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with Joe Mulhall

## The 20-20 Knowledge Worker

# Participation requires Knowledge ... Knowledge requires Personal Participation

When CUSW was formed back in 1999 we coined the phrase “Knowledge Worker” to describe the members that would be part of this Union. This term was appropriate for the direction that we wanted our new Union to head towards. We understood from the very beginning that only through education and training would workers be able to participate in the 21st Century economy. Building a Union founded in participation was the key.

The idea that participation is only possible with education and knowledge is not a new concept. Since the time of the Enlightenment philosophers such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and more recently Leo Tolstoy all realized that without education there could be no freedom. These ideas lead us to connect education with the very basic principles of the democratic processes that today have become synonymous with freedom at the level of civil society. On this very point Thomas Jefferson, the Third

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President of the United States, wrote: “if a nation expects to be ignorant and free it expects what never was and never will be.” The connection between education and democracy is the very root of the development of the public education systems that exist in most democratic countries today. The connection between education and democracy in the workplace is a founding principle of CUSW.

The approach of combining education with personal experience to create knowledge is also not a new thought. In the book “Emile” written in 1762, Rousseau made this very point. He said: “we should not substitute books for personal experience because this does not teach us to reason; it teaches us to use other people’s reasoning; it teaches us to believe a great deal but never to know anything”. The concept of the Knowledge Worker is all about the knowing.

These very basic ideas escaped us in the workplace of the 20th Century. Workers were told what to know and not provided with the opportunity to build

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their own knowledge. Industrial democracy had no place in the mainstream workplaces and union education was limited to arming the workforce to defend against the oppressive employers.

In building the Participation model within CUSW we looked for guidance from both the written word and our personal experience to build a Constitution and structure that would ensure that members would have the ability to be free to build the organization that they want. Reason, education, democracy, knowledge and personal experiences all contribute to the participation model that guides the direction of our Union at work and in our communities.

In more modern times, authors such as Nel Noddings (2012) look at public education in the 21st Century “as a multi-aim enterprise in which schools must address needs in all three domains of life: home and family, occupational, and civic.” At CUSW we extend this same logic beyond schools to a life-long learning approach that sets the stage for building the future in the place where we work, the quality of the life we share with our families, and the civil and social society that surrounds us. These three domains are not separate and the structure of our Constitution recognizes that they are linked. CUSW members in the workplace are the same members that make up the Unit membership and the National Committees and the same people that contribute to the communities in which we live. Understanding this link is critical to seeing how you can participate in all aspects of your life through your participation in CUSW.

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Many of the employers that operated their business in the 20th Century Industrial Complex still do not see a role for the workers in the development of the modern workplace or the society in which we live. Workers in that model became a commodity just like any other resource that contributes to the production of the goods and services provided by these companies. Workers were not asked to contribute their knowledge to the workplace and we didn't.

CUSW provides a structure that allows us as members to make the case that with an understanding of the world around us and the necessary skills and knowledge to affect how the next phase of work will unfold, that we can contribute and that we intend to do just that. Through partnerships with our employers and groups such as the Ontario Sustainable Energy Association we can work with companies to define the needs of industry going forward while at the same time ensuring that our interests are included as part of the solutions.

In 2012 we coined the phrase 20-20 Worker to describe a worker that is informed and that has a clear vision of the world around them. To be successful in creating the future we want for ourselves and our families we need every member to be this 20-20 Worker. With the help of the National Training and Education Committee and our many partners, such as MCI, we can develop and deliver the education, training and knowledge to make this vision come to life.

– Joe Mulhall