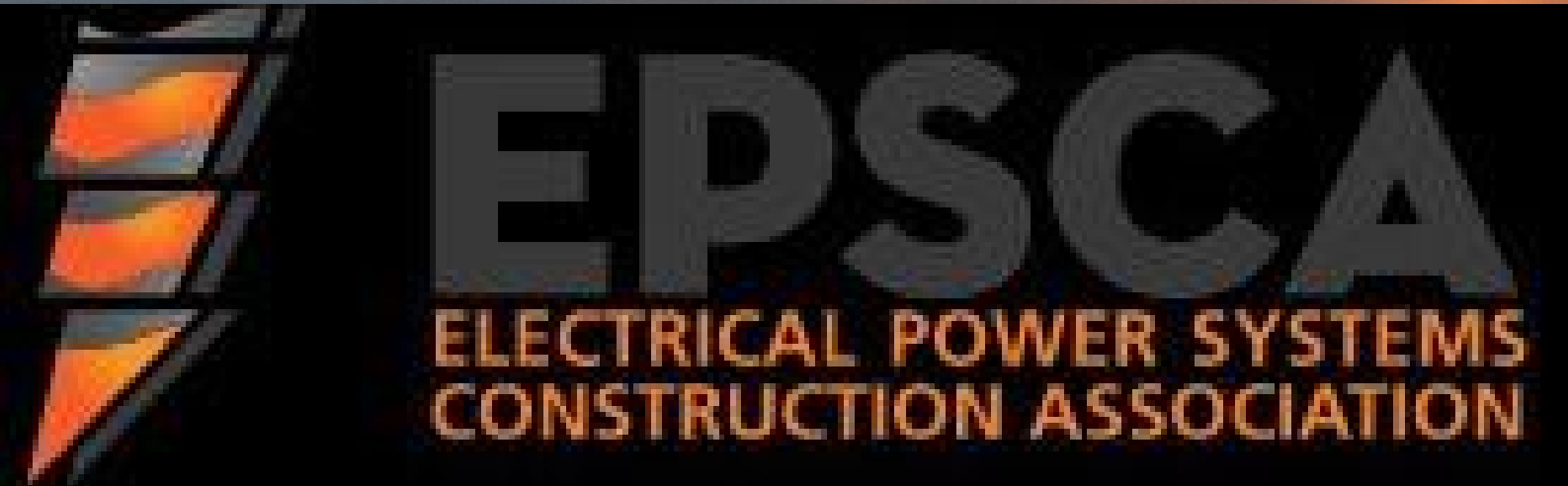


Electrical

Power Systems Construction Association



By: Greg Akeson



High Voltage Labour: Veterans for Hire in Ontario Power Sector

Alex Lolua holds that Veterans' energy is needed to keep the lights on in Ontario

Meet Alex Lolua. Born and raised in Hamilton, he is the current General Manager of the Electrical Power Systems Construction Association (EPSCA), a position he has proudly held for the past nine years. EPSCA is responsible for negotiating and administering the construction trade collective agreements for all the building trades unions that work on Bruce Power, Ontario Power Generation, and Hydro One sites. After nine years, Alex is quite pleased with the challenge he accepted when he became the GM of EPSCA.

Alex began his career in government as a senior policy advisor to a cabinet minister in the Hamilton area. At the time, the government was trying to foster better relations with the unions and as such he became the minister's key liaison with the representatives for the Hamilton building trades. Once a relationship was developed with the unions, Alex found a job representing all the unions in 1993 as the Director of Government Relations to the Ontario Building Trades Council. It was soon after that the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) made him an offer since they were having issues with the government as it related to trade licenses and the enforcement of trade licenses. The IBEW offered him essentially the same role as he had with the Ontario Building Trades Council. As Alex describes it: "a lot of the compulsory trades were having issues with the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. They weren't enforcing trade licenses; they weren't ensuring apprentices were completing their apprenticeships and getting their trade licenses. So, we put a lot of effort into trying to get the government to enforce standards so that everyone was playing by the same rules."

EPSCA Resources



Boilermakers



Carpenters



Cement Masons



IBEW



Insulators



Ironworkers



Labourers



Millwrights



Operating Engineers



Painters



Plasterers



Rodmen



Roofers



Sheet Metal



Teamsters



Tile and Terrazzo



United Association

The Solution

The problem Alex describes was regarding provisional licenses. With a provisional license, a person can practice in a trade before he or she becomes officially certified through the passing of an exam. It was common practice for the Ministry to allow people who failed their exams to continue to practice in the trades with a provisional certificate. It took many years, but the problem was finally resolved in the early 2010s and is one of the proudest moments of Alex's government relations career.

Alex's breadth of experience, having worked both in the public and the private sectors, has given him a unique insight into the problems that exist between the two systems. "Too often, the people who make decisions about our business don't know anything about our business and a lot of negative outcomes result" (8:53). When laws and regulations are made, more often than not, the government has the service sector or industrial sector in mind. In such workplaces, people work for the same employer for an entire career, or they go to the same workplace every day; in construction, workers are often on different sites and they change employers more frequently than workers in other sectors.

The two biggest influences in Alex's career were Patrick Dillon (former head of the Ontario Building Trades Council) and Larry MacDonald (Black & McDonald). In 1993 when Alex was still working for the government, it was Patrick who took a chance on him to be the Director of Government Relations for the Ontario Building Trades Council. Patrick taught him how to advocate strongly for workers and demonstrated a strong work ethic and passion for his job that Alex himself exemplifies today. When Alex went over to the management side, it was a much bigger transition than he thought it would be. Larry MacDonald, who was president of EPSCA, helped Alex transition successfully from being a union representative to being a management representative and showed him how to run an important association in his business.

Alex became aware of Helmets to Hardhats (H2H) through his friend, Joe Maloney, whom he has known since Joe was a business manager of Local 120 of the Boilermakers. In fact, one of Alex's proudest moments at EPSCA occurred when a funding partnership with H2H was created. EPSCA has been a funding partner with H2H now for about four years. Alex explains: "It is a small token of our thanks for what Veterans have done for our country, to train them and give them jobs in the trades."

Continuous Improvement

"Across all our business lines, quality is always a cornerstone of our philosophy. We believe our customers deserve the highest quality products and services available. To deliver on this commitment, we implement robust quality programs that focus on continuous improvement and customer satisfaction. As a result, our quality programs satisfy the rigorous requirements of industry-specific codes and standards, as well as jurisdictional and client requirements." Though EPSCA is not a direct employer for the industry, what Alex hears about veteran hires is that they are hardworking, they show up every day, they show up on time, and they put in eight hours of work for eight hours of pay.

Since Ontario is a leader in the non-carbon production of electricity, the investment in high quality workers is of critical importance. As Alex puts it: "Ontario is a leader in the nuclear business. I'd like to keep it that way, but in order to keep it that way and to keep the benefits of nuclear and reduced carbon, we have to make sure these reactors get refurbished, we have to make sure that they're done on time, on budget, so we need a strong and capable construction workforce who can do the work. The pipeline of H2H is an important piece that helps us continue to bring in the workers that we need to do the work". Veteran hires possess the necessary prerequisites for entry into the construction industry. They understand urgency, they understand teamwork, they understand the importance of showing up and getting the job done. Alex continues: "The other thing about Ontario in particular, we're one of the few jurisdictions on the planet that has almost no carbon producing generation (a few gas-fired power generation plants operate in the province). Otherwise, it's all nuclear and renewables. We're totally off coal. With our reliance on nuclear power, the pressure is on to get these reactors updated and back online and functioning and making sure we extend their lives for as long as we can to make sure we have a reliable and steady source of electricity production."

The qualities that make a good candidate for hire into the construction industry are a good attitude, a good work ethic, and an ability to show up on time. It is important that people want to learn, want to work, and want to show up. For Alex, the most important quality is a willingness to learn. It is not what you know, but what you do not know, and a candidate must be eager and willing to learn. The ability to get along well with other people is also an important quality as you are dependent on hundreds of other people who work beside you, above you, and below you. If you are not working safely, you could be putting others at risk. Quality work is the goal because, if things do not go right the first time, projects can quickly become expensive. In the construction industry, it is of critical importance – now more than ever – that the way forward is to hire good quality talent in order to achieve success. The way forward is with H2H and the talent they provide to the industry.





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