

OPENMIND

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On behalf of Merit Contractors Association, welcome to the 2010 edition of *Open Mind* magazine.

Although most industries went through a very difficult year in 2009, many signals indicate the economy is improving and surveys show there is more optimism with what 2010 and 2011 will bring.

While the construction sector may still struggle with tight bottom lines, lower work volumes and reduced profit margins,

there are some very positive signals in areas related to natural resource development, housing and infrastructure.

Contractors now, more than ever, must focus on becoming more competitive through productivity gains, increased collaboration, and tighter controls to ensure success and to be well positioned when our work volumes return.

In this issue of *Open Mind* we examine various topics that will help contractors be better prepared for the future.

Increasing government infrastructure spending and public/private partnerships present both challenges and opportunities to the industry. Being involved in the building of many new public projects such as new educational facilities, health centres and road infrastructure under non-traditional funding models may be more prevalent in the future as governments work their way out of the recession.

Customer service and good client maintenance is something all of us can improve on. In this issue, you will find an article discussing how you can create a lasting and beneficial relationship with your clients to promote repeat business and a loyal client base. Other key issues examined are the importance of cash flow to any contractor's business and how Merit's group insurance benefits plan provides a great and cost-effective program for your employees. The tips in these articles will give you some easy steps to increase your cash flow and boost net margins.

The controversial topic of mandatory union dues being used to advance the political agendas of union leaders is also discussed in the article "More Than Their Due." This topic is becoming of greater importance as unions are increasingly trying to influence the outcome of provincial elections in Canada.

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Open Mind*, Canada's only open shop magazine dedicated to construction industry news and topics.

Stephen Kushner
PRESIDENT
MERIT CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION