

July 2020

SKILLED TRADES REPORT

Where Do We Begin?

The exodus of Skilled Trades the Company knew was coming has turned into a stampede. Four years ago, at 2016 bargaining during their initial dialog with the Union, **THE COMPANY** stated they might have to consider retention incentives to address the looming loss of Skilled Trades and Production personnel due to the demographics of St. Catharines and Oshawa at the time. Fast forward to today and you see the trouble we are in for lack of action on their part. They were aware of the importance of training our replacements, but the almighty budget had no resources to invest in the future for the security of our Plant and membership and the benefit of our community. They were too focused on reducing jobs and classifications and expecting more work to be done with less people to consider the ensuing turmoil and nobody could predict the havoc a pandemic would wreak. The atmosphere in the plant is not normal, it's the New Normal. There is no end date for using separate points for entry and exit as thermal scanning and the use of masks will continue indefinitely. All this plus two months of tasting retirement combined with a diving bonds market, has created perfect conditions for the nudge it would take for our older workforce to take the plunge and retire, Skilled Trades and Skilled Production workers alike. This leaves the plant and our newer workers in a precarious position.

So, What Can We Expect and What Can We Do About It?

Speaking about Skilled Trades specifically, you can expect to work six days a week and don't be surprised if you are sent to another department either temporarily or permanently to control the most urgent fire of the week and you will be busy. The Union will work to ensure any movement of manpower is done by the contract. Yes, it's good news we are hiring 20 new Electricians immediately but that only scratches the surface of our dilemma and it will take a lot of time before they are ready to take calls on their own. There are approved requisitions in place to hire more Electricians and Industrial Mechanics as well, but we can only hope it's not a case of too little too late. The Union will continue to push for engaging Electrical and Mechanical apprentices as we believe they are vital for a healthy future and they provide an opportunity for some of our production members to advance themselves.

Under any circumstances you are expected to conduct yourself in a business-like manner and safely perform your work as a tradesperson to the best of your ability. At no time do you have to perform any task with which you are not familiar nor any task you may deem to be unsafe. If you are called off one job before it is completed to go to another assignment, leave the equipment in a safe state before going to the other job. You don't have to run, and you can only be in one place at a time and working to your level of ability is a judgement call for **YOU** to make and the Union is not interested in cross-training between Electrical and Mechanical trades. If you need help, ask and wait for it and make sure safety is your overriding priority and don't lose focus on the quality of our products.

A grievance has been submitted about not going beyond phase one of the long-standing prime time vacation plan and we will try to reach a timely resolve.

As contract bargaining approaches Ken and I will be out of the plant from time to time, but there will be a designated replacement for representation in our absence. Local bargaining will be conducted locally and should be completed prior to the contract expiry date. In this COVID environment it is yet to be determined where master bargaining will take place.

The Unvarnished Truth;

Skilled Trades are leaving because it's time to go which is clear by our demographics and because it's very lucrative right now, but many of them are leaving with a bitter taste in their mouth. Bitter mostly because of the consolidation fiasco which was utterly disrespectful if you think about it. How can anyone with an ounce of maintenance understanding think they can wave a magic wand and turn four classifications into one that never existed, with very little and very ineffective training and zero dollars for a training budget? That's like saying someone with one degree in something can instantly have four degrees without the education or without investing. That's because they don't recognize getting a certificate of qualification in a specific trade is like having a post-secondary degree. Sure, we had two years to cross-train but are they saying anyone can acquire three more degrees in two years? I suppose it's understandable because of the maintenance philosophy at high levels in the corporation. When an employer like GM has the attitude that Skilled Trades are a necessary evil at best and some upper local management's opinion is "if they don't like it, they can retire," maybe you can understand why many of our members feel as if they are being pushed out. And sadly, don't forget that for well over twenty years there were no trades or apprentices hired which means the opportunity to leave a legacy, through passing knowledge down to the next generation was squandered along with lost opportunities for production members to become a tradesperson. Worse than that, many are leaving with an "I don't give a shit" attitude towards what happens to GM in St. Catharines after they're gone. A lot of people don't want to hear any of this, but they need to because it's all true. Action must be taken now as the survival of this plant is vital for our new hires as well as the greater community in general. GM St. Catharines is still a great place to work and if the Company gets off its ass and hires our replacements and invests in them, there is no reason why the Plant can't be here for decades.

That's Enough Unvarnished Truth;

Congratulations to all the Skilled Trades and Production members who have retired as well as those who will be leaving soon. You **have** left a legacy for those still working. May you all have a long, healthy retirement. And to everyone, have a safe and happy summer.

NOW MORE THAN EVER, WORK SAFE, WORK SMART AND DEMAND TRAINING IF YOU ARE UNSURE OF ANY ASSIGNMENT.

In solidarity,
Paul Dortono,
Skilled Trades Shop Committeeperson
Unifor Local 199, GM Unit
Office: (905) 641-6032 Cell: (905) 658-7032
email: paul.dortono@gm.com

Ken Naldjieff,
Alternate Skilled Trades Committeeperson
Unifor Local 199, GM Unit
Office: (905) 641-6418 Cell: (289) 696-5586
email: ken.naldjieff@gm.com