

Stephen Dempsey  
Opening Remarks (Beginning of Program)  
Building our Future, featuring Dianne Buckner  
December 13, 2005

My name is Stephen Dempsey and I am the President and CEO of the Greater Halifax Partnership.

I would like to welcome you here today to the fourth installment of this year's Building our Future speaker series.

I am pleased to be here this afternoon and am looking forward to hearing from our guest speaker Ms. Diane Buckner, business journalist and host of Venture.

Dianne will be more formally introduced later in the program.

As the economic growth organization for Greater Halifax, the Partnership is committed to stimulating discussion and debate on leading issues.

Today we're discussing the changing workplace.

The Greater Halifax Partnership's SmartBusiness initiative has conducted over 900 interviews with CEO's in the last 18 months.

The goal? To create the most competitive business climate in Canada.

We've been listening.

Listening and responding.

Helping business remove barriers and find opportunities for growth.

After 900 SmartBusiness interviews, Greater Halifax CEOs have told us that good work ethic and positive attitudes are not always evident in today's employees.

*(Slide 1)*

In fact, almost one in five companies visited listed these as skills that are difficult to find.

But does that mean Greater Halifax has a work ethic problem?

Are 900 CEOs wrong about today's worker?

Perhaps it's all in the interpretation.

The issue of work ethic has many dimensions

It can be viewed through many different lenses. Such as...

Demographic, generational, societal, historic and more...

Is it true that young people today are really only looking to test their skills in a market?

Is it just that for them, a market, not a job or a career.

In a recent survey, young employees indicated that their commitment and motivation at work is influenced less by base pay and more by promotion opportunities and flexible working conditions.

Does this represent a different set of values, where young people are more likely to consider leaving their current job?

Much of the older generation is on the opposite side of the fence.

So... Who's right, who's wrong?

Do young people lack motivation and loyalty?

Are older employers rigid and unwilling to let younger workers challenge the status quo?

I don't pretend to know all of the answers.

But, what I do know is that more than any other time in our history we need a skilled workforce

*(Slide 2)*

At 5.4 percent, our unemployment rate is amongst the lowest in the country.

The population of Nova Scotia is barely growing and in two recent years has actually declined.

Our population is also ageing. Within 20 years, 40 percent of our population will be over 55.

Skills in key areas are in high demand.

Areas such as the trades.

But it's also soft skills – skills that are not technical in nature - like communications, sales aptitude and loyalty that are in critical demand.

All of these factors, combined, could result in a perfect storm.

A perfect storm, resulting in a shortage of skilled workers.

How will we grow our economy without them?

So, we all need to work this out.

There is a lot at stake.

Whether it is perceived, or real, we need to bridge the generational divide found in organizations.

That is why we have brought Dianne here today to share her own perspective on employee loyalty and the changing workplace.

I encourage you to look at today's edition of The Chronicle Herald. You will find two pages dedicated to the topic of the changing workplace. You'll read about companies who are working on retention strategies, engaging their employees and evolving to respond to today's worker.

Finally, thanks to our Building Our Future partners – Presenting partner, The Chronicle Herald. Other partners: the Halifax International Airport Authority, Mount Saint Vincent University, Office Interiors and RBC Financial Group. For the important role you are playing in advancing our economy.

I would now like to call on Sarah Dennis, vice president,  
Brand and Content, The Chronicle Herald to bring greetings  
on behalf of our presenting partner.

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Thank you, Dianne

You have certainly given us a lot to think about today...

(Present Gift)

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Please stay tuned – we are working on an exciting line-up for next year.

Enjoy your afternoon.