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Introductory Comments

Thank you and good morning. I LOVE SCHOOL! SO I'M REALLY PLEASED TO BE WITH YOU TODAY.

My thanks to the organizers of the Specialist High Skills Major Energy Conference for your kind invitation to speak.

As you'll know, Hydro One is a company that is inherently dependant upon a workforce of people skilled in the trades and technology fields.

So naturally, I'm delighted you are devoting your time and expertise and energy to encouraging young people to consider skilled work as viable and important career choice.

I think you have it absolutely right – if we are going to encourage young people to pursue skilled work, then we need to start earlier and talk to our students while they are still in the educational system.

We need to help them understand the world of opportunities that is open to them if they choose to pursue skilled trades.

Providing them with choices and opportunities early will go a long way to ensuring that Ontario is always ready to work.

I come at this with a certain bias - I am more than 30-year employee of the electricity sector and I am proud to be part of an industry that places such a high value on its people and skilled work.

Let me put this into context for you...

Hydro One owns and operates Ontario's high-voltage transmission network that delivers electricity directly to large industrial customers, like auto manufacturers and refineries, and we also deliver electricity to local utilities and our own 1.3 million customers.

We are everywhere - Our operation is huge and everyone in the province is relying on us to deliver electricity safely and reliably every minute of every day. (our high-voltage transmission network spans 28,400 kilometres and our low-voltage distribution system spans 123,000 kilometres.)

Simply put, we cannot meet our commitment to the homes, businesses, hospitals and schools of this Province without the promise of a constant supply of people in the skilled trades and technology fields.

We have thousands of employees working in skilled trades --- electricity, forestry, construction, in almost every community in this province.

This is not without its challenges, particularly as we watch our workforce age and retire.

I would like to focus my remarks today on four key issues that are important to Hydro One.

I think much of what I am about to share will also resonate with other companies that reliant on ensuring there is a steady stream of skilled workers filling the labour pool.

First: The demographic shift that is impacting our business and how Hydro One is responding to this shift

Secondly: Ensuring a safe workplace for young people entering the workforce -- this is so, so critical and I could spend the entire time talking about this subject.

Third: Establishing an employment brand that helps us attract and retain a new generation of electricity workers

And finally: Why it is important for all of us to support and promote skilled trades and technologies as viable, first-choice careers for Ontario youth.

One: Demographic Shift impacting our industry and how Hydro One is responding to this shift

As I have just said, the people of Ontario are counting on Hydro One to fulfill its mandate to ensure that homes, businesses, schools and hospitals of Ontario have safe and reliable power.

As an employer in this industry, we are grappling with one of the single greatest human resource challenges we have ever confronted.

At Hydro One, we expect to see more than 30 percent of our workforce depart in the next few years.

In fact, the exodus has begun.

Add this to that the fact that we had not been hiring to any great extent, for decades.

And we are not alone.

We are seeing an incredibly adept and skilled workforce walking out the door at precisely the time we need them to mentor a new generation of workers *and* to transfer 30-40 years of knowledge to those workers.

This generation has long provided our industry with an enormous pool of talented and ambitious women and men.

Interesting confluence of events - Contributing to our current situation, over the next ten years, Hydro One expects to renew its transmission and distribution systems to enable Ontario's Green Energy Act. In many ways, we are experiencing a technology boom where the future looks very different than what we know today.

I know that Colin Andersen was here yesterday and I'm sure talked about the many exciting things we're doing in the green energy field. That, too, will challenge us all to prepare our students for the new technologies. Keeping up will be a challenge for us all.

I should note that the province expects to see more than 50,000 green jobs created for Ontario as a result of the Act, and I expect many of these jobs to be in skilled trades – there is very positive growth in this area and Ontario aims to be a leader.

That will translate into many person years of direct and indirect employment throughout our sector and for manufacturing and construction sectors as well.

Perfect Storm - We're facing the likelihood of a severe shortage of trained staff over the next five to ten years, coupled with an ever increasing workload.

And it is not as simple as putting ads in the paper.

Employers can advertise jobs, but it is like talking with no one listening if we do not have a deep well of skilled workers from which to draw.

Hydro One is not sitting on its hands waiting for someone else to solve our problems; we have a very aggressive workforce renewal project in place to get ahead of the curve.

Invest in our people - As a long-serving employee of our Company, it was clear to me when I became CEO just over three years ago, that people had to be the absolute priority for Hydro One.

It goes without saying that you need great people to run your business.

So what are we doing?

We decided that as part of our people strategy, we wanted to move the Company from being a sporadic recruiter to a Company with a Human Resources Strategy integrated throughout our business – and we did just that.

All about education – the talent pool - We have also reached outside of our organization to work with all levels of the education system as a means to help develop the talent pool that our Company and our sector so desperately needs.

Apprentices

For example, because trades represent a significant piece of our business, Hydro One has undertaken ambitious trades apprenticeship programs in recent years.

How many? Since 2002, almost 600 people have been hired into apprentice jobs in our various trades.

We give them the best possible training, a safe environment in which to develop their skills, and the foundation for a long and safe career.

They benefit from working along side our most experienced and committed employees.

Pride, safety - Our people are very proud of what they do and how they do it so it goes without saying that they are passionate about mentoring new apprentices and passing along their expertise – particularly as it relates to working safely – I can't stress how important this is at this point in our history.

Aboriginal Communities

We also recognize that our workforce renewal programs and the people we hire should be a reflection of our customer base and the people of this province.

Underrepresentation - We know that aboriginal communities tend to be under represented in our workforce.

We also know that aboriginal communities tend to have the opposite demographic profile to other communities – while our population is aging, they have a large youth population – a greatly underutilized human resource.

Recently we began to pilot a partnership with the Sioux Lookout Aboriginal Management Board and the Power Workers Union to offer training aboriginal people so that they have the skill sets to do our type of work.

We are excited about this initiative and hope to roll it out on a broader basis in the future.

Working with Educators

In order to develop a future workforce, Hydro One is strategically investing in a portfolio of education programs that enrich math, science & technology curriculum, and provide opportunities for students to explore career options in the energy sector.

At the elementary school level, we provide funding to "Scientists in School" and "Let's Talk Science".

Both programs offer hands-on workshops delivered by scientists, or in the case of "Let's Talk Science", university and community college students, and provide not only exciting and relevant science activities, but role models for the students.

At the secondary school level, we are working with two organizations:

Youth Science Ontario are the good people that oversee all of the regional science fairs across the province.

Over the next 2-3 years, they will be creating a series of Science Olympics to increase access to, and the participation of, students in the science competitions.

And secondly, we are very proud of our relationship with Skills Canada Ontario, best known for their regional and provincial skills competitions; organizing a series of summer day camps for Grade 7-8 students in order to encourage them to consider technology and trades as a first career choice.

Colleges

Also key to our workforce renewal strategy is establishing creative and exciting partnerships with post secondary educational and academic institutions.

One partnership, of which I am particularly proud, is our award-winning partnership with a number of Ontario colleges.

Our experience working with these Colleges has been extremely positive and we commend them for the enthusiasm and dedication they have demonstrated to developing meaningful programs to launch the long and successful careers for our future workers.

Working with Mohawk, Algonquin, Georgian and Northern Colleges, teams from Hydro One and the colleges have reviewed the curriculum for the engineering technician and technologists programs and made enhancements to ensure that the graduates are ready to meet the challenges in the utility sector.

We have invested \$3M towards the curriculum development and lab equipment in addition to setting up scholarships and bursaries at each institution. The money is in addition to all the time and effort our employees put into this initiative.

Furthermore, to ensure that we reap the benefits of these new graduates, we have developed co-op placements for students, and recipients of our scholarships and bursaries will be interviewed for summer, co-op or full-time employment, as appropriate.

In fact, since our partnership began in fall of 2007, we have hired 94 students for work placements for our four main technology streams.

In our regular recruitment efforts outside of our work with Colleges, we hired a total of 44 people for the same four technology streams. I dare say that others in the electricity industry are snapping up these graduates as well.

The Colleges are reporting increased enrollment in their programs and some are oversubscribed.

This is fantastic news and proof of what employers and schools can achieve together.

Now - Can you imagine the talent that would come through our Colleges if they first came through a skills stream in High School?

Universities

Another area of shortages - Hydro One is not only facing a shortage of skilled and trades workers, we are also struggling to attract and retain Electrical Engineers.

While not specifically related to skilled work and trades, we also have established partnerships, MOUs, scholarships, on-line course delivery with universities to seed the next generation of talent in our industry.

At the University level, we have partnerships with the Universities of Waterloo and Western Ontario.

In addition, working with McMaster and Ryerson University, our Fellowship Program hires students for a summer development term.

These students attend a series of lectures given by Hydro One engineers to enhance their knowledge of power systems and the operations of the electricity system in Ontario. Remember that experienced workforce I talked about earlier? Retention strategy?

Suffice it to say, that as an employer, we know what we need to do and we are doing it.

We understand we have a stake in developing the labour pool from which we need to draw.

And while I want all this activity to result in some great new hires for Hydro One, the work we are doing, whether it is with our apprentices, Colleges and Universities, I believe will serve our industry and this province.

The curriculum we help create, the people we train and develop, will help launch a new generation of skilled workers with a valuable and portable skill set that will put them in good stead in any electricity utility -- anywhere.

Second: Ensuring a safe workplace for our new employees

What keeps me awake at night? - I can't talk about workforce renewal and the need for skilled workers without talking about the very thing that keeps me awake at night.....and that is the safety of our workers.

The very nature of our business requires that our skilled and trades workers work in often dangerous and challenging environments.

Our people work with and around electricity – need I say more?

Many of them work outdoors in the harshest weather this province has to offer.

So with new and young workers comprising a larger segment of our workforce than ever, we must redouble our efforts in the area of worker safety.

At Hydro One, we believe in health and safety – they are our core values and they are absolutely key to the success of our company.

Training and Tools - It is incumbent upon everyone us to do all possible to provide the safest possible workplace by eliminating and controlling hazards, by instilling our safety values in new and young workers, by giving them the training and the tools they need to ensure their safety on their first day and on every day that follows.

Truly a wonderful opportunity - Every year, we have a continuous influx of young and new workers join the company through hiring halls, apprenticeships, grads and summer students.

We achieve this through our four formal training facilities in Kleinburg, Smiths Falls, Orangeville and Oakville.

These facilities give our skilled trades a hands-on experience in a safe environment.

It should be noted that these centres not only provide vital training to Hydro One apprentices, they are Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities certified.

And it is not just new Hydro One employees that benefit from the safety skills and training at these facilities, apprentices from utilities across the province come to us to put spurs on for the first time and take their first steps up a wooden pole.

More than anything, they benefit from the unparalleled experience of our most highly qualified and skilled workers who are deeply passionate and uncompromising when it comes to safety.

Our new workers are in good hands.

Safety is a point on which there is no give and no compromise - whether we are the Companies that hire skilled workers or the schools that help launch their careers.

I am a firm believer that good safety habits developed earlier in a career are the basis of a long and happy career.

This is why at Hydro One, we make safety a key pillar of our employment brand and through organizations like Rob Ellis' Our Youth at Work, we're talking to our high school students about safety on the job.

Three: Establishing an employment brand helps us to attract and retain a new generation of electricity workers

Everything I've talked about thus far leads me to reflect on employment brand.

Employer of choice - Managing employment brand means building a base of knowledge about our company so that we are seen not only as a possible employer, but more importantly, as an employer of choice.

It simply isn't good enough to attract on the basis that our company is a source of steady, good-paying skilled jobs. I want people to pick my company because it's Hydro One.

Because we are dealing with shortages of skilled workers, the competition is too fierce, and young workers are looking for so much more from their places of work than my generation did.

We need to define our employment brand and articulate it to new generations of communication-savvy employees.

Hydro One believes, as I'm sure you do, that our people underpin everything we do and we are deeply committed to our employees.

We believe that a Company that cares about its employees will have engaged employees who work more safely and will put our customers and the communities we serve at the centre of everything they do.

Our employment brand is not just a tool for recruitment, it is also a statement about how we want our employees to see us – as an employer of choice.

Employees as Company ambassadors - But there is another aspect to our employment brand – and that's the way that our employees represent the Company.

When our forestry workers go to schools during Arbour Week to talk to young people about the high value we place on the environment and safety, they are leaving an impression on our children about the kind of Company we are.

Our employees live our brand when they give back to the communities in which they live and work through countless acts of charity.

Our employees live our brand when they leave their homes for extended periods of time, battling terrible weather conditions and challenging terrain to get our customers' lights back on.

We want everyone who interacts with one of our employees to say, "Now THAT is the kind of Company I would like to work for one day".

And Four: Why it is important for all of us to support and promote skilled trades and technologies as viable, first-choice careers for Ontario youth.

I would like now to turn to my final point – why it is important for all of us to support and promote skilled trades and technologies as viable, first-choice careers for Ontario youth.

The fact is, as employers, we are the very people who stand to lose the most if we are not supporters and promoters.

We are the people who are responsible for filling the employment void created by the mass boomer exodus from the workplace – the exodus that is already upon us.

We are the people who are, and will be accountable, when there aren't enough skilled and trained workers to keep the lights on, build homes, offices, and cars, maintain our computer systems – or build the smart grid of the future!

We could choose to sit idly by and ask: why aren't schools and governments doing something?

But by then, and all too soon, the question will become: why can't I find anyone?

So.....what can we do?

In my view there are two important things we can do.

First, as employers, we can work with high schools, colleges, and universities and we can develop apprenticeship programs.

But I think the most important thing we can do is help eradicate the stigma attached to trades and skilled work.

As employers requiring skilled workforces, we know and respect that skilled and trades workers are the very people who get the job done.

They take our paper and our plans and turn them into an important reality.

They are the backbone of our organizations and our economy.

We know that there are seemingly limitless types of work skilled workers do and can do – something to suit everyone, so to speak. Especially with the new green economy which will spawn a whole new generation of skills and trades.

We know that skilled and trade work can be very portable and take you to any corner of the globe, if you so desire.

We know that skilled and trade work can make you a valuable resource to a company but can also put you in the position to work for yourself.

As employers, we can get out there to schools and employment fairs and build up the image for trades by talking to young people.

We can advocate on behalf of trades and skilled work and let them know all the options they have and where those options can take them.

We can be role models and mentors.

We can help them understand that skilled trades and technology can be viable, first-choice careers for Ontario youth.

But first, we have truly to believe it.

And, if they do choose this path, we must give them the training and tools to ensure they go home healthy and safe everyday.

Concluding Remarks

In closing, I would like to say that as a CEO of a company that relies so heavily on skilled trades and technology workers, I am extremely pleased to take part in events such as this.

That is why I look forward to a day when young people not only have the choice of a High Skills Major Program at their local High School – but they exercise that choice.

I am very proud of Hydro One's skilled workers – they are second to none and a great example of what a career in trades and technology can do for people.

It was my distinct pleasure to address you today and my thanks again for the invitation.

Thank you.