

A Changing Environment: Taking Representation to a Higher Level

By Bill Cole



Elaine Bernard, former Executive Director of the Labor and Worklife Program at Harvard Law School, opens a group training session during the CPA Executive Leadership Program.

There is one characteristic likely shared by every person who becomes involved in his/her police association – he/she did not start a policing career with the objective of becoming a labour leader. Along the way, members are drawn to this work for any number of reasons: often a lingering discontent with the status quo, a culminating incident that requires a response or a desire to improve working conditions, sparks a sense of duty which leads to engagement. Whatever the reason, effective leadership is not fueled by passion or a sense of fairness alone – it is supported by equal parts training and an understanding of the best practices employed by labour organizations. The one certainty along the way – police college did not offer courses in labour law, collective bargaining or political action.

To fill in the missing pieces, association representatives access specialized training through their affiliates, community colleges or local universities. Full disclosure

– over the last eight years I have had the good fortune of being part of the program development and teaching team in the Executive Leadership Program hosted by the Canadian Police Association. The program is delivered under the auspices of the Labor and Worklife Program at Harvard law school, in partnership with the University of Ottawa's Telfer School of Management. So...up front, I acknowledge my enthusiasm for labour-specific education and the demonstrated value it brings to association leaders.

Nearly a decade ago, the CPA was concerned that leaders from its many affiliates had limited opportunities to access executive style education that would support their efforts. In response to this, the CPA looked south to the Labor and Worklife Program at Harvard University. The LWP was created in 1942 to address the missing education needs of the labor movement, particularly in light of the increasing specialization of execu-

tive education for management representatives (which years later would grow considerably with the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard). Together with its interests in research, the LWP hosts the annual “Harvard Trade Union Program” for labour leaders from around the world. The HTUP brings together dozens of subject matter experts to deliver a labour education program like no other.

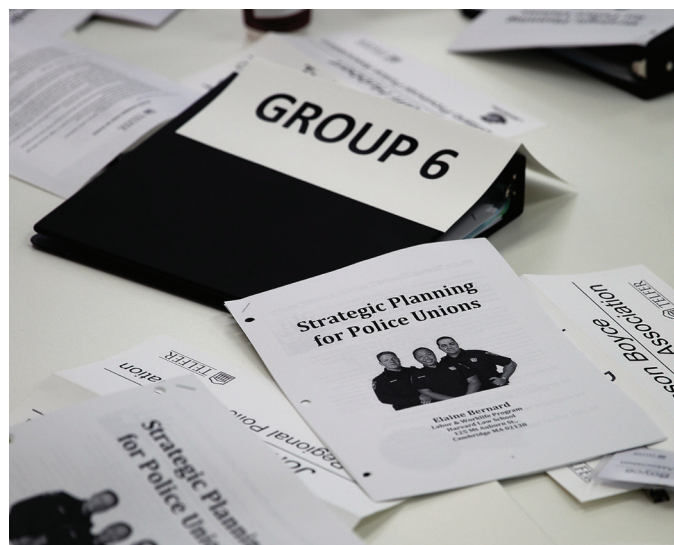
Not only did the CPA discover a suitable model for continuing education, it found an eager partner in what has become its popular Executive Leadership Program. The program is divided into three core modules covering a wide range of topics, including but not limited to leadership, strategic planning, governance, collective bargaining, dispute resolution, political action and contemporary legal issues. The program also offers master-classes for graduates on specific topics including such things as interest and grievance arbitration and member engagement, to name a few.

At its core, the Executive Leadership Program aspires to equip our graduates with the skills to respond to the changing pressures in the police sector. Intensified oversight, threats of restructuring or contracting out police functions, fiscal pressures in collective bargaining and increased activities by community groups are becoming more frequent issues for association leaders. We challenge our participants to design more comprehensive strategies in response, using all of the tools available to them.

As an example, one of our three core modules is dedicated to collective bargaining. In that module, we take a socially complex process – negotiations – and purposely break it into small, identifiable pieces. We then spend time considering the importance of each of these pieces; their individual strategic importance, and how we can modify or shape each with a view to our negotiation objectives. We spend considerable time assessing municipal fiscal conditions, employers’ perennial pronouncements on inability to pay, and the value of research and preparation. In doing so, we hope to give our participants a sense of how they can best frame and support their bargaining goals, how they can create power and leverage in the negotiation process, all in pursuit of a more successful outcome.

One of our overlapping themes in the core curriculum is the value of taking time to consider your organization’s purpose and direction. For many leaders, taking on greater levels of responsibility means inheriting the organization shaped by the leaders you follow. The pace and volume of work often limits your opportunity to stop and consider whether your organization’s structure and functions align with the interests of your membership, or respond effectively to the environment in which you are working. Investing a few days to focus on strategic

planning allows you to stop and identify the vulnerabilities and opportunities within your organization. My experience with strategic planning in police organizations is that it is often the first time the staff and/or directors sit down to focus exclusively on the threats they face, the weaknesses they may have as well as their strengths and opportunities. The value of this exercise is not always in the product of the strategic plan, but rather the time you spend with your team, pooling your thoughts and experiences. As General Dwight Eisenhower once said, “planning is everything, the plan is nothing.”



While we make considerable efforts to ensure that the content of the modules respond to the interests of our participants, we have a secondary interest in the delivery of the CPA Executive Leadership Program. Since the program’s earliest days, one of the consistent comments we hear is the value created in bringing together association leaders from across Canada. We have always been impressed at how quickly participants start to discuss important issues and share their experiences. Learning is not contained to the classroom, and the CPA program has been a success in creating connections from coast to coast and between large and small organizations. As we see more turn-over in association representation across Canada, the opportunities to learn together grow in importance.

Continuing education for labour leaders is not new, but its importance continues to grow. Challenges in the police sector, and the Canadian labour movement in general, will continue to test the skills, abilities and creativeness of our organizations’ leaders.

Bill Cole is a Senior Research Associate in the Labor and Worklife Program at Harvard Law School. His research interests include negotiations, dispute resolution systems and engagement. He is also the Chief Administrative Officer of the Ottawa Police Association. ♥