Worker Direction: Philosophy & Practice

Purpose

Worker Direction is our approach to building a workplace culture that prioritizes democracy, participation, proper incentives, and mutual respect. It draws on the **7 Principles of Cooperatives** and aims to give workers genuine influence over decisions that affect their work and their community. This, and all kinds of democracy, **require participation**. While we can't control how or if people will choose to participate, **we can make the opportunities** possible.

Philosophy

For Worker Direction to thrive and participation to be possible, it is necessary to;

- **Prioritize a Living Wage**; participation is only possible if needs are met

- **Build an accessible framework** that people can be a part of; we need the right tools and clear rules

- **Foster an environment of good faith** in which people can freely participate; trust can be hard, so we should work hard to create it

We hope that by building with these principles in mind, we can create an environment where people can be actively involved in the development and direction of the organization they are a part of. This involvement can serve several purposes that will strengthen the group, develop the organization, and help the individuals taking part in it to grow personally and professionally. The systems and tools of Worker Direction should serve to teach the skills and wisdom necessary to be a good citizen in the Democratic Membership of that organization if the individual chooses to pursue that path in the future. For those who are already a part of the Democratic Membership of the organization, these systems can allow them to teach and guide aspiring participants, include everyone, and help the organization they are building Flourish.

Worker Direction, using the guiding principles listed above, is something we believe is needed in our modern times in order to help dispel the fear and cynicism that has been instilled in our culture by decades of stagnant wages, workplace abuses, and a general mistreatment of the working class. Workers have learned not to trust leaders because, for generations, they have been burned. This culture is self-reinforcing as well because of human nature.

Why We Need It

Workers today often carry deep mistrust toward leadership due to decades of:

- **Stagnant wages** and rising living costs.

- **Exploitative scheduling** that prevents work-life balance.

- **Limited mobility** and a lack of career growth opportunities.

- **Decision-making without worker input**.

This cycle reinforces cynicism: workers expect poor treatment, and leaders, sometimes in self-defense, adopt the same harmful practices they once disliked.

Worker Direction breaks this cycle by creating a reliable path toward trust, transparency, and shared responsibility.

The Two Paths for Leaders

When a new worker joins the workforce and strives to excel, they will quickly realize how unfair the landscape is, especially if they come from a middle-class or lower socioeconomic background. They will see policies like

- Erratic week-to-week scheduling shifts that serve to prevent them from taking time off or building their life
- Pay that isn't keeping up with the costs of living
- Dead ends that keep them trapped
- Policies that are designed to keep them placated while not acknowledging contributions/thoughts.

These experiences lead to a deep frustration and animosity towards those they naturally see as causing this problem. Those in control of these companies. It becomes an expectation that leaders will treat them this way because that is what they've experienced.

Now, imagine a person is starting a business. This person is someone who understands the struggles and abuses of the current business landscape towards workers, but managed to save up enough and got a loan. They're trying to create something that they feel is "good". They hire some workers to help once the business is started.

Sooner or later, they will encounter the results of that culture that has been cultivated by the same abuses they endured. It may manifest as people being afraid to talk to them, but instead gossiping and feeling frustrated. It could be people transferring frustrations they held towards abusing leaders in their past to this new workplace, and being ready to fight or defensive because they've been taught to expect unfair treatment and retribution.

When a leader encounters this inherited workplace cynicism, they can take one of two routes:

1. **The Good Path:**
   Commit to understanding what's happening and intentionally build a culture of trust and good faith repeatedly, with every new person who joins.

2. **The Bad Path:**
   Harden against perceived hostility, become defensive, and slowly adopt the same policies that erode trust.

Worker Direction exists to make the *Good Path* easier, providing tools, principles, and practices that keep compassion and understanding at the core of leadership.

Core Principles

- Prioritize a Living Wage.

- Build an accessible framework for involvement.

- Foster an environment of good faith.

Goals

- Build trust and good faith between all participants.

- Make participation in decision-making easier and more rewarding.

- Teach and reinforce good communication skills.

- Replace cynicism with compassion.

- Reward bravery and initiative, both economically and socially.

- Teach organizational and leadership skills.

- Prepare people for cooperative membership.

- Prepare organizations to adopt worker-owner models.

In Practice at Beanchain

We are actively developing a Worker Directed Model with systems that can serve as a template for other businesses. In order for this model to be effective and easy to implement, we'll need to define some clear practices that make the basic framework for this model. Below, we'll talk about the practices we use currently, the programs we've built, and the basic framework we feel is required for Worker Direction to operate smoothly.

Basic Framework

We want to **build an accessible framework** that people can be a part of. We need the right tools and clear rules regarding how that framework operates. Additionally, the **participants in that framework need to understand how it works**. You can't play a game that you don't know the rules of. If one person doesn't understand how it works, that will make it hard for everyone else and frustrating for all parties involved. For this reason, an important first step is to ensure that participants know everything they need to know in order to be competent participants in this Worker Directed Framework.

Participation Certification

For the Beanchain, we are going to ask that interested parties show understanding and proficiency in a couple of areas before being allowed to participate in any Worker Direction. Those areas of focus are:

1. **Worker Direction:** They will need to completely understand the philosophy of worker direction and how it is being put into practice here at the Beanchain. We will provide

documentation and be available to them as a resource whenever they want to talk about it.

To prove their understanding of this topic, they will need to reach out and schedule a meeting with a Member / Founder at the Beanchain, in which their knowledge will be tested.

2. **Solution Seeking System:** The Solution Seeking System is the primary mode of problem solving and a foundation for teamwork and good communication. We use this as the backbone of our leadership practices at the Beanchain and as a tool for coaching people towards healthier team and interpersonal communication. For us to build more democratic practices in the workplace, we'll need a lot of good faith, understanding, and careful communication.

To prove their understanding of this topic, they will need to reach out and schedule a meeting with a Member / Founder at the Beanchain, in which their knowledge will be tested.

Once an interested party has shown complete understanding of these topics, they will be granted permission to participate in all aspects of the Worker Direction Model here at the Beanchain.

Practices

● **Living Wage Commitment:**
One of the many barriers to participation in anything is poverty and the stresses it introduces into our lives. We aim to eliminate that by continuing to move towards a living wage until we achieve it. At that point, we will remain committed to ensuring our base wages match the living wage for any area in which a Beancain is located. So a Beanchain in a more expensive area to live in should have a higher base wage that matches the needs of its workers and members.

● **Platform for Purpose:**
We continually ask our workers what the Beanchain can do to help serve their mission in life. We work to find ways we can help them serve that mission if it's something that is compatible with the Beanchain's values and can be served with our resources. The benefits of this are that it provides a way to allow workers to start taking leadership roles on projects, allows us to help directly serve goals that will motivate our workers, and helps to start building trust.

● **Better Tools for Communication:**
We work hard to find the best tools for communication and teamwork in order to make it that much easier for good communication to actually happen. The hardest part will always be the human element: bravery, vulnerability, patience, and good faith. But with

the right tools, we can remove more barriers

- **Discord** – primary communication platform

- **Miro** – collaborative whiteboard

- **Google Drive** – shared files and docs

- **Dropbox** – media collaboration

- **Notion** – project management and documentation

- Additional voting, brainstorming, and proposal tools

- **The Solution Seeking System**
  A structured, compassionate framework for leadership and problem-solving.
  - Uses the **Communication Protocol**:

    - Introspection

    - Mutual Understanding

    - Solution Seeking

  - Supports **Living Systems**; organizations that adapt and improve continuously.

  - Provides **Wisdom Principles** that support the operation of this philosophy

  - **Leadership tools** at Beanchain:

    - Feedback

    - One-on-Ones

    - Targeted Conversations

    - Formal Solution-Seeking Sessions

Programs

1. Work Teams
We build work teams around certain scopes of responsibility. We have a Marketing team right now that is our flagship team. Anyone who works with us can join the team to participate in its projects, and they get paid for attending meetings, doing work, and have the opportunity to take on special roles within those teams as well. These are living teams that are shaped by the people who participate in them. We hope they will serve as a template that others can follow to allow for greater collaboration with co-workers, whether they are on the path towards being a cooperative or a standard business

Teams serve many purposes and are probably the most direct representation of Worker Direction in action. Below are a few examples of what we accomplish with our teams.

- Open to all workers.

- Paid participation in meetings and projects.

- Opportunities for special roles and leadership growth.

- Benefits:

    - Build business skills

    - Co-develop the organization

    - Strengthen teamwork and communication

    - Expand capacity and speed of growth

    - Improve relationships across the team

2. Recycled Knowledge
Workers who want to seek education regarding a topic that can help them excel in their role or somehow benefit the greater organization can request that the education's cost be covered by the organization.

The requirements of participating in this program are:
- Be dedicated to those studies
- Ensure the information is helpful to the organization and can be applied here
- Teach interested parties in the organization what you've learned

- ○ Build detailed reports, supplementary information, and whatever else is needed for people in the organization to benefit from the information in the future.
- ○ Properly store and organize the information in a useful way
- ○ Host workshops or classes on the materials, if possible

We wanted a way to help people grow in knowledge while ensuring that it benefited the whole team and potentially the greater community. This program began in our Marketing Team, and after seeing some success with it, we decided to make it an official practice. It's also a great way to enact Principle 5 of the Cooperative Principles.

3. Forums

This tool allows for discussion and proposals, which are an important part of our toolset. We wanted to encourage people to voice their opinions, ideas, and any thoughts they may have about improving our efforts in the shop. This is another channel that people can use to start conversations with each other and the Members. It enables members to guide the conversation and assist in crafting an effective and actionable proposal. It also allows for philosophical discussions that may serve to enhance everyone's understanding of a practice within the shop.

- Accessible for all workers.

- Encourage participation in democratic processes.

- Allow philosophical discussions to deepen understanding.

- Benefits:

  - ○ Provide a voice for all

  - ○ Foster collaborative proposal development

  - ○ Encourage best communication practices

  - ○ Capture collective experience for better decision-making

4. Bounties

This program allows workers to pick up units of work that need to be done and get rewarded for completing them! This can serve as a more free-form way to make opportunities available for the team and can work nicely in conjunction with the Forums program as a place where we can put jobs proposed in that space. It can also be a way that Teams, like the Marketing Team, can allow others to help them with certain tasks.

For a unit of work to be well defined, it needs to have:
1. Name
2. Description

3. Requirements
4. Reward

It may need to have more than what's listed here, but that is the minimum requirement for a Bounty to be workable.

When people are working on a Bounty, they will need to use the comments section of the Bounty to log progress and post artifacts of their work. Things like documents, images, drafts, and final versions of work should all be posted in the Bounty comments section. Conversations can be had there that help further the effort.

The resources generated by the work on that Bounty should be stored properly in an appropriate file. This should be defined in the Requirements section of the Bounty so that it's clear for whoever is working on it.

Conclusion

Worker Direction is about creating the conditions where everyone can participate meaningfully in shaping their workplace. At Beanchain, it is both our philosophy and our practice, a living experiment in workplace democracy that we're refining so others can replicate it.