



# Now is our time...

**In** early April, 282 officers from all 32 UA Canadian local unions came together in Toronto for a special called meeting characterized by a forthright assessment of where the United Association in Canada stands today, frank discussion of where it would like to be in the future, and creative thinking about how to make that vision a reality.

This meeting—unique in that it was the first time any construction union in Canada has tried anything of this magnitude—aimed to gather as much of the local union leadership from all over the country in one place to spend quality time focusing on issues pertaining to the future of the UA in Canada.



General President Bill Hite



Director of Canadian Affairs John Telford



International Representative Rob Kinsey

*“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.”*

—Charles Darwin





**Special Representative Steve Morrison**



**Special Representative Larry Cann**



**Bob Blakely, Canadian Building and Construction Trades Director; and Special Representative James MacDonald**



**Mark Breslin, strategist, speaker and author**

In addition to the many business managers, business agents, financial secretaries, presidents, organizers, and other local union officers who attended, the meeting also included General President Bill Hite, along with International Representatives Rob Kinsey, Gino Morin, and Budrow Tozer, and Special Representatives Larry Cann, James MacDonald, and Steve Morrison. UA Director of Canadian Affairs John Telford hosted and presided over the two-day meeting.

“Successful international unions do not happen by accident,” General President Hite told the gathered UA officers. “It’s strong leadership—past and present—and you have to have a membership that stands behind the elected officers.”

The General President praised the local union leaders who had come together for the meeting, saying, “The business manager’s job is the toughest job in the UA. You’re the guy who is there on the front line every day. You’re the one who has to sell change to our membership, and sometimes that’s a real tough job to do.”

He continued, “But our focus here, and in the United States, is all about jobs. It’s about good jobs, careers in the pipe trades. It’s all about building Canada and the United States and keeping it running every day. . . . It’s our responsibility to develop the workforce of the present and the future. That’s why we were elected—it’s our responsibility as elected union officers to find work opportunities for the next 100 years.”

### **A Call to Action**

In explaining the reasons for this special called meeting to his brothers and sisters from throughout Canada, Director of Canadian Affairs John Telford outlined the need for a clear vision for the UA to move forward and secure more job opportunities for members and to create a positive perception of the union in people’s minds—including among UA members themselves, clients, owners, and contractors. He presented his belief that the union needs to increase its influence in the industry, membership and loyalty in the UA, and the total number of UA contractors, clients, and owners.

Telford noted that during the 1950s, the United Association did 90 percent of the plumbing and pipefitting work in

System  
Hard on  
RAND  
lines



*“They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.”*

—Andy Warhol



**John Yale, Standard for Excellence spokesman**



**Dennis Hull, retired Chicago Blackhawk, dinner guest speaker**



**Seated from left to right, Special Representative Larry Cann, General President Bill Hite, Director of Canadian Affairs John Telford, International Representative Budrow Tozer; standing, left to right, Special Representative James MacDonald, Special Representative Steve Morrison, International Representative Rob Kinsey, International Representative Gino Morin**

Canada but said that today, the UA does on average about 30 percent of that work—and in some areas, less than 10 percent of the plumbing and pipefitting work is done by UA members.

“The challenge we face now is our industry is growing rapidly, but our market share is shrinking,” said Telford. “We are facing serious competition for jobs, deteriorating union loyalty, and skill shortages. We cannot ignore these facts.”

**Preparing for Change**

The April meeting was entitled, “Moving Forward 2010”—but just what is this “Moving Forward” campaign?

The effort began back in June 2008, when the UA Canadian office sent out letters to every member in Canada car-

rying the message that change was eminent if the union was to survive and asking them for their comments and ideas. From this feedback, a research company developed a questionnaire that was mailed to all Canadian UA members in 2009. Based on the findings of this confidential survey, the UA Canadian Office learned what needed to be the strongest priorities of the union going forward. Among the findings:

- Creating a better image of the UA was the top priority for the majority of respondents.
- High importance was placed on making members accountable for unprofessional behavior.
- Respondents believed it was important to create a positive attitude about the union among members.

- The majority supported providing education and leadership skills training to elected officials, members, and staff.
- More than half of respondents believed it was very important to inspire members to recommit to the UA.
- Respondents valued up-to-date information about the union’s activities.
- Two in three respondents supported increasing future membership through aggressive recruitment and organizing.

The meeting in April came out of this initial background work and was the next step in progressing toward some very ambitious goals for change.



*“Progress is a nice word. But change is its motivator. And change has its enemies.”*

—Robert Kennedy



### Creating a Vision

The Moving Forward campaign was launched formally by a UA Canada Strategic Planning Committee led by Brother Telford with the assistance of his Canadian officers and staff—particularly Special Representatives Steve Morrison and Larry Cann. Other business managers on the committee included John Kelly, Local 56, Eastern Canada; Gerard Cyr, Local 144, Quebec; Larry Matychuk, Local 488, Alberta; Ross Tius, Local 663, Central Canada; Terry Webb, Local 628, Northwest Canada; and Dale Dhillon, Local 324, British Columbia.

The primary objectives of the Moving Forward campaign as identified by the Strategic Planning Committee are: (1) concentrating on the UA Standard

- for Excellence as a cornerstone for bringing about change in the United Association;
- (2) leadership development and local union administration;
- (3) a national marketing campaign in conjunction with promotion within the construction industry; and
- (4) a renewed focus on national organizing.

[See sidebar article for a detailed look at the strategies and tactics either planned, underway, or completed that are to be pursued in order to achieve these objectives.]

### Building a Future

This gathering was the first of its kind—and the participants did not sit back and listen while others gave speeches or did all the work. Instead,

they rolled up their sleeves and got working quite diligently in a workshop environment, where everyone did his or her part by brainstorming and discussing ideas in depth.

Guest speaker Mark Breslin first inspired the participants to think about making big changes and challenged them to be the leaders that they were called to be. Breslin is a nationally recognized speaker, trainer, and facilitator specializing in construction leadership, strategy, and labor-management relations.

He spoke at length about what makes leaders successful and discussed several case studies in business (including Apple, GE, Starbucks, and Toyota), as well as speaking very directly about the construction industry and the UA’s

# Primary Objectives of the Moving Forward Campaign

**1. Standard for Excellence:** To develop an enforcement mechanism for the United Association Standard for Excellence (SFE) that will ensure that members who violate job rules, show up to work unfit or do not live up to our collective agreements do not represent the UA in Canada.

**Strategies:** (1) appoint a subcommittee of labor/management to develop a protocol; (2) consult with the legal community to ensure legal compliance; (3) consult with the strategic planning committee (SPC) for their input

**Tactics:** (1) develop draft of SFE Disciplinary Protocol; (2) review with SPC; (3) refine protocol with legal input; (4) develop draft protocol; (5) forward to SPC for input and approval; (6) develop training for all involved (apprentice intake; apprentice evaluations; apprentice disciplinary policies; Standard for Excellence Forms—available on uanet.org); (7) job box posters (distribute to locals and contractors)

**2. Leadership Development and Local Union Administration:** To better prepare our local union officers for the role of leading a local union through training and consultation.

**Strategies:** (1) develop national training for business managers and agents; (2) develop national training for other local union officers; (3) develop foreman training; (4) develop steward training; (5) find methods to allow for transparency of local union administration; (6) develop handbook for officers; (7) mentoring program; (8) strategic planning for local unions; (9) local union analysis of baseline operations; (10) process mapping to ensure continuity of tasks; (11) succession planning; (12) jurisdiction database

**Tactics:** (1) contact agency to develop leadership training; (2) contact agency for stress/time management training; (3) contact agency for communication development; (4) investigate software for process mapping; (5) contact agency for conflict management training; (6) develop foreman training; (7) develop all other training; (8) local union analysis; (9) jurisdiction database

**3. National Marketing/Industry Promotion:** To promote the UA in the construction industry, to our industry partners, and to our members and the public at large through a broad-based rebranding and marketing campaign.

**Strategies:** (1) develop a game plan for marketing/industry promotion; (2) determine target audiences; (3) develop national vs. regional campaigns; (4) develop a timeline for the project; (5) set a budget for the project; (6) develop a criteria for assessment

**Tactics:** (1) appoint a national marketing co-coordinator; (2) develop a website for messaging; (3) develop a vehicle for direct messaging to members; (4) develop a game plan for lobbying; (5) develop tripartite initiatives on national and local level

**4. National Organizing:** To embark on an initiative to assess the merits and (if warranted) develop a national framework and campaign for organizing that complements the UA national strategic plan.

**Strategies:** (1) assess the current organizing structure and financing on a national level; (2) conduct an analysis of the merits of change vs. status quo; (3) if warranted, develop a national strategy

**Tactics:** (1) conduct a survey of current personnel and financing; (2) conduct a SWOT [strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats] analysis of current program; (3) identify "targets" for organizing; (4) develop standardized policies and best practices; (5) initiate national COMET [Construction Organizing Membership Education Training] program



current role and market share. Then, he had those gathered ask themselves what they would need to do and say to better engage the rank-and-file in their unions, and how they could change their behaviors and have them become full partners in this effort. "Truth-telling is a sign of great leadership," Breslin told the UA Canadian officers and encouraged them to abandon the tired "back in the day, we did it this way. . ." story and the self-defeating patterns of denial, stalling, and over-analysis.

"Today is about going into action," said Breslin. "Today is about moving to something profoundly different." He helped the group determine their greatest assets, which include the strategic plan, membership input and



buy-in (as demonstrated by the survey), and leadership committed to change (citing examples like the Stewards Course, and Foreman Certification for end users).

“As we proceed today, the main thing to think about is this: You can only influence things you can control, and you have to forget about things you can’t control,” said Breslin. “We spend an enormous amount of time on stuff we can’t control.” He asked participants to list a few things they could not control, and their answers included the value of the dollar, commodity prices, owners, government policies, pricing, what the competition does, the economy, the weather, and other crafts and what they do.

“So, how much time do we spend worrying about jurisdiction or the non-union, or other things we can’t control?” Breslin asked. He challenged the group to focus their attention carefully. “One hundred percent of a good leader’s time is spent on things they can influence and control,” he said. When it came to what the meeting participants thought could be controlled, the list included education/training, safety, wages, trust, image, productivity, organizing, marketing, accountability, hiring practices, and



*“If you don’t like change, you are going to like irrelevance even less.”*

—General Eric Shinseki, U.S. Army Chief of Staff



rules and regulations.

“This is where the talent in this room needs to be—focused on what can we do and what will we do...It’s a function of being proactive versus reactive, trying to look ahead instead of behind and figure out what it is we’re going to do.”

Next, Breslin led the participants through several hours of strategic planning, working to create a business action plan for the UA in Canada. Working in small groups using flip charts, they brainstormed ideas to grow the union and then chose the top ideas to expand upon. Among the many excellent ideas discussed in detail were creating an organizing structure across Canada; learning more about the market and better understanding the competition; improving communication with members, with apprentices, and with contractors; using new technologies to connect; fostering a culture of teamwork with owners and members; implementing and enforcing the UA Standard for Excellence; and better mentoring of apprentices.

The Standard for Excellence was frequently discussed by all the meeting speakers, including Breslin—and it was also reinforced through a film (“Scruffy”) that showed local union of-

ficers how to uphold and enforce the Standard even with difficult members. Another guest speaker was consultant John Yale, formerly a UA steamfitter with Local 469 in Phoenix, AZ, and partner with J.B. Rodgers Mechanical Contractors, who helped present the perspective of contractors and also spoke in detail about the importance of promoting the Standard.

“It truly is an incredible pathway to a future we’re all looking for,” said Yale. “There are three areas that we can’t afford to slow down on: our image, our productivity and our labor-management relations... The Standard for Excellence is the cornerstone for creating the future that we all want.”

### Leading the Way

“Real substantial change has to come from the leaders in this room,” said Special Representative Steve Morrison, in giving an explanation of the process of long-term strategic planning to the meeting participants. Both Morrison and Special Representative Larry Cann assisted Telford in making presentations during the gathering.

Cann went over the specific duties of local union officers in detail, both as a review for long-term officers and as instruction for the newer officers

present. “We all have a role to play in making the UA successful,” he said. Cann discussed several aspects that characterize excellent leaders, including professionalism and accountability. “Our membership has spoken and made their wishes known about what they want us to do...our job now is to deliver.”

In all, this meeting in Toronto was a dynamic and unforgettable experience for those who attended, and they were sent out with specific plans of action to take back to their local unions and to remember in their daily contact with members, contractors, and clients. Although this gathering included extensive discussion and planning, it was by no means just all talk, but included serious goal setting.

“I’m not going to take my eye off the ball,” Brother Telford told the participants as he closed the meeting. “We’ve got three or four years of hard work ahead of us—five or six percent a year would be nice. Three years from now, if people see we have 15 percent more market share, that would be a success story...I think we’ll do this again in two years, and I hope that we can say we control 42 percent of the market share in Canada.”