

Farewell interview with LRO Walter McDowell

On Oct. 31, Labour Relations Officer Walter McDowell retired after more than a decade with MAHCP. In this newsletter, we chat with Walter about his time at MAHCP and what he's looking forward to in retirement. We thank you for your years of service, Walter!

1- How long did you work for MAHCP? What did you enjoy most?

I first was introduced to MAHCP in 2005 to develop and deliver training for members in leadership positions (staff representatives) and moved into an LRO role thereafter. I love most working with my colleagues to represent the interests of our members and advocate for workplace justice for individuals in the healthcare environment. In the end, it is about helping people who are vulnerable to a sometimes-indifferent employer or an unfair situation that needs a voice and a way forward. There is a great deal of satisfaction when we can make a difference in representing people's rights towards a fairer workplace. I will miss that, but also have confidence that the current team that has a wide variety of talent is well equipped to carry on.

2- In your years here, how do you think the field of labour relations has evolved?

Labour Relations between employers and unions reflect those rights provided in Labour Legislation. We also need a jurisdiction that recognizes and upholds certain rights under our Canadian Constitution. Certain rights have been eroded, ignored and violated in other provinces and past federal governments.

There has been some progress in the world of Human Rights as it pertains to employment law and individual rights. However, there is an argument to be made that the trend in Labour Relations in Provincial Healthcare has devolved: devolved from an attitude of working with unions to fairly administer the collective



Walter McDowell, who recently retired as an MAHCP LRO, leads the 'O Canada' anthem singing at the MAHCP AGM on Oct. 11, 2018.

agreements, now to the point that the day-to-day administration has become increasingly adversarial and partisan towards reduction in resources at the expense of service/delivery cuts to Manitobans. Stonewalling has almost become the norm with an end to any meaningful dialogue between the parties. One could characterize this devolution as kind of a "cold war" between the government-controlled employer and the bargaining agent relationship, all to the detriment of our precious public health care for our families.

To be successful in this new environment there needs to be a steady increase in the leadership capacity of our organization and members, inclusive of the Labour movement towards the goal of solidarity. True solidarity breeds a stronger democracy and a better way of life for all.

Leadership = Influence.

Leadership is simply showing up – physically showing up, not just showing up on social media. We start by influencing those around us to influence those around them to seek the truth and speak it to power and act upon it. By "showing up" we invoke change. We need to show up, we need change!

3- What advice would you give fellow LROs, MAs and members?

Perseverance in the face of adversity. Do the right thing (in all ways) each day to achieve your goals. Teach others that solidarity is the most powerful tool but only can be harnessed with influence and activism.

4- How have you been enjoying your retirement? Any plans?

With only about a month in this new reality, I've got too many plans currently that need prioritization and action. Freud said that there are two basic ingredients to happiness: love and work. I have love in abundance and I plan on working, but of a choice and pace that is entirely mine.

Thank you to MAHCP for providing me with happiness working with all the wonderful people doing important, meaningful work. Onward, there is much to do!

In Love and Solidarity, see you on the lawn of the Legislature sometime! Hopefully accompanied by about 10,000 more who care about quality health care as much as we do.