

## MYTHS & FACTS

**MYTH** We don't need unions anymore—working conditions are fine and everybody makes good money.

**FACT** Unions have been setting the bar for wages and working conditions since they were first created. Before unions, most people worked 12-hour days, six or seven days a week. Many worked in unsafe conditions. Children did the most dangerous work in factories and nobody got paid when they were sick.

Yes, things are better today. Everyone enjoys benefits—such as maternity leave, vacation pay, and protection from discrimination—that unions won through bargaining.

But not everything is rosy today. Employers keep people in part-time and temporary jobs to avoid contributing to government benefits. Young people work without pay as interns, without the protections paid employees enjoy. Unions still have an important role to play in building a fair and equitable society.

**MYTH** Unions make it impossible for employers to fire incompetent workers.

**FACT** Anyone who can be hired can be fired. No contract requires an employer to keep workers who are lazy, incompetent, break the law or chronically absent.

Unions do try to make sure that employers have “just cause” for dismissing employees. They also try to ensure that people are treated fairly regardless of their race, gender, disability or sexual orientation.

**MYTH** Unions make companies less efficient and profitable.

**FACT** Unions know very well that there are no good jobs without successful, profitable companies. Workers have a stake in keeping companies competitive, and unions play an important role in developing cutting-edge training and ensuring that people work in a safe environment. These are important factors that contribute to efficient, profitable, highly competitive companies.

**MYTH** Non-union construction workers make the same money as union workers... and they don't pay union dues.

**FACT** With a high demand for construction workers in Canada today, employers are paying high hourly wages. But recent studies show that union workers still earn about \$5 per hour more.

And that's not the whole story. Workers who don't belong to unions are often expected to work long shifts for weeks at a time without earning overtime. They rarely have benefits such as dental insurance, extended health care coverage and legal insurance. Pensions are almost non-existent.

**MYTH** Construction unions are old boys' clubs: you need connections to get in. If you're a woman, forget it!

**FACT** Teachers, lawyers, doctors... a lot of people follow the same career paths as their parents. It's not surprising that, in the past, construction workers often arranged for their sons to apprentice with journeymen they knew and trusted.

Yes, it was a man's world (so were law and medicine!), but that's not the case any more. Today many women are enjoying great careers in the building trades.

Unions strongly support workplace equality and fair hiring practices to ensure that job applicants are judged on their merits, not on their gender—or on the connections they have!

**MYTH** People who don't want unions are often forced to join and pay dues.

**FACT** That may seem unfair, but the fact is unions negotiate contracts on behalf of all the employees, not just those who voted for them. And everyone benefits when wages increase or benefits improve.

Taxes may seem unfair too, especially if you didn't vote for the party that forms the government. But we all benefit from the laws and services governments provide and we all have to pay for them. The same holds true in a unionized workplace.

The vast majority of our members come to the union hall, sign a membership card and pay an initiation fee to join the union, allowing them to benefit from training, education, mentoring and other support.

**MYTH Construction is for big, muscle-bound guys who don't have the smarts for other work.**

**FACT** Some trades did need strong men in the past, but technology has changed everything. Today the trades need bright people who are good with computers and can handle complex mechanical equipment. Modern tradespeople have strong math and writing skills, and can analyze problems and come up with creative solutions.

These jobs take skills, but they're not guy skills, just skills. Today, intelligence, creativity and training are highly valued, most of the muscle is provided by machines, and more and more women are finding rewarding careers in the building trades.

**MYTH Unions only care about themselves and don't mind inconveniencing everyone else by going on strike.**

**FACT** Strikes make headlines and can be inconvenient, but the truth is that today about 99% of labour agreements are successfully negotiated without strikes.

No union wants a strike, and no one is more inconvenienced by a strike than workers themselves—think of picketing in a snowstorm or trying to keep up with your bills without a regular pay cheque! Strikes develop when two sides cannot agree and workers believe the issues at stake are important enough to justify the sacrifice.

Far from caring only for themselves, unions have always worked to make gains that would benefit the whole community. The labour movement fought for the weekend, public health care and education, minimum wages, safe working conditions, pay equity, sick pay and pensions.

**Build Together is a national CBTU program that promotes, supports and mentors women in the skilled construction trades.**

In Canada women represent only 4% of the skilled construction trades workforce. As women working in the trades, we at Build Together see an opportunity and a responsibility to recruit and retain women into great lifelong careers in the trades. Great salaries, benefits and pensions, lifelong learning, advancement and job satisfaction: what's not to love?

**Join us and help us to continue achieving our goals!**

- Build partnerships and create a sponsor recognition program of like-minded organizations that have goals to further the success of women in the trades.
- Continue providing mentorship and support to apprentices, journeypersons, and women considering the trades.
- Continue challenging and debunking the existing myths and stereotypes of women in the trades.
- Continue providing awareness and exposure to careers in the trades.
- Launch a structured mentorship program specifically geared towards retention of women in the industry.
- Support and assist in the creation and operations of provincial Build Together programs through the CBTU's provincial councils across the country.

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