LOOKING BACK
MOVING FORWARD

CMG/CBC Presidents’ Council

November 6-7, 2009

Toronto, Ontario
LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD
The CMG/CBC Presidents’ Council

The 2009 CMG/CBC Presidents’ Council Meeting was unprecedented.

For the first time, the President of the CBC and nine members of the senior management team sat down for ninety minutes with Guild Location Unit Presidents from across the country to find out what matters to them most and to gain an understanding of the complexity of the issues at work.

The Presidents’ Council meeting is an annual event designed to give Guild leaders an opportunity to come together to share information, issues and ideas. In the past, the meeting has been conducted in a traditional format with a dais and podium, a series of reports, microphones on the floor and selected speakers. This year, the committee charged with planning the event opted for something different.

Knowing that the people who would be attending are a group with a high commitment to quality and innovation, the planning committee began by asking how it would be possible to create a new level of engagement and how could we best tap into the knowledge and experience that would be in the room.

The committee established some broad goals:
- To be inclusive and democratic in the discussions and conversation
- To engage participants’ voices to the fullest extent possible
- To recognize the challenges that CMG presidents have faced this past year through downsizing and news renewal
- To acknowledge the successes of the year’s union work and the contributions of specific individuals
- To remind us and reinforce our values as union leaders
- To engage in meaningful conversation about the issues that matter most
- To develop strategic actions plans around priorities to carry forward
- To inform senior CBC management about the most serious problems facing CMG members and the complexity of resolving them

The committee turned to a less traditional approach for the meeting incorporating the “Art of Hosting”, a method of gathering which uses a specific set of processes designed to help groups dig deep into their work.

The planning committee set out the overall themes of looking back and moving forward, recognizing that these themes would be linked and interwoven. Committee members recognized that it would not be possible to answer all questions or solve all problems in the two days of meeting but by creating conditions for maximum participation, it was hoped the people attending would take ownership of the work ahead.

The Presidents’ Council Meeting began with CBC Branch President Marc-Philippe Laurin setting the stage for the work ahead. He acknowledged the challenges of the previous year and laid out the aims of the conference. He emphasized that this first gathering with CBC management was only the beginning in trying to address the issues and concerns in the workplace.

In small groups, union leaders and management tackled a powerful question: “What one question, if given attention, would make the biggest difference moving forward?” When they reached consensus in the small groups, they jointly put forward their key questions. Two questions emerged as top priorities – what to do about work overload in its many facets and how to embed the spirit of the Port Credit experience at all levels of the organization and re-establish trust. Other important issues raised concerned sustainability, quality of product, diversity and the role of the CBC in Canadian society.

The planning committee also sought help from an experienced Art of Hosting leader, Tenneson Woolf. The use of an outside consultant was a deliberate choice to ensure neutrality, a fresh set of eyes and ears and the expertise to design and carry off the plan.

Woolf is a Canadian and a process consultant from the Berkana Institute, a non-profit organization based in Utah, committed to using dialogue and participative leadership for strategic planning and action. With the help of the committee, Woolf structured the meeting so that each section was seeded and/or built upon the next.

The literature suggests that the Art of Hosting is almost always successful except when the organizers have a predetermined outcome. It’s a proven method to generate ideas, plans and excitement.

Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising which tempt you to believe that your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires courage.
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Adapted from material developed by CUPE
What one question, if given attention, would make the biggest difference in moving forward?

Workload
- What will it take for CBC/SRC to implement change without having a negative impact on employees?
- The CBC is only as good as its people. We as Guild leaders get involved because we care about our people. Given diminished resources and increased workload, what’s the CBC doing to take care of its people?
- What could we do together to address workplace upheaval? (Currently in the workplace)
- What is CBC doing to reduce stress in the workplace caused by workload and uncertainty about the future?
- How do we work together to distribute workload fairly? (In a unit?)
- What can be done to restore a work / life balance, in part caused by workload problems?
- How can we adjust News Renewal to help with workload? Or make the changes sustainable?
- Why is it that management, after planning news renewal, rolled it out without some / any consultation with union reps and staff for feedback? This would help 2-fold -- 90% of workload issues solved.
- Do we have a problem? YES!!! How do we address workload?
- How do we find time?

The New Relationship at the Location Level
- What do we have to do to make the new relationship pervasive through the whole corporation -- realistically?
- How do we take the spirit and the way we worked with each other @ Port Credit and make it part of how we work together at the local level?
- Is there a way to improve the skills of managers and supervisors to improve the work environment?
- Building and improving trust at the location level?
- Respect: How do we get the collective agreement respected on the floor, translating into action our relationship with management?
- How do we ensure access to the Vice-President responsible for French Services?

Sustainable Resource Model
- How do we ensure continued existence of CBC & SRC -- particularly TV -- and provide distinctive public broadcasting?
- Do we have a person / resource model which is sustainable so that CBC-SRC continues to deliver value to Canadians?
- Without an increase in a parliamentary appropriation of fee-for carriage, what is to happen to this organization five years down the road?
- What are we doing to ensure financial viability for the CBC?

Quality
- How do we return to the quality we had? Technically? Journalistically?
- Is CBC’s "quality" suffering as a result of this change? What is the feedback? How is quality measured?
- How do we reach a common understanding of what we mean by quality?

Defining the Role of the CBC
- Cultural leader, developer, or popular network?

CBC Management and Diversity
- Why does CBC management not reflect Canadian diversity?
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Tenneson Woolf, Host and Consultant, The Berkana Institute, Utah. I am a practitioner of change and a group process artist. I am dedicated to what is possible when we explore the heart of our work and the edges of our communities. I use participative leadership methodologies, maps, and models as strategy to create helpful meetings and inquiries. www.berkana.org; www.tennesonwoolf.com

This process and the ensuing discussions sent a strong message to CBC management about what Guild leaders care most about now in the current post-downsizing news renewal environment. The conversations generated new understanding for senior management of the complexity of the problems and earned a commitment from the CBC President, Hubert Lacroix, to work together with the Union to find answers.

REINFORCING OUR VALUES

The next stage of the Council meeting (Union only) was aimed at providing an opportunity for some appreciative inquiry – to share stories that reminded union leaders of the essential values of the Canadian Media Guild. Presidents met in the World Café through three rounds of lively discussion, sharing both positive and negative stories of their work as Guild leaders.

The values harvested at the end of the discussion echoed some of the themes in that arose in the session with CBC management:
*To serve + protect
*Protection of the best interest of members

*Protect well-being & work / life balance
*Pro-active for / toward change
*Continue to build upon the discussion that was started at Port Credit, with the goal of building trust & honest discussions.
*Empowering members
*Partnership
*Translate the personal side of the issues into a business case
*Trust
*Importance of / belief in quality of work
*Maintaining quality of work
*We care – transparency & communication, fairness, equity, quality, recognition, success

According to the presidents, the World Café served to “shake up the norm”, to be creative and to think in a different way. They noted that the format allowed for a comfortable, more natural sharing, that the discussions were constructive and more voices were heard. And while it built consensus and encouraged participation, it was also fun. The café also served to let the presidents know they’re not alone in the challenges they face.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Friday afternoon was devoted to the more traditional business of Presidents’ Council meetings. Participants heard from the National Grievance Committee (Elaine Janes (chair), Jonathan Spence, John O’Connor, Bob Sharpe, Christian Massé, Pam Petrin, Bruce May) and from its sub-committee, the Temp Review Committee. The success of converting more than 300 temporary CBC employees to permanent full-time work was acknowledged by the Council – an impressive achievement. Janes also noted that the number of grievances and arbitrations has been slowly diminishing, in no small part because of the development of the new relationship with CBC management and the tenacious work of the joint committee.

Michael D’Souza, Branch Director for Equity and Human Rights, spoke briefly to the work of his committees. He also introduced the CMG’s newest staff representative, Terri Monture. Monture is a Mohawk originally from the Six Nations Reserve. She is responsible for the equity/human rights file at the CMG as well as the usual work of a staff representative. She spoke of coming from a culture of warriors, noting that true warriors try to mediate conflict rather than engage in constant battle. Monture expressed the hope that she would “infect” the Guild with her “Mohawkness”.

Individual Branch Director reports are available through the CMG.

THE BEAR PIT

The Bear Pit is a holdover from previous council meetings. It provides an opportunity for Guild leaders to pose questions to the Guild’s professional staff and lawyers.

For two hours, the Q&A flowed back and forth, covering recurring themes and questions that ranged from the broad to the specific. What kind of company are we? What are we going to do about improving our relationship with CBC Human Resources and Management? How can we see opportunity in change, rather than a threat? How do we take on these challenges to get ahead of the curve? What’s the update on the APS file? What’s going to happen with the morphing of jobs and job reclassifications? How can we jointly engage our communities on the issues we’re facing? It was a free-flowing space that allowed participants to come and go, and to engage in the questions that mattered to them personally.

THE PRESIDENT’S AWARD

Friday ended with a celebration. Earlier this year the Branch Executive Council established the President’s Award – a recognition of outstanding service to the Guild and to its members. The Presidents’ Council recognized nominees Shane Judge, LEC President for Thunder Bay, and Steve Finkelman, LEC President for Edmonton (retired) for their dedication and hard work over the years. The President’s Award for 2009 went to Glen Guerin, a member of the Toronto LEC.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR GETTING TO WORK

Saturday began with some context for the purpose of the circle and the “hearth” established in the centre. The hearth included original union charters and other artifacts representing the work and the history of both the CMG and the CBC.

Terri Monture spoke briefly about the use of meeting circles in aboriginal culture and the need to be culturally sensitive. She also spoke of a Mohawk tradition of “bringing your good mind” to the circle. In that spirit, participants were asked to reflect on four simple
What is powerful and important to carry forward from here?

1. The ideas of communication, understanding, partnership.

2. The commitment not to lose the work we've done together, to share it where it needs to be shared and to keep the conversations alive.

3. CMG members and Management at the local, regional and national levels have to become one force and take on what is needed to be done to save public broadcasting in Canada if they don't want to become the next PBS. That would be f.......g scary!

4. Take ownership of issues - bust some ass!

5. Commitment to follow through with a PLAN to help our members with the ideas/strategies discussed.

6. Setting up of a national guild integration/news renewal committee to collect data and build a case on several aspects i.e. workload, job evaluation, quality of product, and “Tell Hubert” campaign.

7. To have a more focussed effort on workload issues across the country. We need to all speak with one voice with one approach.

8. To effectively communicate my workload issues to management so my workload doesn't get out of hand. And to encourage others to do the same.

9. A focus. An action plan. Strength, courage, determination and PATIENCE.

10. Encouraged by stories from others who have been able to find solutions; troubled by common quality workload issues.
questions before diving into the work of the day:

1. How present am I?
2. How curious and open am I?
3. How willing am I to be disturbed?
4. How willing am I to support the work and learning of the people around me?

Next up were presentations from the CMG’s Advocacy Committee (Gerard Malo, Harry Mesh, Karen Wirsig) concerning the Free TV Campaign and the CRTC hearings on funding local television; from the Transmission Services Committee (Harry Mesh, Glenn Grey); and from Gerry Jones, a retired CMG member now working to establish retirees’ committees across the country.

Three hours and twelve conversations later, participants returned to the Circle with their work and reflected on the ideas brought forward.

The discussions were summarized for the entire group and first steps put forward.

Reports are available from the CMG office.

CONVERGENCE

So where do we as Guild leaders go from here? In addition to the ideas, strategies and action plans developed, each participant was asked to reflect on the question, “What is powerful and important to carry forward from here?”

The ideas of communication, understanding and partnership rose to the top as well the commitment not to lose the work created together, to share it where it needs to be shared and to keep the conversations alive.

POST-COUNCIL REFLECTIONS
by Marc-Philippe Laurin
CMG/CBC Branch President

I begin by thanking all of you for attending the President’s Council and giving what the planning committee hoped was a new approach to doing our meetings a chance. There is always some uncertainty when you try new things and it takes courage. I believe the old adage of no risk, no gain applies in this case.

No meeting is ever perfect, but every meeting should have the primary objective of allowing as many people attending to participate and share their ideas and concerns. I believe we achieved that goal.

It was very heartening to hear from newer participants that they felt comfortable and how easy it was to get to know other CMG activists in smaller groups.

The facilitation processes used allowed everyone to participate and for all of us to focus our energies on the key questions of the day affecting members. As with everything, there is always room for improvement and the planning committee will be reviewing your comments and suggestions.

I know you will join me in thanking the members of the planning committee for all their work and also for having the courage to try something different, and Tenneson and Barbara for taking on the challenge of facilitating a room full of type “A” personalities.

In the end, a lot was accomplished. Priorities were identified and clarified. Clear messages and their urgency were shared. Commitments were made, values reinforced, strategies developed, actions planned. We discussed tough questions and celebrated accomplishments.

The BEC will look at all the ideas and strategies that were generated by you and map out the course for the coming year.

Great job everyone.

It takes a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure, to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful. There is more security in the adventurous and exciting, for in movement there is life, and in change there is power.

– Alan Cohen

The Planning Committee
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The Facilitators
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The Branch Executive Council
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PHOTO GALLERY
The "Hearth"

PHOTOS BY KENN SUNLEY & TENNESON WOOLF

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