

CONSUMER AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

OF THE

REPRESENTATIVE POLICY BOARD

OCTOBER 21, 2024

MEETING TRANSCRIPTION

Naomi:

I am calling the meeting to order at 5:33. First we'll have our safety moment. Our safety moment for October is Health Literacy Awareness. This is just to help everybody understand their medical records and all their health information. It's also about communication and making great decisions. Also, access to your health services and health knowledge and beliefs. Also, it helps to have your information organized. But to make a long story short, I'm going to say that everyone should know what your PCP is. I'm not sure whether everybody's insurance has a gatekeeper. If you do, be sure to refer to your PCP. They can in turn refer you to someone. If you don't have a gatekeeper, you could go to any specialist that you want. You should also, if everybody has MyChart, that's a really helpful tool. Most of the hospitals in this area do use the EPIC system in MyChart so that really helps you get your information about your health, your records. It puts all your scans, your X-rays, it puts your medicine in there. So it does all kinds of things. But it also helps you to communicate with your providers. Because you could talk to them, send messages. Most of the times they respond. So those are just some little points to remember as well. Okay. Moving on to the next topic. Jennifer, do we have any members from the public?

Jennifer:

No, we don't.

Naomi:

Okay. This is where Liz comes in. Liz, are you on? Prem are you going to...

Prem:

I think I can take this session for today. So Liz was planning to be here. I'm sure she probably got caught up in something. So we can do a quick update, Naomi.

Naomi:

Okay.

Prem:

So very quickly, I just want to quickly run down some hybrid model and the discussion that we've been having. As you all know, we had gone into a whole hybrid model as soon as we got hit with COVID. So just to run a few stats. And please stop me if you have any questions. I'll try my best to answer. And if there's any follow-up, I could get Liz to answer the questions later on.

So we actually have around 310 employees, as of September 30th, who are actually very actively working as part of a hybrid model. Some statistics. Of the 310 employees, we have 19 employees who are part of our Wells Services company. As you all know, we have acquired three plumbing companies as

we went ahead with our acquisition, the M&As, that we had gone through. We have around 169 employees are management and 122 of them are Union Steelworkers, as you know.

In terms of our budget, we have close to 295 as our budget for the headcounts, and we are actually under the budget. So we are doing pretty well. We are 291 for our RWA employees. That is if you take out the 19 that I talked about for the Wells Services company.

In terms of our mixture of the hybrid model, just to give a little bit of the statistics on that, we are actually doing pretty well. 65% is our on-site full-time employees. Most of them are part of our union as you know, field services crew, much of it. And then we have much of our management employees, which is around 109 employees, which is a 35% of our overall employee rate.

The reason I said it's pretty good mix is because we also looked at in terms of how others are doing out in the industry. So you see a split of around 50-50, and as you all know, many of the employers are now are also looking at a model where while the roles which can perform hybrid can perform, but many of them are actually bringing back employees, as we see. Much of that is happening from a perspective of the industry mix that's out there. So our 65-35 is a good mix, we see, because the fact of the matter is that the productivity has been pretty good overall in terms of how we've been operating.

And then a couple other highlights I would hit. Our CSR, as you all know, we actually are preparing for our big CIS program that has been planned for April go-live. We actually have gotten our CSRs, I would say the whole customer care team, back for three days. If you remember when we got hit with the COVID, we went all remote because of situation that we were in terms of our public health, et cetera. We did bring them back for Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. So all of our customer care units are back these three days in the office, and they are working hybrid Mondays and Fridays just to give the flexibility. It is not bringing everybody back, but at the same time, having that balance.

And all other employees are actually back to work for two days a week, which is a good mix as well, depending on the business needs and based on whether they're part of, let's say, finance, HR, or IT shared services versus more customer facing. Customer-facing roles are more on site, and as we have started to do our business as usual. But we do have the flexibility and then the productivity has been pretty good.

In terms of monitoring performance, as you all know, we track our strategic goals, we look at our KPIs. So we've been doing pretty well in managing our KPIs, especially focused on our fiscal '25 goals this year. We are managing in terms of hitting our KPIs at the same time, making sure that the balance is working out for all employees.

So some of the benefits, if you go down a little bit, Jennifer. Some of the benefits that we have been seeing in terms of hybrid model, as you all know, there's a work-life balance for employees. Again, we've been cautiously monitoring also what others are doing, including our state, and then making sure there's a work-life balance.

And also, in terms of employee morale and engagement, I think it has been pretty good. I could compare ourselves pre-COVID times as to how we used to operate and how things were versus now in terms of this hybrid in the model and the flexibility that the employees have, whether it is a doctor's appointment, things of the sort that we kind of accommodate and make sure that we're improving our engagement with our employees.

I should say, if Liz was here, she would mention we are planning to do an employee engagement survey at the end of this year. That will be a good mark for us to see how pre-COVID versus post-COVID and how we have been improving on. So that's been planned. Liz is actually working on that.

And then obviously to retain top talent, we are working through making sure that looking at a succession plan, we are working through looking single point of failures.

And then as we are trying to get new people onto the board with RWA, we are making sure that there's a good mix of keeping the talent and also having experienced people from our team to impart that knowledge as well.

So overall, I think it's been a very good story for us. We believe there's an optimal balance and obviously as you could imagine, we do have quite a bit of bigger projects we are executing on. And keeping a balance is very important, so the employees are feeling fulfilled in both sides of the house in terms of coming to work and making sure they have a good balance in terms of their personal life.

So I hope I covered everything. I am not sure if I missed anything. But if there are any questions for me from any of our team members. If I can't answer, I'll bring it back to Liz and we can circle back as well.

Stephen:

Prem, this is Steve. I have a couple of questions.

Prem:

Go ahead, Steve.

Stephen:

The 65% of people who are full-time on site, do they have the option to work off site or do they have to be there?

Prem:

That's a great question, Steve. The biggest example we have is our field teams. While we cannot offer them to work from home, we do have other ways of finding flexibility. So we look at, for example, if there's a shift that works all the way through 4:30, we try to work and see if we can manage a shift to work at 3:00. So we are providing other kinds of flexibility based on how we can accommodate our extended team, because some of these roles are customer facing.

Another good example within customer care is, for example, reception. And we want the reception to be there when someone shows up. So things like that, there are certain roles, but we are trying to find flexibility. In that example, maybe a half an hour lunch is scheduled in a different way and we try to accommodate by having some backup plans. Flexibility might mean different for different roles that our customer facing, Steve. So they do have flexibility, but it's not the same hybrid where they can just work from home. Because the role just doesn't allow that.

Stephen:

But at least there's something for them. So I would think that would cut down on any dissatisfaction that people might feel who have to be there.

Prem:

No, absolutely.

Stephen:

The other question I have is, has this been an issue for the unions?

Prem:

I would say, when you say issue for the unions, we do not have an issue per se, but as you know, there are certain instances where... I'll give my own example of customer care. So we had brought in our teams for Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays working in person just to make sure that we are getting ready for our big project. And also we do have some younger folks in the team. Four of our new CSRs are pretty new to the team, so we want some cross-pollination, some training and education. So we had brought them in. So now what we are doing is we're trying to work with them in terms of flexibility, whether it's doctor's appointment and things of the sort. But overall, I think there is not a big challenge, and this is where Liz comes into play to help us if there's any attendance issues, et cetera.

To be honest with you, we had a lot of that pre-COVID. But then now with the flexible model, that's gotten quite a bit down. There are some exceptions. We are working through it, but overall it is not a huge issue per se. I think there is no impact. I'm proud to say that there's no impact in terms of our customer impacts. We are managing. There are days where we try to put more people on the phones, especially let's say a Monday because people are coming back after a weekend and there are more calls, versus there are days like Fridays, we take care of some of the back office work, so we are able to manage with them and have a balance. So we don't really have a lot of issues per se.

Stephen:

Yeah, I would imagine this wasn't an even thought of originally before COVID, and then it just happened and you responded to it.

Prem:

Yeah.

Stephen:

I just was wondering if it had any impact on the future discussions or contracts.

Prem:

To be honest with you, that's actually a great question. You all know, every company had gone through the same kind of challenges, and I still remember when we actually just went into the COVID phase and all of a sudden we had to turn everything to become a remote kind of a model and deploying devices and scheduling stuff for our customers to be in the safer hands and we still pick our calls, et cetera.

So it was a little bit of a learning, but then I think overall it went, I would say, pretty smoothly. And now I think we are now learning the new ways of flexibility, and again, I always tell this to the team that we have to be prepared for our bigger projects. One of the reasons why we wanted to bring the crew back is also to learn and play in this new system, et cetera, as well for customer care. On the field side, I would say, like I said before, we are trying to get more flexibility to the team, but in different ways because it doesn't mean the same for them because they're customer facing.

Stephen:

Great. Thank you.

Prem:

You're welcome. Any other questions for me?

Naomi:

Prem, for the 109 people that are hybrid, are they going to be coming on board when we start the new system?

Prem:

Yeah, no, I think it's a great question, Naomi. The way that I look at for the hybrid people, they will be coming in, but we will still have the flexibility. Because one of the worries we have is, as you all know, our teams wear multiple hats. And I always say this, because of the fact that they wear multiple hats, it's not easy for us to say that one hat can be remote and one of the hats has to be in person. So we don't really have a balance. And we will still provide the flexibility. The 109 might come back, but they will still on a hybrid model. So it's not that they're going to be here all the time, five days a week. And to be honest with you, I think it'll be tough to manage that way because there will be employee turnovers as all people out there, they want flexibility. And if we make that as a hard and fast rule, then you're going to start seeing losing people. We don't want that. So we have to continue our operations.

All of the time we talk about this because if you think about it, finding a person with one hat itself is tough. Now you're talking about multiple hats, so it gets really, really hard. So we need to keep that balance, and we can't just have a hard and fast rule that everybody's going to be in. So we'll still have a flexibility. And [inaudible 00:19:12] had been very much a proponent for that. And you want to make sure there's a healthy balance. So that's the plan.

Hopefully that answers your question Naomi.

Naomi:

Yep. Anybody else have any more questions for Prem? Okay.

Prem:

Okay. Thank you, everyone.

Naomi:

Thank you, Prem.

Stephen:

Thanks.

Naomi:

Can I get an approval of last month's meeting minutes please?

Stephen:

So moved.

Charles:

I could second it. It's Charles.

Naomi:

Thank you. It has been moved by Steve and seconded by Charles. Ready for the question? All those that are in favor, let it be known by saying aye or nay.

Committee members:

Aye.

Naomi:

Aye. Okay, it's a motion. Moving on to the report from Jeff.

Jeff:

Hi, good evening everybody. The main thing that I worked on in the last month was of course the issuance test rate application. We don't have any pending escalated consumer complaints or consumer issues, so fortunately it's nice and quiet right now. No pending applications. Nothing really much to report on. Thank you.

Naomi:

Oh, thank you. Could I get an approval of Jeff's invoice for September?

Stephen:

So moved.

Naomi:

Can I get a second?

Charles:

I'll second that too.

Naomi:

Okay. It's been moved and seconded. All those that are in favor, let it be known by the saying aye or hand show.

Committee members:

Aye.

Naomi:

All those that are opposed have the same right. Seeing none, hearing none. It's a vote. Dana, did you want to say anything or add anything?

Dana:

No, not at this time. I think they covered the onsite hybrid very well. That was all. Prem hit all those high points and I'm just happy that I don't have any escalations for Jeff. The team has been doing a great job as we're trying to mitigate and address them in real time so that they don't get to that level. So, thank you.

Naomi:

Okay, thank you. And thank you Jeff as well for not bringing anything to our attention.

Jeff:

Sure.

Naomi:

Any new business from anyone? I just want to mention to everyone that Jennifer did send out an email regarding donations for the United Way. So if anybody wants to make a donation, be sure to get it to Jennifer as soon as possible.

Jeff:

Hey, Jennifer, could you send me that email too, please?

Jennifer:

Yes, I'll get that out to you.

Jeff:

Thank you.

Naomi:

Okay, our next meeting will be on Monday, November the 18th at 5:30 P.M. Okay. If all minds and hearts are clear, could I get a motion for adjournment?

Stephen:

So moved.

Charles:

Second.

Naomi:

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Thank you. Well, everyone have a great evening.