

Pay cheque to pay cheque

By Brian Lockhart

On January 1, when the calendar flipped over to a new year, the minimum wage in Ontario rose to \$14 per hour and will eventually go up to \$15 per hour in 2019.

There has been a lot of debate about this new legislation, with some claiming it has to be done to ensure workers are paid a fair and living wage while citing the benefits of more money earned means more money going back into the economy.

On the flip side, many small business owners claim the mandated wage increase will force them to reduce hours, hire fewer employees, and raise their prices to compensate for the additional expense.

There is of course, merit on both sides of the argument.

People should be paid a decent wage ? this isn't some Third World country where children are sent to work in textile mills for six cents per day. You work to pay your bills, put food on the table and gas in your car.

A job is an exchange of services, you're not there to do a favour for someone.

On the other side, some small businesses do exist on very thin profit margins, with only a few employees and skate by every month just managing to keep afloat. For them, a wage increase could impact their daily operations.

The real problem is some companies will not compensate their employees fairly unless they are absolutely forced to.

While some smaller businesses do what they can, and pay what they can, it's the profitable big money makers that refuse to offer more than the absolute minimum that should be under the scrutiny of the public ? not the guy running a small pizza outlet.

Several years ago, in 2010, I was between jobs and looking for something local. A brand new store was opening and advertised available positions.

I was very suited for one job in particular. It was a supervisory position that required past experience as a supervisor in this type of business. It required several qualifications in which I had experience as well as a business school background.

During the interview they reviewed my resumé and offered me the job.

The interviewer brought out a folder of legal papers to get the ball rolling then informed me that because it was a supervisory position they would pay a little more - \$10.50 per hour.

I informed him that a recent national survey indicated the average rate at a company of that size for this position was actually about two and a-half times what they were offering.

I got a blank stare and ?do you want the job or not??

During the orientation for new employees, we were told that the company values its employees so much that we were going to be getting a full hour for lunch each day. That sounds great until you realize that you now lose one hour's pay per day and at the end of the week you only get paid for 35 hours ? another cheap way for the company to save a few bucks.

Knock off taxes, EI, and CPP, and your pay cheque is about the same as an average 10-year-old gets from their relatives in cash for a birthday.

The real kick in the head came when the General Manager proudly announced with his Cheshire cat grin, that headquarters expected this store to be very successful and predicted, in 2010, that it would do about \$54 million in sales.

I lasted about two months before deciding I had better get serious and look for a ?grown up' job.

It's great that companies can be profitable, make money, and employ people, but for crying out loud, stick a crowbar in the corporate wallet and pry it open and don't be so cheap ? especially when paying employees a livable wage means the fat cats at the top will still be raking in millions.

Minimum wage laws are there for a reason. While many companies value their employees and share the wealth and prosperity of a good business model, others simply consider low-end employees to be nothing more than easily replaced chattel.

It's unfortunate that a society such as ours has to have government involvement in business at this level.

However, ask the kid in the textile factory in a country that doesn't have a minimum wage law what they think and you might get a totally different perspective.