

Trust and Openness at Work

The story of *Arc-en-saison*, a residential maintenance firm in Montreal

BY ANDRÉ ROBERGE

I OWN A SMALL BUSINESS IN Montreal and I chose to base it on the Economy of Communion guidelines. It is called *Arc-en-saison*, (Season's rainbow) and it deals with residential maintenance. The company's primary goal is to enable people to keep their homes and businesses in good condition. As part of our services, we mow lawns, trim hedges, do landscaping, paint the exterior and interior of houses and remove snow. I also work as the caretaker of a factory.

I was already involved in the Focolare's New Humanity Movement when, in 1991, Chiara Lubich proposed a new way of doing business. Since the 1970s I had been searching for a way to help build a more just society, but I questioned the models proposed. The way things were done made me see that the gap between the rich and the poor was only widening.

Furthermore, I rarely saw any proposals that took into account a person's dignity or their desire to live happily. It seemed that the only proposals that made any sense were those that were introduced with the



André Roberge with his wife, Celine

ultimate goal—whether one admitted it or not—of increasing production, both at the level of management and labor, in order to satisfy an insatiable thirst for profit. I knew this could not be the answer!

I saw that the EoC indeed was the answer to my deepest questions in this sphere, giving me the tools to act upon them. It conformed with the social doc-

trine of the Catholic Church and also provided the means to embody that doctrine within a business. This discovery gave me the answer to my 20-year search. I became very enthusiastic.

In September 2001, I had the opportunity to start my own company. I decided to base it on the ideology and spirit of the EoC and to create an atmosphere of trust and openness at work.

About six months ago, a client offered me the position of caretaker for one of his companies. After we visited the building, he asked me how much I would charge him. Not feeling I had the knowledge and expertise to give him a price, I told him so. After a few minutes, he suggested that I do the work for a month, at which time I would establish a pay rate that he would agree to.

I began to work at his building, following the written job description given to me by my client, doing no more, no less. During this period, my client's employees were amazed by the quality of our work. Previously, competing companies had not provided the work that reflected the price they had quoted.

At the end of the month, I presented my final figures to the owner, but he told me it was almost twice the sum he had paid in the past and said it was too expensive. I replied

honestly and openly that the estimate proposed was fair, and if he wanted to keep his factory clean those were the tasks that had to be carried out and that was the price he would need to pay. The next day he called me to his office and offered me the contract, saying that dependability and honesty had no price. We adjusted my submission slightly, and I accepted the contract. 

STELLA VISCHER

“I had been searching for a way to help build a more just society ... I saw that the EoC was the answer to my deepest questions ... giving me the tools to act upon them.”