

Partners? In Excellence?

When MPAC's "Partners in Excellence" roadshow started making the rounds to regional offices around the province, a lot of OPSEU members started asking: "Is the union involved in this process?"

The answer is no. The union is not involved in this process. At all. Under our collective agreement, MPAC management has the right to manage the organization. They have not consulted with union members on the Union-Management Committee about Partners in Excellence. We don't know any details about the organizational change that is coming. All we know is that change is coming.

MPAC says the changes won't cost jobs, that people won't be forced to reapply for their own jobs, and that the changes will take four years to implement.

Those of us who went through the ugly mess that was the "Futures" transformation remember that then-CEO Bob Richards said Futures was an "employee-driven" and "grassroots" initiative. Instead, it was a top-down assault that disrupted – or ended – people's careers, upset our municipal partners, and spun into a political poopstorm.

"I think many of us feel that

MPAC needs change, but we hope that MPAC has learned from its past mismanagement," said Ivan Herrington, OPSEU chair of the Union-Management Committee at MPAC. "If the organization wants to improve customer service – an idea we all support – then it must start by treating its employees with respect and recognizing our contributions in concrete ways. Theoretical frameworks developed by consultants who

don't know property assessment mean nothing if many workers face arbitrary, heavy-handed, inappropriate, unprofessional, and intimidating conduct from managers in the workplace.

MPAC says it wants to be among the Top 100 employers in Canada by 2011. To do this, some things will have to change. This edition of *OPSEU Impact* points out a few areas where improvement is needed.

Job comp problems persist

Some MPAC managers still can't figure out their responsibilities related to job competitions under the collective agreement.

Earlier this year, OPSEU members on the Union-Management Committee asked

management to investigate two separate cases of suspected nepotism. In one case, they claim to have conducted an investigation, but won't share the results. They won't discuss the other case because it is the subject of a grievance.

The grievance related to the first case goes to arbitration this month.

"Management's approach to

job competitions in far too many cases appears highly irregular, and probably not something that would happen at a company

that was among the Top 100 employers in Canada," said Ivan Herrington. "We just want some answers."

In a problem at the other end of the scale, Property Inspection manager Ben Rocca (Hamilton, St. Catharines, Brantford) has been failing to fill Property Inspector vacancies, to the point where he now has just two full-time inspectors and five working on contract.

Mr. Rocca has a history of

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Competition problems

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keeping people on edge by not posting jobs.

If this kind of thing is happening in your office, please contact the OPSEU UMC member for your area (contact information on page 5).

In the North Bay office, a vacancy came up for the position of Valuation Review Specialist. It was offered to a

member in another office as part of a grievance settlement. The member declined the job, so the job was then posted. There were three applicants, who were all interviewed for the job.

Then the manager cancelled the competition, saying he "Didn't feel comfortable" filling the vacancy

permanently "at this time." He then turned the vacancy into a nine-month acting position.

Obviously the manager felt comfortable jerking people around....

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More problem bosses

Some managers talk too much, to the point where they actively contribute to a poisoned work environment. For example, a manager in the Owen Sound office is known to have openly discussed an active grievance with MPAC employees who were not party to the grievance. A couple of managers in Oshawa like to volunteer their own opinions on the strength or weakness of OPSEU members' grievances. They also like to canvass workers' opinions about the outcomes of job competitions.

Why they do this is anybody's guess. But this kind of behaviour is inappropriate and unprofessional.

Other managers try to get around the collective agreement. For example: some managers like to ask people to work overtime, but only for time off in lieu.

This is a contract violation.

Article 15.05 of the OPSEU collective agreement with MPAC says clearly that members of the OPSEU bargaining unit can choose whether to take time in lieu or be paid out for overtime

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worked. Please contact one of the OPSEU members on the Union-Management Committee if your manager tries this.

Other managers are threatening people with discipline if they forget to update their voicemail message (for example, when they call in sick). This kind of heavy-handed tactic is bad for morale. And haven't these managers got anything better to do?

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Vacation time is here! (Or not!)

Some Valuation Review Specialists have been concerned lately that their summer vacations will be reduced – or cancelled altogether – because the fine-tuning of assessments is behind schedule (namely due to the "seamless" transition from OASYS to IPS). The OPSEU members on the UMC took this issue to MPAC. Management says that there is no corporate initiative to limit vacation time, and if you submit a request you are entitled to a response, one way or the other. If you currently have a vacation request sitting in limbo, speak to your manager. If you still don't get a response, contact your local union rep or member of the UMC.

Inside the Milner sweatshop

Where even good ideas go bad

Recently, bosses at the Customer Contact Centre on Milner Ave. in Scarborough decided that it would be good for morale if staff were allowed to wear jeans to work on a Friday. “Gentlemen” were even allowed to wear walking shorts as long as they were suitably modest.

Then the bosses saw what people were wearing. Camouflage shorts didn’t make the cut, and one female OPSEU member was sent home. Four or five more staff were just about to be shipped out when Ivan Herrington, OPSEU chair of the Union-Management Committee at MPAC, caught wind of it. He called Gerry Stuart, Vice-President of Human Resources, who quickly showed some common sense and told managers to lay off and keep everybody at work (good show, Gerry).

Okay, so call centres aren’t normally famous for good labour relations, but only at Milner could a good idea turn into an opportunity for discipline.

Some managers at Milner are insisting that people must be up and running at their computers at 7:30 or 8:00 a.m. when their shift starts. CCC staff who are asked to do this should point out that this is a violation of our collective agreement. Article 15.01.01 states clearly that you have five minutes at the beginning of the day to turn on your computer, adjust your headset, or do whatever you feel like to get in gear for work. If the manager insists, file a grievance through your OPSEU steward.

The Milner Staff Attendance Policy, which says that “You are expected to be at your desk and logged on and working by the start of your shift,” violates the collective agreement.

(Manager Ben Rocca, in the Hamilton office, also tries this trick.)

In another display of heartwarming sensitivity, a Milner manager in the Central Processing Facility (let’s call her, oh, Judy Lamothe) waltzed into a staff meeting and

boasted that seven staff had been fired in the last year. She went on to say that not everyone on contract would be safe (see “Burning Platform” on page 4), nor would full-timers. Ms. Lamothe told staff that if they did not meet her standards for quality and quantity, they would be let go as well.

What a motivator! We can almost feel the customer service improving.

The same manager is willfully violating the nine-month rule for acting assignments. OPSEU members on the union-management committee are considering a policy grievance into the matter.

Not long ago, one female OPSEU member got a disciplinary letter on her file for taking three personal calls on work time. Two of the calls were with Ivan Herrington about a work-related matter; one was with her child’s school.

The collective agreement permits managers to direct you to perform overtime. But Judy Lamothe would rather badger you to volunteer.

In an e-mail a few months back, Ms. Lamothe wrote to some staff:

I was reviewing the past two weeks overtime and have noted that you have not worked any overtime.

It is very important you do your utmost to participate as a team and pull your weight in times of pressure and deadlines.

Some of you are new contract staff and may not realize the importance of overtime while others have become permanent staff in the past few years and I remember very clearly many of you saying, that you would always do your best. The more senior staff, I would ask that you lead by example and encourage others.

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Milner sweatshop

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I am asking that you all take a few hours out of your personal life and dedicate it to the department so that we can get this backlog under wrap. Together we can get it done! Together we can ensure the security of the CPF! Together is the only way!

Thank you for whatever time you can give.

This message has upset a number of contract staff who feel that if they don't work the overtime they will be fired.

"The Milner site has been a problem for years as far as the work environment," says Ivan Herrington. "Some local managers have treated our members like dirt. Over the last few months, I have developed a close relationship with the members of the new OPSEU Local Executive at Milner, and I want to congratulate them for the excellent job they have done so far."

MPAC corporate strategy:

What's this about a "Burning Platform"?

If you read through MPAC's "Customer Centred Corporate Strategy," a document from the Partners in Excellence Conference, you'll see the phrase "Burning Platform," as in, "We need a 'Burning Platform' to motivate all of us to re-energize and to refocus on achieving our new Vision."

This term has been used by business consultants for some years now. It refers to the story of an oil-rig worker who jumped 150 feet into the freezing waters of the North Sea rather than be burned to death on his drilling platform, which had been engulfed in flames after an explosion. "Better probable death than certain death," he reasoned.

Apparently, this is the kind of motivation MPAC employees need. The Centre for Public Policy and Administration (part of the University of Utah) offers this advice to managers trying to change their organizations:

*If all this talk about jumping from an oilrig seems a tad dramatic for you, consider that most people will change only when **survival anxiety is greater than learning anxiety. Learning anxieties are the basis for resistance to change** and represent apprehension of trying something new*

*for fear that, it will be too difficult or we will look stupid while attempting it. **Survival anxieties, in contrast, are those painful realizations that in order to succeed, we have to change.** The oil worker who took the perilous North Sea plunge clearly had greater survival anxiety than learning anxiety. Your challenge is to introduce survival anxiety while also lessening learning anxiety, thereby creating a safe environment in which true learning can occur.*



*Therefore, when with the "burning platform" of a tough issue and organizational change, work with your team to **identify the key issues** that will introduce survival anxieties to stakeholders and this means that **stakeholders will be able to describe why we must change in order to survive.***

Your OPSEU team at MPAC believes that management by fear is not management at all. After the Futures fiasco, we will not tolerate another ill-conceived corporate restructuring whose only legacy is lower morale and policy failures like the Integrated Property System. We will be watching closely. Please contact us at any time at the addresses on page 5.

Model employee potted at MPAC head office!



As part of the Partners in Excellence program, MPAC managers are on the lookout for the best talent available on staff. The employee pictured here, known to co-workers as “Isenhower,” was chosen for the official title of Model Employee after management discovered that Isenhower has no family obligations, doesn’t ask questions, is always at work after hours, never takes a sick day, and steers clear of involvement in the union. *(Editor’s note: Be careful what you say around Isenhower – could be a management plant.)*

Keep in touch!

To ensure a speedy response to your questions, your leadership team has divided up all MPAC offices in the province. If you have a question or a comment, please contact the member responsible for your office. Contact us by e-mail at work or at home, as follows:

Ivan Herrington, Chair: Milner (CCC, CPF, LPU), Peterborough, Pickering (Head Office).
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Jamie Stata, Vice-Chair is on leave. If you work at the Brantford, Chatham, Goderich, Kitchener, London, Owen Sound, Sarnia, or Windsor offices, please contact any of the UMC members listed above.



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