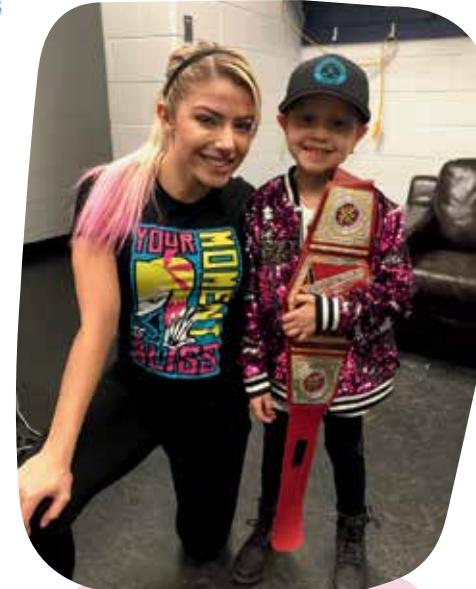
We met Drea in 2019 when she was just 6 years old and going through chemotherapy.

It was a special moment when Drea officially became a "Dream Kid". During her discovery meeting at The Dream Factory, Drea shared ideas for her big Dream come true. But the thing that excited her the most was the prospect of visiting the most magical place on earth... **Disney World!**

Beyond Dreams

Because of her illness, Drea would not be able to travel for a while, so her dream had to be put on hold. However, **Drea got to experience so many fun opportunities with The Dream Factory in the meantime!**

Drea met her favourite WWE Superstar, Alexa Bliss (according to Drea this was one of the best days of her life!) and her hockey heroes on the Winnipeg Jets. She's also been part of creating her own themed ice cream cone at BDI, and been to many special events, from taking part in wrestling matches, to speaking about her experience as a Dream Kid in front of 1,000 people at the Dream Maker Auction!



TDF News Correspondent

Over the last 4 years, we've seen Drea grow into the unique, outgoing girl we know today. Through several Beyond Dreams experiences, **Drea has built an impressive resume interviewing local celebrities and became our go-to Dream Factory News Correspondent!**

In addition to several Winnipeg Blue Bombers, Drea has interviewed Josh Morrissey from the Winnipeg Jets, Mark Morris from Hot 100.5 FM, and various high-profile guests at the Dream Maker Auction, our annual flagship gala-event.

It is unique, personal experiences like this that help children like Drea, who are facing life-threatening illnesses, to have fun and create new memories, even through difficult times.



Dream Come True!

In December of 2023, **Drea's dream finally came true!** She and her family had a blast at Disney World, meeting all of Drea's favourite characters and going on endless rides!

"I don't have words to describe how amazing this trip was for so many reasons," Drea's mom shared. **"When I look through the photos we took, one thing that stood out was all the smiles!** The smile where you don't have a care in the world, the smile where you can relax and enjoy everything going on around you. For that, we are so grateful."

Today and Beyond

Drea joined us again at The Dream Maker Auction in April, 2024 - but this time as a keynote speaker! She and her family were featured in a video showcasing Drea's journey with The Dream Factory and gave a speech on the podium in front of more than 1,000 people!

Drea's journey is still ongoing, and we can't wait to see how she'll continue to grow into a confident, individualistic, young lady! **Go Drea!**



Scan the QR Code to hear from Drea and her family!

Culture

eats safety for breakfast

Where your company culture goes, safety will follow

By Nathan Rasmussen



PHOTO CREDIT: RIG KMET

Meet them where they're at.

That's the key. That's the difference maker. If you're wanting to work on the culture surrounding safety in your organization, your efforts need to start with recognizing where the individuals who make up your organization are at, emotionally, with safety. Every suggestion on how to improve your safety culture that doesn't also address the reality of the culture that exists inside your organization today is at least a little bit off base... writes the person about to make suggestions for how to improve your safety culture.

I recognize the irony, and so I will limit my thoughts to the process for identifying where to start identifying the challenges your unique culture faces the and choices some other excellent organizations have made to contribute positively to their culture.

Taiichi Ohno said, "Having no problems is the biggest problem of all." This applies equally across all aspects and functional groups of your organization, including safety. You can expect to find opportunities for improvement in three phases of "safety," and since everything starts with culture, let's quickly discuss the other two - "Program" and "Program Execution" - and get them out of the way.

If we start from the premise that not a single one of your workers woke up this morning and thought to themselves, "I'm going to hurt myself at work today," then we can make the easy jump to people being injured at work either don't see the risk or believe that they are safe enough.

Your "Program" is the plan that you have for how to operate your processes safely. For this phase of safety to be successful, you need someone (or a team of someones) with enough technical knowledge to identify all of the hazards associated with how you do business and work with your operations team to come up with effective and practical ways to control those hazards.

The two most common challenge here are the need for practical solutions that work for production as well as controlling risk, along with finding a safety champion for your process with enough safety knowledge to guide the operations team to find hazards and controls. If you don't have this expertise in-house, there are independent consultants and Industry Based Safety Programs (IBSP) available to support you, but make sure that you're working with the right external expert. Not all consultants are experts in every aspect of safety and ensuring that you've done your due diligence before getting started is important. Your IBSP should be supporting you here, helping you find the right expert for the problem you have.

"Program Execution" is just that: is your team able to execute that safety program plan? You can have the best written program in the world, but if your team doesn't have the hazard identification skills to identify issues when they come up, or the problem-solving skills to come up with effective root causes and corrective actions, you're making an investment in safety that won't give you a return.

A needs analysis is a tool for identifying the gap between current skills and desired skills and will help you create a training plan worth investing in. Feel free to reach out on LinkedIn or through the Made Safe website if you'd like to to chat with me directly about training plans and where to start. If not, but you still need help making sure your training program is getting you a return on your investment, Google "9 Essential Workplace Skills" to ensure your people have the capacity to take on new skills and then "needs assessment template" to help guide you through the process. The important thing to remember is that there isn't really a shortcut to good training, but there are several shortcuts to bad training!

So, 500 words later we've arrived at "Culture," and Taiichi Ohno had something to say about culture too: "Progress cannot be generated when we are satisfied with existing situations." If you're okay with where your culture is right now—if you believe that your team holds safety as a priority the way you want them to, then thanks for reading this far and I hope you have a fabulous day.

However, if you've ever had a moment where you've thought to yourself some variation of, "what where they thinking?" then we've arrived back where we began. To influence behaviour, you've got to meet them where they're at.

If we start from the premise that not a single one of your workers woke up this morning and thought to themselves, "I'm going to hurt myself at work today," then we can make the easy jump to people being injured at work either don't see the risk or believe that they are safe enough.

For simplicity's sake, we'll say that most safety programs go through three phases:

1. Doing safety to your people
2. Doing safety with your people
3. Providing the resources and support to your people while they drive the program forward.

When your team isn't ready to take the reigns and move the program on their own, finding opportunities to develop culture will be important.

One incident - a machine break down - stands out for me as a turning point in my own career. The repair efforts were being rushed to try to save the production run, but in a way that created risk. As I stood there with the production manager, who was as new to the company as I was, talking through options for doing the repair work safely: Do we have a different maintenance process that we could use? Do we have different protective gear? What can we do?

We were both very uncomfortable but couldn't come up with a solution. Here's where the culture at that company came from. Our VP came up behind us and asked the situation. Hearing that we were coming up empty, the VP explained that the expectation was safe work. They asked about the production schedule for that day and the following day, then made the necessary decisions to shut down the repair process for the day, allow the hazard to dissipate, and pick up the repairs again in the morning. The simple act of a minor interruption to production in favour of safety sent a message to both the manager and me. An

expectation had been set and culture built in that one moment; we had been shown where safety sat on the priority list. Actions spoke louder than any policy could have.

For your frontline teams, being deliberate about creating opportunities for culture development will be more impactful than waiting for the right moment. Here are some of the ideas that world class companies in your own backyard have come up with:

- Industry Based Safety Program Involvement - Whether it's participating in the "edutainment" of the engaging On-Tour Trailer presentation or having one of the team members visit in-person to deliver custom presentations, Made Safe is working around the province during North American Safety Week (May 6-10, 2024).
- Many companies have sponsored and supported their staff in creating a walking team for the Threads of Life events. Threads of Life supports the families of victims of workplace fatalities with a large event every April coinciding with the National Day of Mourning.
- One of the Made Safe member companies held their own safety conference, bringing in speakers and hosting not only their own staff but invited their contractors, vendors, and other organizations from the community.
- Two large member companies have recently refreshed all of the supervisor and managers on their eight-hour supervisor training (delivered by the Made Safe team).

Bringing together teams of your leaders to connect with the training material in a way more specific to your organization can work for team building and to create that common set of expectations.

- Creating a worker driven committee for planning your own Safety Week celebrations is not only an opportunity to create meaningful events and opportunities for relationship building throughout your organization, it's also a development opportunity, giving that group an opportunity to try skills and work through challenges that develop skills they may not have otherwise had the opportunity to find that they have.

If your team isn't ready to dive into a major training exercise or planning exercise, bringing in an outside consultant to support day to day safety activities such as inspections, or participating in a special interest group (such as can be found throughout the CME program) where your people can practise the skills they need with coaching or the support of more experienced personnel can make all the difference.

Nathan Rasmussen is an Advisor with Made Safe. He's part of a team that provides Manitoba manufacturers with a comprehensive suite of training and practical solutions for real world safety challenges. Visit www.madesafe.ca to learn more.



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5 Questions about Unlocking Value with your Employee Benefits Plan

By: Steven Hnatishin

Do we have a good employee benefits plan by accident or a great benefits plan on purpose? Employee benefits play a crucial role in attracting and retaining top talent. A comprehensive benefits package not only supports employees' well-being but also contributes to their overall job satisfaction. However, with the ever-evolving landscape of employment and changing employee expectations, it's essential for businesses to regularly evaluate and update their benefits plans. You don't want to lose a great employee or miss the opportunity to hire the next great one. Here are five questions you should consider about your employee benefits plan:

1 Do your employees like your benefits plan?

Not only are employees increasingly asking about benefits plans, but they're also diving deeper into the details than ever before. It is essential to understand your employee demographics, lifestyles, and needs. This is fundamental to creating a benefits plan that truly provides value to them. Collecting data through regular surveys or focus groups can provide valuable insights into what benefits matter most to your workforce. Younger employees might prioritize health and wellness spending accounts, while older employees might value retirement planning options and healthcare coverage. Have you had a large part of the workforce retire or has your average age shifted lately? Your plan that was set up five years ago may need a retool to better fit your current workforce. By aligning your benefits plan with your employees' needs and preferences, you can ensure maximum engagement and satisfaction.



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Are you keeping up with your competitors?

Employee benefit and group savings plans are a significant factor in job satisfaction and can have a major impact on your organization's ability to attract and retain top talent. You want to make sure you aren't losing talent to the shop down the road. It is extremely important to benchmark your benefits package against industry standards and your competitors regularly. This includes researching what benefits similar companies in your industry offer and comparing them to your own. If your benefits package is lagging behind your competition, it may put you at a disadvantage when trying to recruit top talent. Conversely, offering industry leading benefits can give you a competitive edge in the talent market.

3

Are you getting the most value for your money?

While offering robust benefits is essential for employee satisfaction, it's equally important to ensure that they are cost-effective for the organization. You need to find the right balance between providing valuable benefits and managing costs efficiently. Performing a cost-benefit analysis of each benefit offered can help identify areas where adjustments can be made to optimize spending. In the current market you need to ensure you make the most of your budget. This can involve renegotiating contracts with carriers, exploring alternative benefit options, or reallocating resources to benefits that offer the most value to employees.

4

Does your benefits plan support your employees' mental health?

In today's fast-paced work environment, employees increasingly value benefits that support their overall well-being. Beyond traditional healthcare coverage and retirement plans, consider offering benefits such as mental health support programs including Employee and Family Assistance Plans (EFAP), wellness incentives like Wellness Spending Accounts (WSA) that provide funds for gym memberships or equipment, and comprehensive plans for mental health practitioners. These benefits not only demonstrate a commitment to employee wellness but also contribute to a more productive and engaged workforce.

5

Do your employees know anything about the benefits plan?

Even the most comprehensive benefits plan is only effective if employees understand and use it fully. It's wonderful to have a brand-new piece of equipment in the shop, but we aren't getting any production out of it if no one knows how to operate it. Do your employees get ongoing information on the plan, or do they get paperwork to sign during orientation only? Ongoing communication and education are critical to ensuring that employees are aware of the benefits available to them and how to make the most of them. Provide clear and accessible information about benefits through multiple channels, such as employee handbooks, intranet portals, and regular meetings or workshops. Make sure to leverage the suppliers that support your benefits plans. Offering personalized guidance and support helps employees navigate complex benefit options.

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It is essential to ensure that your benefits plan remains competitive, cost-effective, and aligned with the evolving needs of your workforce. By asking these five critical questions and making necessary adjustments, employers can create a benefits package that not only attracts top talent but also supports employee well-being and contributes to overall organizational success. Remember, investing in your employees' satisfaction and security through comprehensive benefits is an investment in the future success of your business.

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