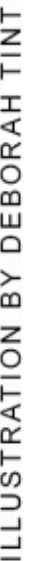


January 25, 2022



In July, mandatory member labor returned to the Coop for the first time since the pandemic began. It was not, however, a return to the system that had kept the Coop running for decades. Gone were the giant ledgers filled with workslots; gone were the

squads with the same people bagging dried fruit or stocking inventory or cleaning the walk-in freezers together throughout the year; gone were recurring shifts altogether. Members, suddenly, were all placed on the Future Time Off Program (FTOP), responsible for scheduling their own shifts each cycle. (A new name for these work assignments is forthcoming; until then it's FTOP all the way down).

Mercifully, the Coop had developed a way to make the change easier on the members: a brand-new online shift-scheduling calendar that debuted during the pandemic. I spoke with Ann Herpel, a General Coordinator, and Matt Hoagland, a Membership Coordinator, about how the new system was developed. We spoke via video conference, with Herpel and Hoagland in separate offices in the Coop. Hoagland wore a hockey jersey and a high-quality respirator; Herpel's video signal wasn't working, but her voluble, upbeat voice came through loud and clear.

Herpel said that plans for putting shift scheduling under the Member Services tab on the Coop's website had been in the works for years, but it took the disruptions of the past two years to get it off the ground. "The pandemic makes you innovate right on the spot," she said. By fall 2020, the new calendar was ready for its first trial run, just as members were invited back to work in the Coop on a voluntary basis. (I signed up for several of those early shifts, most of them outdoors, and it was a dream: as many cart return shifts as you could schedule, week after week.) "It was like having a big test group to help us improve software and user interface and instructions and everything," Herpel said. "So probably the rollout was a little smoother than if had we just gone from zero to a hundred in one day."

"THE PANDEMIC MAKES YOU INNOVATE RIGHT ON THE SPOT."

GENERAL COORDINATOR, ANN HERPEL

By mid June 2021, the system was ready to handle the full return of member labor. In

contrast to the old system of four-week cycles, members were at first only required to work every seven weeks, then six, and now five. Today, if you sign up for a shift online, you'll have the chance to filter by committee and time of day. You can sign up for a shift the same day (up to a half hour before the shift) or 27 days in the future, and you can cancel up until 8 p.m. the night before. To incentivize people to sign up for less desirable workslots, like early-morning truck unloading, some are designated "carrot shifts"—complete enough of them, and you'll get an extra work credit.

← Previous Week

Thu 1/20/2022	Fri 1/21/2022	Sat 1/22/2022	Sun 1/23/2022	Mon 1/24/2022	Tue 1/25/2022
5:00am Stocking 📦	5:00am Lifting 🚚	5:00am Lifting 🚚	5:00am Lifting 🚚	5:00am Lifting 🚚	5:00am Lifting 🚚
5:00am Stocking 📦	5:00am Lifting 🚚	5:00am Lifting 🚚	5:00am Lifting 🚚	5:00am Lifting 🚚	5:00am Lifting 🚚
5:30am Lifting 🚚	5:00am Lifting 🚚	5:00am Lifting 🚚	5:00am Lifting 🚚	5:00am Lifting 🚚	5:00am Lifting 🚚
5:30am Lifting 🚚	5:00am Stocking 📦	5:00am Stocking 📦	5:00am Stocking 📦	5:00am Stocking 📦	5:00am Stocking 📦
5:30am Lifting 🚚	5:00am Stocking 📦	5:00am Stocking 📦	5:00am Stocking 📦	5:00am Stocking 📦	5:00am Stocking 📦
5:30am Stocking 📦	5:30am Lifting 🚚	5:30am Lifting 🚚	5:30am Lifting 🚚	5:30am Lifting 🚚	5:30am Lifting 🚚
5:30am Stocking 📦	5:30am Lifting 🚚	5:30am Lifting 🚚	5:30am Lifting 🚚	5:30am Lifting 🚚	5:30am Lifting 🚚
6:00am Lifting 🚚	5:30am Lifting 🚚	6:00am Lifting 🚚	6:00am Lifting 🚚	5:30am Lifting 🚚	5:30am Lifting 🚚
6:00am Lifting 🚚	6:00am Lifting 🚚	6:00am Lifting 🚚	6:00am Lifting 🚚	5:30am Lifting 🚚	5:30am Lifting 🚚
6:00am Stocking 📦	6:00am Stocking 📦	6:00am Stocking 📦	6:00am Stocking 📦	5:30am Stocking 📦	5:30am Stocking 📦
6:00am Stocking 📦	6:00am Stocking 📦	6:00am Stocking 📦	6:00am Stocking 📦	5:30am Stocking 📦	5:30am Stocking 📦
6:00am Stocking 📦	6:00am Stocking 📦	6:00am Stocking 📦	6:00am Stocking 📦	5:30am Stocking 📦	6:00am Health & Beauty 🧴
6:00am Stocking 📦	6:00am Stocking 📦	6:00am Stocking 📦	6:00am Stocking 📦	6:00am Stocking 📦	6:00am Lifting 🚚



The illustration features a woman in the foreground, smiling and wearing a green and blue striped beanie, a red and green striped scarf, an orange jacket, and blue pants. She is holding a blue tray filled with colorful round objects (red, yellow, and green). In the background, a white truck with a blue stripe and the letters 'TINT' on its side is parked. A person in a green hoodie and blue pants is standing inside the truck's cargo area, holding a large green bag. The truck has a license plate that reads 'XOXI'. The entire scene is set against a background of a calendar grid.

ILLUSTRATION BY DEBORAH TINT

Hoagland said that they anticipated many members would need help navigating the web interface, but “the need did not materialize as much as we thought it would.” (There was, however, a spike in retirements when member labor returned.) Although there was “a level of initial resistance from some people,” Hoagland continued, most members seem happy with the change. One poll—a mandatory survey administered to anyone who used Member Services for a two-week period in November and December—found that 70% of the membership wanted to stick with the new system.

In addition to the ability to easily poll the membership, funneling everyone through Member Services has other benefits. The Coop finally has an accurate, up-to-date record of everyone’s email addresses. Members can easily see descriptions of any work-slot—a full rundown of each job pops up whenever you click on a shift. And, most important, say Hoagland and Herpel, it’s eliminated a persistent source of problems at the Coop: the make-up shift. Before the pandemic, if you missed a shift, you were supposed to work two make-ups: your original shift plus a penalty one. Some squad leaders, however, would allow members to avoid the penalty make-up if they canceled early enough—or if they simply wanted to be nice. That led to uneven enforcement of the rules. “It was so arbitrary,” said Herpel. “It was inconsistent.” Getting rid of that, she said, “removes the culture around bias, favoritism, whatever.”

Now members sign up only for shifts they know they can work, and they can cancel up to the night before without penalty. There is no room for discretion—the computer runs the show. Hoagland said that the make-up shifts themselves caused problems: dozens of people would show up when they weren’t needed, while other workslots went unfilled. “Now,” he said, “we’re directing people exactly where we need them, and we can grow and decrease the size of these shifts immediately.” The number of no-shows has become “negligible.”

“[THE CURRENT SYSTEM] IS BUILT ON A PIECE OF SOFTWARE THAT IS INCREDIBLY OUTDATED AND VERY RIGID.”

One final benefit: fewer people are working while ill. “I think the habit was for a lot of people, myself included, that if you’re kind of under the weather, but you’re okay enough to go, you’re gonna push through it. We would bring a lot more sickness into the building as a result,” said Hoagland. Easy cancellations and the end of recurring shifts make it simple to isolate for several days and return to the Coop when you’re healthy.

Up next, Herpel said, is a more complete overhaul of the Coop’s member database, to allow Member Services to work even more efficiently, though that process has been slow. “It’s built on a piece of software that is incredibly outdated and very rigid,” she said. There will also be a return to a recurring workslot option for those members who want it, most likely in April. They’re sticking with the five-week schedule, though. It works, and who doesn’t want a little extra time between shifts?

Christopher Cox is an editor and writer. His book, ‘The Deadline Effect,’ was published in July.