

Scott Powell:

Hi. I'm Scott Powell, of Manitoba Hydro's Corporate Communications Department, and I'm here today with Shane Mailey, our Vice President of Operations. Hello, Shane.

Shane Mailey:

Hi, Scott.

Scott Powell:

We'll be taking some time today to talk to Shane about what his past year has been like from an Operational perspective here at Manitoba Hydro, and some of the initiatives his group will be focused on in the year ahead. We also have a few questions that we're going to ask Shane that many of you, our customers, submitted to us over the last couple of weeks. So, to start off Shane, could you tell us a little bit about what your team is responsible for, here at Manitoba Hydro?

Shane Mailey:

Thanks, Scott. Sure, I'd be pleased to. When you think of Operations at Manitoba Hydro, we're really the staff that you would envision having boots on the ground. They would be the people within Manitoba Hydro who are out at our generating stations, working on our transmission lines, on our distribution system or a natural gas system, who are operating and maintaining the equipment and infrastructure that we have there to serve our customers. I'm proud to say they would be the people that our customers and the public would see quite frequently. They would quite often be the people you see up in bucket trucks, whether it be stringing wires, or replacing old ones, possibly working along the sides of roads, either on natural gas pipes that need repair, or poles or insulators that are damaged. And also, of course, would be the people that would come to your house if you're experiencing a no heat call, and someone who would be very welcome, of course, at your door in that circumstance.

Essentially our responsibility is to provide safe, reliable energy to meet the evolving needs of Manitobans overall. And generally, with I would say would encompass what our core mandate is in Operations. That's not to say with those responsibilities doesn't come challenges. We're certainly no stranger to very cold weather. Our staff are accustomed to leaving their homes and their families in the middle of the night to attend to outages or emergencies. But, I'm proud to say they're very dedicated employees who work very hard to keep the gas flowing and the lights on, because we are a 24/7 essential service.

Scott Powell:

Thanks for that, Shane. I imagine this past year with COVID-19 has posed some special challenges for you and your staff as they work in the field.

Shane Mailey:

Yes, Scott, I can certainly attest that the pandemic has brought many challenges for our team. As I mentioned, our staff do operate critical infrastructure in a 24/7 environment, whether it be at our stations or out in the field. With Manitoba Hydro providing that essential service that I described to the province, we had to come up with a plan. Of course, we had to ensure that we were protecting the health and safety of both our employees and our customers as well.

I'll be honest, it was not simple or easy because it was a battle, as all Manitobans know, that we hadn't fought before. We weren't experienced with this type of emergency. Of course, we're accustomed to

responding to other types of emergencies, but this was a new one. With public health guidelines changing early on, which is understandable, and worldwide shortages of PPE and proper sanitization products, understanding what is the right physical distancing, we did have hundreds and hundreds of our work procedures that we had to review and modify to make sure that we are able to get the work done.

So reflecting, thinking early on in the first days and weeks, it was a process of quick adaptation. We certainly know a lot more now than we did, but fortunately I would say we've come together as the strong team we are, and using the knowledge and leaning on our public health authorities, as well as our internal teams within Manitoba Hydro, most importantly the plans I spoke to, we put right into action. And, I would say we made sure that we provided our workers, not just with the process and the tools, but the support behind it to make sure that they were both safe and functional.

If I was to summarize the question, Scott, a lot has changed in the timeframe since the pandemic hit. The adaptation and the changes that we've gone through have been significant, but we've been on a very steady and positive path. And, certainly the commitment and dedication of our staff has allowed us to grow stronger and serve our customers, despite the adversity of the pandemic, I would say.

Scott Powell:

Well, it certainly has been a very unique year, I'll say that, and many challenges faced by many Manitobans across the Province. We heard earlier, Shane, from Jay Grewal, our President and CEO, who introduced some of the foundational pieces of our long-term strategic plan, known as Strategy 2040, and why it's so critical that we put our customers at the center of everything we do going forward.

We also heard from Alex Chang, our Vice President of Customer Solutions and Experience, who talked about how his team will be working collaboratively with other divisions and departments right across Manitoba Hydro, in helping them to become even more customer centric. What does customer centricity mean to Operations and what changes do you see coming as a result of this renewed focus?

Shane Mailey:

I would say first off and foremost, it starts with acknowledging that every single employee at Manitoba Hydro, including our Operations staff, play an important role in serving our customers. No longer can we think of just the billing center or contact center as that customer piece. It's broader and encompassing across the whole corporation. So, part of my focus will be to help our team see that connection, both between the work that they do and the value we provide to our customers daily. This past year, we leaned more heavily on the data to assess how we are doing. We were able to access customer satisfaction data on the different services and touch points that we in Operations have with our customers.

One example that comes to mind is our tree trimming process. Often vegetation interferes with our poles or power lines, and of course we have to deal with it to ensure things are kept safe and to help prevent outages. But, this often involves us having to go on our customers' property. So, we worked with our Customer Solutions and Experience team to map out the customer journey on this tree trimming process. And, we looked at it from start to finish, from the first contact the customer may have, right through to if we're re-energizing the system and of course getting their lights back on.

What we did was, we did a deeper dive and looked a lot closer at the data to understand those pinpoints through that process from a customer perspective, and we were able to focus on the key drivers to improve that overall customer experience. We were able to make changes to the process to help that overall customer experience on the journey from the beginning to the end of the process.

That's just one example, I guess, of how Operations is looking to use the new tools and data to embrace and to improve that customer centric approach, as well as the mindset the customer may be in. At the end, this would allow us to better deliver our services, and allow us to prioritize our customer and what they would be experiencing on every step or every interface they may have with us in Operations.

Scott Powell:

Thank you, Shane. We'll now move on to some of the questions that we received from customers in the lead up to these public accountability meetings. Our first question for you, Shane, today comes from Eric, and Eric was wondering why there hasn't been any recruitment programs for power line technicians or other apprenticeship groups over the past little while.

Shane Mailey:

Well, Eric would be correct in his observation, Scott. We did take a pause in our recruitment efforts, which we would normally do to look at what training and employees we would require moving forward. And that essentially was, first and foremost, dealing with the impacts in respect to the pandemic and COVID-19, and what that meant to operations as a whole.

I am happy to say that our recruitment is back on. Recently on February 16, we did announce a call for applications to our Operations trainee programs. And, we are looking to recruit up to 100 people for these programs over the next year, 2021 and into 2022. Someone may ask, well, why the push now? The answer is fairly straightforward. We do look forward to see what skill sets and skilled workforce we would need to keep operations functioning properly for our customers. We would take into account attrition and the impacts of retirements moving forward, and what we've experienced over the last year or so.

And also, looking at the number of trainees who have either graduated or are soon to graduate to understand how the different trainees would progress through Operations. And also, a newly hired trainee would not be qualified, depending on the stream they're in, for up to five or six years. So, we need some time, obviously, to train and prepare them to meet those future needs.

In the coming years that we foresee, these are the numbers that we've established, hence why we're starting to recruit now. And, we're really excited and encourage anyone who's interested to potentially have a career at Manitoba Hydro in some of the areas, and I'll list them off, whether it be Power Electrician, Power Line Technician, Mechanical Technician, Protection Technician, or Telecontrol Technician, or our natural gas service personnel, to visit our career page on Manitoba Hydro's website, and submit your application if you have an interest, because we're really ramping up and looking forward to this.

Scott Powell:

Thanks Shane. In our call for questions, we received a question from a customer in rural Manitoba who was clearly frustrated by an unplanned outage of a significant length. Is there anything you can speak to, as far as improvements we might be looking at, in terms of our outage response and our communication to our customers?

Shane Mailey:

Yeah. Thanks for that, Scott. That's a very good question, and one I certainly can understand from our customer's perspective. No one, of course, ever likes to experience an unplanned outage. If I look at how our system has been built to be rigid and robust in its design and construction, along with how we of course try to be proactive in our maintenance to ensuring that the system is of course reliable and

safe in its operation, it is a very complex system, and things obviously do occur. It can be extreme weather, could be animal or bird contacts with our equipment, and we also experience pole fires or other events throughout the year that could cause an outage. We certainly understand the significance and importance, and of course time is of the essence.

Respecting that our customers do rely on uninterrupted power, whether it be at work or at home, knowing how important their energy needs are, we're very open to finding better and new ways to improve an outage response. And really, how we communicate with our customers is very important when reflecting on that.

Similar to previously answering the question you asked earlier about improvements and the like, one piece similar would be around the customer feedback mechanism we have available to us. Really, it tells us our customer satisfaction would go up when we're able to provide timely and accurate information when the power will be back on, and that's fully understandable.

This past year, we implemented some improvements in this area, specifically to how our dispatchers model an outage in our system, and that allows us to provide more precise information about an outage location to our field crews. With this information, our field crews can get to site faster and assess an outage, and also an estimate of restoration time. So, with this, we're now able to notify customers more quickly with more timely and accurate information. This might include the cause of the outage, the number of customers affected, and most importantly when the power will be back on.

In the past, I would say the focus has always been on just getting the power back on as fast as possible, which of course is still a priority for us, no doubt. But, moving forward, we'll also be looking to get the most accurate information to customers as fast as we can, as to the criteria I shared earlier.

Scott Powell:

Thanks for that, Shane. Certainly from a Communications perspective, I can absolutely attest that the additional information that your team puts together helps us to communicate with our customers much more effectively over various channels. One of the most important these days now being social media, where we can interact directly with customers on Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms, in order to keep them informed of the most recent developments on outages, in addition to having that information that's very current, up on our website. So, thanks for that.

I want to just say, Shane, thanks again for taking the time to join us today, and hope you have a great day.

Shane Mailey:

Well, thanks for the opportunity, Scott. My pleasure. Have a great day.