

## Takin' Care of Business: On the Second Cooperative

### Principle in My Community and Life

Democratic member control is an All-American concept, despite the idea being founded in England, and implemented internationally. The Rochdale cooperative principles were created as an ideal for the operation of co-operatives. The Rochdale Society of Equitable Engineers formed the cooperative principles in Rochdale England in 1844, combating poor working conditions and low wages. The cooperative principles are as follows; voluntary and open membership, democratic member control, member's economic participation, autonomy and independence, education, training, and information, cooperation among cooperatives, and concern for the community. By way of forming a business to treat members with respect, they formed the cooperative movement. They established democratic member control as a primary means of creating an honest business with equal opportunity. Members of a cooperative are defined by their compliance with membership requirements, such as monthly economic contributions and participation in democratic meetings. The seven principles were adopted by the International Cooperative Association. The principles have been slightly modified through the years, but the founders' intent is yet explicit. The second cooperative principle lays out that cooperatives must be democratically controlled by the members. Each member gets a vote, and members must be involved in policy and decision-making. When leadership boards are created, those elected to represent must be members of the cooperative. Democracy in the workplace sets cooperatives apart from most businesses. The requirements surrounding democratic control of a cooperative have strengthened and maintained the integrity of cooperatives worldwide.



Democratic control of cooperatives influences my community in multiple ways. The Rock Energy Co-op hosts annual meetings that all members are invited to, and they are encouraged to share their opinions on meeting matters. Soon, members will vote in the director elections for districts 2, 4, and 9. Directors decisions help cooperatives to run smoothly. The community of members deciding on a board of directors ensures that the directors chosen will have the community's most wanted qualities and goals. Important aids are provided through policies made by caring representatives, elected by a caring community. Community outreach is done, such as blood drives, vaccination clinics, and member appreciation breakfasts. Strong efforts are made to assist local youth, providing internships, scholarships, apprenticeship programs, and sending teens to the Youth Leadership Conference. Policies are also made to keep member fees down and to offer payment options; such as low-income assistance. Rock Electric community members are interested in solar and wind power, and my local energy cooperative is working to assist with those services. Co-ops encourage members to participate in other democratically run organizations, such as voting in government elections. Cooperatives create programs to inform voters to support their co-ops and communities. Importantly, co-ops are nonpartisan and will never endorse a political party or candidate. Cooperative principles have a strong beneficial impact on the inner workings of my community.

Cooperation has been an integral part of my life in sports, school assignments, 4-H, interactions with peers, student council, and the performing arts. A musical theater performance is a beautiful story of cooperation. People work together in every aspect of the production. The cast bounces ideas for the best line delivery off each other, perfects choreography, and learns to mesh their voices together when they sing. Musicians work with the actors to develop cues and pacing that are attainable for those singing, creating balance and interest in the music. The stage



crew learns every scene's needs, opening curtains, wheeling out sets, and taking care of props, while simultaneously keeping the cast in check and fixing every minute mishap. The lighting and sound crew create the ambiance of the show, and they work together seamlessly despite often being separated across the room. Similar to a cooperative, these parts of a production collaborate on decisions made and often compromise for the benefit of the group.

Attending the youth leadership conference hosted by the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association taught me how co-ops cooperate locally, statewide, nationwide, and internationally. Electric cooperatives send linemen to different districts when outages occur, leaders attend statewide meetings to discuss Wisconsin power-related issues, and they provide electricity to rural parts of poorer countries. Cooperation among cooperatives is one of their principles, and it has proven to be vital to their success. The conference also taught me how co-ops benefit my life in ways I had previously been unaware or oblivious. Co-ops offer jobs to my neighbors, care for my community, and well-priced products. My neighbors are down-to-earth, intelligent people, and while attending the youth conference and meeting the adult representatives and speakers I recognized how similar they were. I gained trust in cooperatives knowing that people similar to them are in charge. The second cooperative principle impacts my community and my life in truly meaningful ways, and attending the youth leadership conference opened my eyes to that fact. Just like the Bachman-Turner Overdrive 1973 hit, cooperatives have been takin' care of business utilizing the second cooperative principle for centuries.