

A Special Report from COCKSHAW'S Construction Labor News + Opinion:

IBEW President Ed Hill Urges Members to Change Attitudes

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Editor's Note: Last year Publisher Peter A. Cockshaw, National Labor Analyst and Publisher of the influential COCKSHAW'S Construction Labor News + Opinion, ran a series of three articles outlining issues and challenges that the IBEW faces today. The articles created a stir in the labor movement and were so popular that the issues are now out of print. They may be the most important labor reports you ever read!



Peter A. Cockshaw, National Labor Analyst and Publisher, COCKSHAW'S Construction Labor News + Opinion

The first article featured a message from Ed Hill, International President of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, to the rank and file. The second article outlined how IBEW locals can win back work. The third article profiled how an IBEW Local was able to win back substantial market share. Publisher Cockshaw has given us permission to recap portions of each of the articles. We have recapped Ed Hill's message from the first story, and we will feature recaps from the other articles in the series in subsequent newsletters.

"We are not the only game in town anymore, and we haven't been for some time. Our customers now have a choice and far too many of them are choosing our non-union competitors."

So stated Ed Hill, International President of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers in a forceful mes-

sage last year to IBEW's rank and file, as reported by national labor analyst Peter A. Cockshaw in his influential monthly newsletter, COCKSHAW'S Construction Labor News + Opinion.

Hill made his remarks in delivering his "State of Our Industry" speech at the union's construction conference.

The Need for Change

"What we need is change—a change in our own attitude," Hill urged. "Right now, electrical customers think we care more about ourselves than about them."

"But in today's world where the customer is always right, it's a recipe for disaster. The customer is the one who gives us our jobs and signs our checks. Listening to the customer isn't a sign of weakness; it is just good business!"

Hill laid out—in a no-holds-barred fashion—the "fix" his union is in (and in Cockshaw's view, the "fix" all building trades unions now find themselves).

"So here we are in the 21st Century, and unions are not getting enough work," Hill lamented. "All too often we're not the choice for the customer—a customer who has other options."

"Today the organized sector finds itself with a hammer hanging over its head. Call it a crisis, call it a threat, but if we don't collectively elevate our game, we could become insignificant in our own industry," Hill added.

"Regardless how much work any one local may have, this is a much broader issue because labor's fate is tied together."

"If the IBEW loses some big, long-

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The VDV brand is now available for use on your marketing and communications materials. Visit www.norcalvdv.org and click on "The VDV Brand" to download the logo. Your use of the VDV brand will help it grow in recognition and identify you as a qualified member of the Sound and Communications industry.

Ed Hill (continued from page 1)

term customers—as we already have in some places—how long will we be able to sustain wage and benefit levels?

"If a few local customers leave and that is multiplied across the entire country, doesn't it become just a matter of time until we're fighting over crumbs and our wage-benefit package looks a whole lot like everyone else's?"

Choosing a Direction

The IBEW President warned that the union is at a crossroad. "There are only two different ways we can go. We can continue on with business as usual and have a front row seat to our own demise. Or we can put IBEW on the path to success. It's a decision in which we will vote—a vote that will be determined by members' actions today and every day that follows."

President Hill then cited results of the latest study done for the building trades unions that involved a series of interviews with construction decision makers.

The good news from labor's standpoint, he said, is that the research found that union craftsmen are perceived as trained, experienced and knowledgeable. The bad news is that industry customers also view unions as arrogant, expensive, inflexible, entitled, protected and not customer-service oriented.

"But the worse news from the study," Hill advised, "is that such negative perceptions take away from our positives and negate the likelihood of hiring union craftsmen."

"All studies aside, all we have to do is listen to what too many of our customers—or potential customers say about us. They stress that poor attitude by many craftsmen is a root cause of our problems."

Assessing Your Contribution

To illustrate, Hill related his conversations with many contractors. These employers generally place IBEW craft workers into three groups:

- 15% of union electricians are described as "top-notch producers"—craftsman that employers cannot do without.

- 70% are "solid contributors" who, when told what needs to be done, will do it.
- Bringing up the rear are 15% on "cruise control"—looking for the path of least resistance.

Hill added that contractors maintain that the work habits of the bottom group tend to "infect" some of the 70% above them, and also intimidate the 15% at the top.

"The net effect of the bottom group," Hill said, "is to drag down the job and the union's reputation."

***"Regardless of the
Union vs. non-union market
measurement you choose,
we are on the short end
of the stick."***

*Edward D. Hill, International President
IBEW, Washington, D.C.*

Hill then asked his members to "take a good look in the mirror and do a little self examination, asking themselves the following questions:

- Are you where you're supposed to be when the work day starts?
- Are you breaks ten minutes or are they 15 minutes or more?
- How much time do you really spend at lunch?
- Do you show up late and leave early?
- Are your clothes appropriate and non-offensive?
- Is your cell phone turned off while you are working?

"Even if the vast majority of our members deliver the goods every day, it only takes a few that do not to bring the whole ship down," Hill said. "It may not be fair, but that's just the way it is.

When a few workers don't produce, it gets noticed and all union members pay the price."

Cockshaw adds: In essence, what IBEW's Hill is stressing it that a work force's performance on any job helps sell—or kill—a contractor's chances of securing the next job.

"It's the contractors who have invested the time and money to secure bids for the jobs we get," Hill explained. "It's the contractor who risks his business and his livelihood on the work we do. He needs us. We need him.

"That's why the sooner union members realize that we're all in this together, the better off we will be!"

Lost Productivity

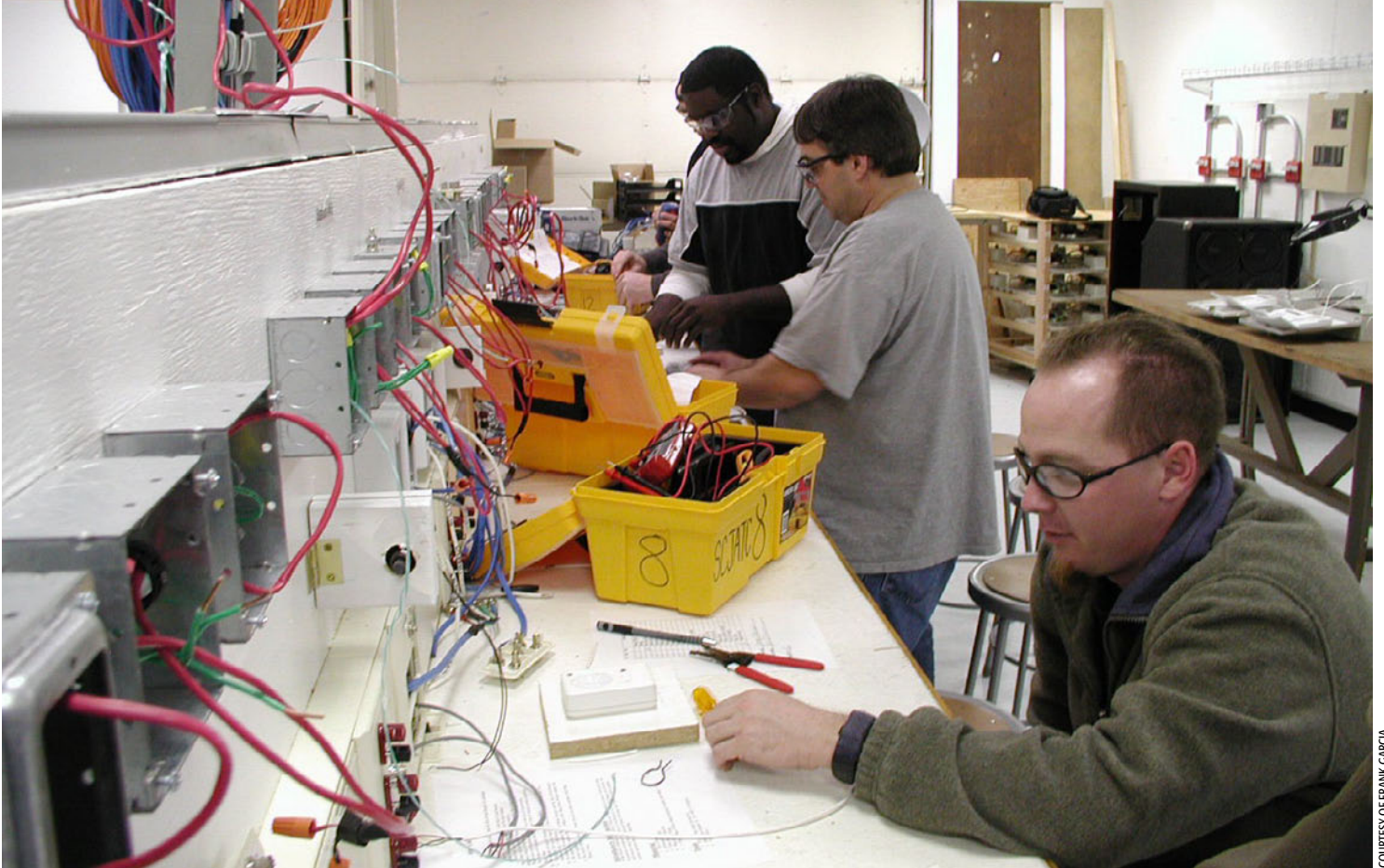
Hill then looked at how workers who take extended breaks or don't start or quit on time can negatively affect productivity. As an example of how costly these negative practices are, he cited a wage and benefit package of \$40, just under \$.67 a minute. He then took as an example a worker who shaves ten minutes here and there throughout the day, accounting for an hour for work for which he'd been paid that day.

The \$40 a day quickly becomes \$200 a week. Multiply that by 50 weeks and the contractor has given the worker an annual donation of \$10,000. Multiply the \$10,000 by 100 workers and the employer loses \$1 million annually in lost productivity.

"It easy to see," Hill said, "how individual actions—or non-actions—influence the big picture. Also, contractors tell us that \$10 or \$12 an hour going to benefits—an expense their non-union competition may not worry about—has to be made up somehow to be cost-effective."

The IBEW president also advised that employers maintain that unless they are within six to seven percent of the lowest bid they won't get a second look most of the time.

Helmets to Hardhats...From Iraq to NORCAL



COURTESY OF FRANK GARCIA

The Helmets to Hardhats program connects former members of the military to jobs within the construction industry including the IBEW.

NORCAL locals now have the ability to help members of the military ease back into civilian life with jobs in Sound & Communications through Helmets to Hardhats, a national program started in 2002. The program connects National Guard, Reserve and transitioning active-duty military members with quality career training and employment opportunities within the construction industry, including with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

Like most throughout the nation, NORCAL Locals are eager to help U.S. soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen transfer their experience and can-do attitudes into secure jobs within the construction industry. "The fact that this potential employee has served in the military answers a lot of questions," said John Sawtelle, Sound &

Communications Organizer of Local 332. "You can assume a lot of good traits and a strong work ethic – these are the kind of individuals you want on your team."

Helmets to Hardhats is co-sponsored by all fifteen Building and Construction Trades organizations, as well as their

employer associations, which together represent about 82,000

contractors. The program has experienced

tremendous success in a short amount of time. There are currently over 45,000 careers listed on the Helmets to Hardhats website and 21,161 candidates have been referred for new careers.



For more information or to register, please visit: www.helmetstohardhats.com

Ed Hill (continued from page 2)

"Some contractors," Hill explained, "say they are so close on some jobs that if they knew they'd get that extra hour or so a day of 'real' work they'd bid it. And if contractors could build into their bids an additional hour of truly productive work, that would have a significant impact on gaining back market share."

Summing up the central thrust of his message to union craftsmen, Hill stated: "It is the quality of our own effort that has the biggest impact on any job's bottom line. The more professional and productive we are, the more likely we are to get more work."

NEXT ISSUE: How Unions Can Win Back Work

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Your Trust Fund Important Phone Numbers

Questions about eligibility for coverage, premiums, reserve accounts and info booklets, call:

United Administrative Services
408-288-4452
Toll-Free 800-541-8059

Trust Self-Funded Medical Plan Trust Dental Plan

Questions about claim payment, claim forms and benefit info:
408-288-4481
Toll-Free 800-541-8059

Blue Cross PPO

www.bluecrossca.com
To locate a participating preferred provider physician, clinic, or hospital:
408-288-4452 or 800-541-8059
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Interplan/DentInex Dental PPO

www.interplancorp.com
To locate a participating preferred provider dentist:
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Group # 10000824-0001, 0002

Vision Service Plan

www.vsp.com
Questions about vision benefits and vision claims or to request a Vision Plan Provider Directory:
Toll-Free 800-877-7195

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Take 10% Off Your Medical Costs

Members enrolled in the Trust's self-funded Medical Plan option will pay 10% less for eligible expenses incurred for hospital services by using a Blue Cross of California preferred provider network (PPO) hospital. The Blue Cross of California PPO is a network of hospitals, physicians, clinics and specialists who have lower, pre-negotiated rates and they pass on the cost savings to you.

Other options

If you utilize a non-preferred provider hospital for services, the Trust's self-funded Medical Plan option has no stop-loss provision for expenses you incur. In other words, the Trust will pay 80% and you will pay 20% (after satisfying your deductible) regardless of the amount of your expenses. By using a preferred provider network hospital, your

deductible (\$50.) is waived and the Plan will pay 90% instead of 80% of covered charges of the first \$2,500 of eligible expenses and will pay 100% thereafter.

Using a Blue Cross of California preferred provider saves you money and saves the Trust money.

Under the Trust's self-funded Medical Plan option, using a Blue Cross of California Preferred Provider is voluntary, but with the cost of health care services rising so much and so fast - the Trust offers you a way to pay 10% less of the fee. Here's what you can do:

To find a preferred provider network hospital, physician, specialist or therapist, contact Blue Cross of California: www.bluecrossca.com or 1-800-541-8059.

If your current doctor is not a preferred provider, call 1-800-541-8049 to refer your doctor to Blue Cross of California.

You can ask your doctor to refer you to Blue Cross of California preferred provider network hospitals, specialists or therapists.

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