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## Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce Symposium

### Developing Our Talent:

I would like to thank you for inviting me to speak today on the topic of Developing Our Talent. It doesn't seem like it was very long ago that employee development consisted of, a few day seminars and a week or two of on the job training. Today, training has become a strategic cornerstone many companies are building strong foundations from as we strive to increase productivity and stay ahead of our competitors. Our competitors are not only after market share; they are also competing for our shrinking pool of skilled labour.

It is not an easy job today to build and coach a team you just have to ask Craig McTavish. But if we are truly focused on staying ahead of our competitors, whether that is within our city or within our world, we need to ensure our game plan is in order. To stay ahead in this game, our information has to be current and accurate, requiring us to continually evaluate our performance and adapt where needed. Time is precious and we can't afford to squander it, because our season is short. Once we have made our selections the pivotal point of developing a winning team will rely on how well we work together.

Each phase of building a team or workforce takes a great deal of time and money. Development of training tools, training delivery time and the productivity learning curve are costly factors so it is important that we are doing it for the right reasons and with the right people. I am sure many of you are familiar with the exasperation felt when you lose an employee who has gained extensive knowledge of your business and your customers; possibly even a successor to one of your business leaders. Simply put, it hurts. It hurts the work group and the customers and in the end, you are forced to start the development process all over again. And if you're really lucky, he/she won't take along a few more valuable people when they exit. This has become a far too common problem many of us face today.

This leads us to ask, what makes people want to join teams today? I find myself asking this question everywhere I go. Whether I am talking to the sales person at the video counter or my teenage son, I am always curious about what they look for in an employer. Some of the most common answers I hear; I like the people I work with, I have great development options and it works with my life style. I believe the most current and accurate information about your employees comes directly from asking them; keep in contact, listen to them. People want to join a team where they feel a sense of belonging, where their input is valued and they can grow both personally and professionally.

At Weldco-Beales, our challenges are not so very different than many other companies today. We are experiencing rapid growth, actively seeking the talented employees we need to implement innovative efficient programs and produce the quality products we have come to be known for. One thing that is somewhat unique about our company is our story. Weldco-Beales is part of the NorTerra group of companies and our ownership group is made up of the Inuit of Nunavut and the Inuvialuit of the Western Arctic who are our beneficiaries.

We actively participate in creating career development opportunities through our career development programs and over the last few years we have continued to celebrate success. This program has assisted Inuit and Inuvialuit beneficiaries to become meaningful participants in the economies of the Arctic and Canada as a whole. Our program involves exploring the business needs and developing wherever possible the skill levels needed for a career. This is done through a variety of options which include speaking tours throughout Canada's northern communities, coaching and mentoring, providing work related post secondary educational training and most recently through student job shadowing.

Last year our company welcomed Inuvialuit students who took part in a program called Outward Bound. These students spent several days challenging their physical endurance in a series of outdoor wilderness activities such as hiking, canoeing, and camping, allowing them to experience personal development. The Outward Bound experience concluded with students visiting each of the NorTerra companies, Canadian North, Northern Transportation Company Limited and Weldco-Beales Edmonton. These visits highlighted career opportunities; giving students a first hand look at various positions within our companies. From the AutoCAD programs our Engineers use to design our products to the Welding torches our employees use to build it, they experienced it. Through this experience one young lady realized that even though she had never entertained the idea of a career in the trades her interest was peaked. After the tour, she returned home only to continue to reflect on a trade's career option and in the spring of this year she returned to Weldco to complete a week of job shadowing. She spent time grinding, fitting and welding and at the end of the week, she proudly said with a grin, "that was so cool, I love it, getting to see the results of your work". With a clear set goal in mind she returned home to complete her high school and hopefully return to us as an apprentice in the very near future.

Over the last couple of years we have begun focusing a greater degree of attention on the educational institutions themselves for our future workforce. We have found it to be very beneficial in speaking with Junior High and High School students to communicate career options and educate them on things such as work norms and employer expectations. With this information, it has been helpful to both employer and potential employee as each has a clearer understanding of needs. I would like to share a little story about one of my first hires after starting with Weldco. I had been out at a speaking engagement at a pre-trades educational institution and met several young students who had just completed a twelve week trades readying course and were preparing to enter into the workforce as young apprentices. I met a very interesting young fellow and after interviewing him and giving him a tour of the facility, we hired him as a welding apprentice. I was quite proud of myself, feeling quite sure his keen interest and eager attitude would make him a stellar employee. To my surprise, about 2 days after he started, he came into my office and said he needed to talk to me; he was very upset. He sat down and we began to talk. He explained that he wanted to be a welder and he felt his time would be better-spent working with a welding torch and not grinding with power tools, which was what he had been doing over his first couple of days. Needless to say, this experience taught me that we need to begin communicating clear expectations at a younger age because, as I mentioned earlier, training and development is very costly and it is much less effective if people find out it is not what

they are expecting. I often wonder how many people enter careers with expectations that never materialize.

In a world where the early bird gets the worm, we have also found that we can no longer wait for success to come to us, we need to cultivate it. For that reason, we have worked diligently with our community education partners to ensure we are proactively planning and adapting now for tomorrow.

Companies are very cognizant of results in business. We invest a great deal of time and money to analyze our customers; trends, loyalty, and satisfaction rates and quite frankly, we do a good job at it, however we need to continue to explore these same philosophies for our employees. The face of trades is changing today. With more women choosing trades careers and a greater mix of cultural diversity in the workplace our training programs need to reflect this evolution. We have found a growing need to expand current training programs that develop soft skills for our supervisors and educational assistance for our employees. The technical requirements of production demand higher levels of literacy and numeracy. Most recently at Weldco we have begun offering specialized training delivered on site. The instruction covers ESL trades examination readying and settlement transition training; the initial response has been fantastic. We see a growing need for this in our workplace and we want to be able to provide our employees with the tools they need to succeed. Our supervisors and future leaders are also being developed through cultural diversity training programs, cross training and succession programs.

With time being precious, we need to share our knowledge. If every company spends the same time and effort to develop similar training programs it will take us that much longer to deliver it and the sand is running out of the hourglass. There is a need to work in collaboration, sharing resources that will result in a more timely delivery of programs. We have begun exploring more effective and flexible delivery methods. With the addition of so many new employees, our workforce demographics are diverse and as such, we need to evaluate and update our methods of training. Working with aligned associations has given us the ability to access specialized training specific to our industry in a much timelier manner than developing it in-house.

Training is no longer just a necessity of doing business, employers with solid career path options and flexible training incentives have an edge in today's economy as employees are seeking a vast array of training options as part of their overall compensation packages. As employers, we need to be aware of the great number of employees retiring in the next few years. It is urgent that we explore options such as these to draw employees to our companies and give them reason to grow with us or we will lose them to our competition. Our employee demographic is changing; motivated by development opportunities, rapid progression, and work stimulation. The offset of developing programs that meet the needs of both the employer and the employee will be the growth of a highly skilled workforce. Employers who do this well will become the employers of choice. The advantage these employers will have is that they will be well out ahead on the road to continuous improvement and it's a road that never ends.

I want to thank you for having me speak today about developing our talent.