

What Is Different About Being a Member?

SUMA is a workers' co-operative. The members of the co-operative collectively own the business. All members are responsible for the operation, management and therefore the state of the business. Members must be both workers, doing their daily jobs, and managers, organising the business.

Only when this responsibility is shared can the business succeed. There are no managers to fall back upon. We must avoid the extreme of some individuals over- exploiting themselves whilst resentment ferments towards those who do the minimum but accept the benefits of membership. Someone who "keeps their head down and gets on with the job" may be an excellent worker but a poor member. Someone who contributes little to their daily jobs but does much management is equally a poor member because they rely on others to do their daily work.

Applicants for SUMA membership must be willing and able to learn sufficient management skills, and hold the necessary personal values, to take part as a member. This is separate from the work skills which all SUMA workers, members and employees, should possess.

Management skills include being a responsible worker who constantly improves the efficiency of your job and work systems and communicates improvements to your colleagues. In contrast to the "jobs worth" employee.

Management skills include being an effective co-ordinator or company officer who builds a productive team, maintains equipment and facilities, monitors and reviews work output and plans for future improvement. In contrast to keeping things "ticking over".

Management skills include taking part in meetings and discussions with constructive suggestions and reasoned reports and arguments. The two major places are General Meetings and Management Committee. But many other opportunities for involvement exist. In contrast to negative or cynical attitudes and behaviour or apathetic non-involvement.

SUMA members must share these personal values.

- trust
- respect
- co-operative behaviour
- responsibility
- self-motivation

TRUST: Our collective working structure requires mutual trust. We need to feel that each individual is pulling their weight and working to the best of their ability for the collective good of the business. Morale suffers badly when people are seen to be abusing the system.

RESPECT: Members must respect each other, even if we dislike the way others work, or the opinions they hold. Diversity is a strength. Change must result from open discussion and agreement and not from bullying or manipulation.

RESPONSIBILITY: Everyone must share responsibility for all aspects of the business, both in our own work areas and elsewhere in SUMA. We are all owners of this business. We all affect the morale and the profitability of the business by the way we work personally and the commitment

and involvement we show in the management of our departments and the whole business.

SELF-MOTIVATION: Members must be self-motivated, set their own personal standards, continually assess and improve their own performance and seek out improvements in their own work areas and in the business as a whole. SUMA members should act with individual initiative and collective responsibility.

CO-OPERATIVE BEHAVIOUR: Working for the collective good whilst protecting yourself.

- Openness, willingness to communicate, not hoarding but actively sharing knowledge and power.
- Sharing desirable jobs, training cover people and successors to ensure continuity.
- Taking active part in debate, discussion and decision making.
- Seeking and using extra responsibility when needed by the Co-op,
- Working as a team member but taking individual initiative and collective leadership.
- Putting right what you find wrong and changing the system to avoid future errors,
- Taking decisions if the “correct” person is unavailable, not “It’s not my job.”
- Pioneering new ideas and jobs for the good of the collective.
- Accepting and learning from your own and other members’ failures, seeking personal development and training to improve personal efficiency and to take on more demanding jobs.
- Accepting and fulfilling democratically decided decisions and democratically given authority.

A member sees SUMA as their own possession shared with all other members. A member sees a long term shared future at SUMA. A member expects to make personal sacrifices and to receive rewards of many different kinds in return i.e. what is good for SUMA is good for the members as a group and as individuals. This is the exact opposite of most other workplaces.

Members expect to change and develop over the years, for the needs of the business and for personal development. SUMA cannot function without “multi-skilled” members who are ready and willing to “fill the gaps”. This is our competitive advantage over normal businesses staffed by inflexible specialists.