



CBTU

CANADA'S BUILDING
TRADES UNIONS

A photograph of construction workers on a site. In the foreground, a worker in a blue hard hat and high-visibility vest is operating a motorized trowel on a concrete slab. Other workers in various safety gear are visible in the background, some standing near a large rebar structure. The scene is outdoors with trees in the distance.

Canada's Building Trades Unions



Q&A with Sean Strickland

Canada's Building Trades Unions

For those readers who might not be as familiar with CBTU, how would you best describe the organization and what it does and what your role as its Executive Director entails?

Canada's Building Trades Unions are the national voice of over half a million Canadian construction workers — members of 14 international unions who work in more than 60 different trades and occupations and generate six percent of Canada's GDP. With over 195 training centres from coast-to-coast, we recruit, train and deploy the best skilled trades workers in the world, continually improving and advancing our training facilities to meet the needs of the industry. We work closely with our contractors and employer partners to ensure Canada's skilled trades workforce can meet the needs of the industry as it continues to evolve and change with new technologies. My role, as Executive Director, is to oversee the Canadian operations of our office and team based in Ottawa, ON.

What was it that first drew you to labour relations as a field? Was it something you fell into or a career path you planned from early on?

My father was a bricklayer, I was a labourer myself. I know how hard our members work, each and every day, and have a tremendous amount of respect for the work of Canada's skilled tradespeople. With CBTU, I have the opportunity to work every day to improve the conditions under which our members work, and the opportunities they have to go to work. We're at an exciting time in the construction industry, with advancements in technology, changes in energy resources; the face of our industry is changing. It's great to play a part in this.

How did you first meet Joe Maloney and get involved with Helmets to Hardhats?

I've known Joe for many years and we are proud to support the Helmets to Hardhats initiative as it not only responds to the needs of Canada's Veterans from the standpoint of entering second careers, but it also supports the pressing shortages of skilled trades throughout the construction and related industries. Additionally, as the subsets of Veterans include women, visible minorities, disabled people, Indigenous people and youths (cadets), H2H's multi-faceted approach will assist many Veterans as they transition into highly skilled second careers.



Q&A Continued – Part 2

Given your broad expertise in the industry, especially on the labour side of things, do you find that there is a unique quality that veterans bring to construction jobsites?

Absolutely – the discipline, respect, team work, dedication to the job and pride in your work are all qualities that veterans have instilled in them, from first entering the military. These qualities make them ideal candidates to start in the skilled trades where there are clear expectations – whether you’re an apprentice or a journeyman – to show up on time, prepared with the right tools of the trade, ready to put in a day’s work. There is a clear chain of command from the job steward to the foreman, to the general foreman, to the journeymen and apprentices that you work with; this is similar to the chain of command and team that Veterans would be familiar with. And I know from the trades, the dedication to your craft and the pride in the work you do to build a home, to a major infrastructure project like a bridge or power plant – our members have such pride in what they do, in the same way we see Veterans so proud to serve their country. There are many great qualities Veterans bring to the job site that make them great tradespeople.

A recent article in Build Force Canada suggested that Ontario will have to recruit as many as 100,000 new construction workers over the next decade to keep up with the demand caused by retirements. Do you foresee Helmets to Hardhats playing a significant role in meeting that growing demand? Is this labour shortage a problem that is plaguing all of Canada? I know it is an issue for Ontario, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia, but is it a problem in remote, or less populated, locations to the same extent?

Labour availability is an issue we’re seeing in different regions, and in different trades and developing the workforce to address that, is a major priority of the Building Trades. Helmets to Hardhats plays an integral role in connecting Veterans with opportunities in the trades and this potential labour pool will be very important in meeting the needs of the industry.



Q&A Continued – Part 3

What would you say is the biggest challenge for construction labour in Canada in the near future?

The construction industry creates highly-paid, highly-skilled, career opportunities in a variety of fields. Oil and gas, for instance, was one industry that has historically created a lot of job opportunities for skilled trades members. As we – globally – transition to more green energy, we need to ensure no worker is left behind and that support and training opportunities are created for workers most affected by the transition. In addition, Canadians – from all backgrounds, genders, youth, new Canadians, Veterans – need to know there is opportunity for them in the trades, and choosing a career in the skilled trades can open the doors to a lifelong, rewarding career.

What are some of the major initiatives CBTU are currently working on?

Canada's Building Trades Unions advocate for public policy and work opportunities that benefit our members and improve the living and working conditions for construction workers all across Canada. We recently launched the Apprenticeship Services Program, which will support small and medium employers to hire apprentices – including Veterans. We need to grow and diversify our workforce, and this project aims to start 4,000 new apprentices over two years, focusing on equity-deserving groups.



Q&A Continued – Part 4

I know it can be hard to single out one accomplishment but is there a particular achievement of which you are proudest, especially in your role as Executive Director of CBTU?

In the recent federal budget, we strongly advocated for and won a Labour Mobility Deduction for Tradespeople – something we’ve been fighting for, for over two decades. This change will allow workers who have to travel, temporarily, away from home to work, to deduct certain travel expenses from their income. This will make a real difference to our members – keeping their hard-earned dollars in their pocket; at the same time, it will make it easier to travel for work and to address some of the labour availability issues we’re seeing across the country.



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