

Audio Script: Bargaining 200: Connecting the Table and the Worksite

This is the actual audio that was recorded for Bargaining 200. Use it for a reference or study guide.

Welcome to Bargaining 200

This course should take you about 30 minutes to complete

It is one of the required courses for the Certificate of Completion in the Bargaining track.

The prerequisite for this course is Bargaining 100.

The sections in this course are:

Member Outreach is Important, and

The Role of a Contract Campaign in Bargaining

Section 1: Member Outreach is Important

Overview

Bargaining is a critical activity for Local 1000 and all of its members. It is the time employees sit down with the employer to discuss significant issues that are important to both the employer and the employees.

It is the process by which the union and the state discuss and come to agreement on hours, wages and terms and conditions of employment.

Included in bargaining are benefits, retirement, leaves and other working conditions. We go to the bargaining table to address improvements in contract language.

This opportunity is often seen as the responsibility of the chosen few who are elected to bargaining teams and those who are the elected chairs of the different bargaining units. But the reality is that the most effective way of moving things at the bargaining table is by involving the membership throughout the process.

Members participate in formulating initial demands, electing bargaining team members, participating in campaign actions at the worksite, and voting to ratify or reject the final agreement.

Preparing for Bargaining

How does the bargaining team, the BUNC, prepare for bargaining? There are many pieces to decide and focus on...

Surveys are one way to narrow the issues for bargaining – conducting a

survey helps identify and prioritize Local 1000's members' issues. Surveys are completed prior to negotiations so the negotiating teams can plan effectively.

In collecting member priorities and mapping where our members are, we create worksite networks that help us disseminate key information during bargaining and respond quickly to changes in negotiations.

We can more easily organize for actions, build support, or move a message when we have already identified the go-to people for leading these activities. In addition, worksite networks help strengthen relationships between and among co-workers and help establish a greater sense of community across the workplace.

Locating Members

To solicit member input on bargaining priorities, it is important to know where our members are, and in what areas we are the strongest. One way to find out is to draw a diagram or map of each workplace, listing each employee by name and identifying each by membership status and position in the union – if they are a steward, an officer or an activist.

The map will tell us where we need to recruit new activists. It also gives an idea of which union members might be enlisted to talk with their co-workers about getting involved. For large workplaces, each steward should diagram their own work area.

For more information about mapping and charting at the worksite, take the Leadership Academy course Organizing 120: Building Networks

Grievances and Complaints

Another way we identify priorities for bargaining is by reviewing the filed grievances and complaints that have been submitted. We also track issues that have arisen through the last bargaining agreement and discuss changes necessary to address these issues.

It is evident in the process of preparing for the negotiations table that, while a small group may represent Local 1000's members at the table, the overall issues that are raised, the proposals that are passed to the state, the presentations and arguments that are made all represent what the membership as a whole is seeking in their next contract.

Employee Committees

Once information is gathered on bargaining priorities, it is helpful to form employee committees. Employee committees are an important component to winning at the bargaining table. Establishing employee committees helps get more people involved.

Here are a few kinds of employee committees we often form:

- An organizing committee - to do initial planning and implementation of worksite actions;
- A community support committee - to reach out to allies in the community;
- A public relations committee - to keep in touch with the media; and
- A legislative committee - to enlist the support of local politicians.

Member Issues and Concerns

The bargaining teams are charged with representing their members' issues and concerns and reaching the best agreement possible. All Local 1000 members have an opportunity to approve the tentative agreement at the end of the process, so it is important that the members' needs be reflected throughout negotiations.

Section 1 Review

The most effective way of moving things at the bargaining table is:

- a) Reading the contract
- b) Surveying the membership
- c) *Involving the membership in the bargaining process*
- d) Holding as many campaign actions as possible

The answer is C - Bargaining is often seen as the responsibility of the chosen few who are on the bargaining teams. But the reality is that the most effective way of moving things at the bargaining table is by involving the membership throughout the process.

What are two ways a bargaining team can effectively identify member priorities?
Choose two answers

- a) *By reviewing filed grievances and complaints*
- b) By re-reading the contract
- c) By meeting with the governor
- d) *By conducting a member survey*

The answers are A and D - Surveys identify and prioritize Local 1000's members' issues and should be completed prior to negotiations. Another way to help the team plan the collective bargaining process is by reviewing grievances and complaints submitted over the duration of the most recent contract.

An efficient and effective way to develop a worksite network is to:

- a) Call every employee
- b) *Establish and maintain a chart on each worksite*
- c) Learn everyone's job classification
- d) Publish a newsletter

The answer is B - It is helpful to establish and maintain a chart on each worksite that includes names, phone numbers, email addresses and job classifications, along with any other information or skills that employees might have to help recruit people at that worksite.

Section 2: The Role of a Contract Campaign in Bargaining

Worksite Leaders

We have talked about the role of the bargaining team at the table, now let's consider the role of the worksite leaders.

It is critical that at no time is the bargaining team left to fight on its own. The team needs to know that the power of its members, Local 1000 and employees at all of the state buildings stand firmly behind them as they pass proposals for consideration.

So how can worksite leaders help to ensure that the bargaining team never stands alone? What kinds of worksite actions show support for the elected bargaining team members who are fighting for contract improvements at the negotiations table?

Bargaining Campaign Issues

Worksite leaders are responsible for building unity during negotiations for a new contract agreement. In particular, campaigns that are held throughout the life of a contract help build the unity needed at the time of bargaining.

"Purple Up Wednesdays" is an example of an ongoing campaign that helps increase unity among members. Additionally, as worksites become more active in wearing purple on Wednesdays, the more those worksites will demonstrate that Local 1000 has a strong, important presence at the worksites.

Campaigns that are specifically used during contract bargaining are similar to Purple Wednesdays. During contract bargaining, bargaining team members hear from worksite leaders about efforts by other bargaining units and are motivated to be more supportive at their own worksite.

Unit bargaining teams need the support of members and leaders at the worksites to win on key issues.

Organizing to Help Negotiations

Each bargaining unit engages in negotiations around issues that affect their unit, in addition to negotiating the master contract.

How can these issues be organized at the worksite to help the bargaining teams when they are at the table?

For overall contract negotiations, having a common theme to the action or campaign is helpful. A theme is the public expression of our goals, and it appeals not only to people's self-interest, but also their sense of justice and unselfishness. People need to believe not only that they are fighting for themselves, but that their cause is just. A positive moral tone is also particularly important for building good public relations and community support.

After choosing a theme, members work together to decide on important worksite actions that support this theme. One way to express support is to prepare desk tents or placards that members place in their cubicles. This display of support shows management that employees are united on this issue.

When the state meets with individual bargaining units, they often bring labor relations staff. These staff members will have seen the desk tents and can share their observations of the level of support at their worksite with management.

Another way to draw attention and support is to hold a lunch rally on the day that negotiating teams will meet on that specific issue, drawing attention to the issue and/or to the department where the issue exists. A solidarity break is also a good way to gain attention for your issue. It can be as small as a group walk around the block during a break.

Another effective way of connecting members to bargaining is by bringing them into these negotiations. In other words, the bargaining team may include direct testimony from members with the stated issues or grievances to help explain the issue, particularly if it is one that has not been addressed by previous contracts.

When organizing on contract issues where all members are affected, broad-based mobilization is important. Types of contract issues that may require this kind of significant mobilization may include the following:

- A fight for pensions when the state is arguing that maintaining the pension system we currently have is not a priority and that they are looking for major reforms.
- Or mobilizing against increased payments to our health benefits package. The state may be arguing that employees need to cover a larger percentage of their benefits
- If negotiations have slowed and the state appears to be stalling over Local 1000's proposals a statewide action can be helpful.

Escalation

Escalation into larger mobilization efforts should be gradual. There are several reasons for this. One is that you cannot ask people to take a big step until they have taken smaller steps. An employee who has never been involved with their union may be quite willing to fill out a survey, but he or she may not want to come to a rally, confront a boss, or engage in a job action. Gradually this employee will become more accustomed to taking part in union actions, and more committed to the justice of the issue.

Also, you do not want to burn people out by asking for too much too often. No campaign can sustain itself if it is holding mass rallies two or three times a day. Eventually enthusiasm will die down.

Another reason for gradual escalation of activities is to maximize the impact on the employer. If the union calls a major rally a month before the contract negotiations begin, then by the time the contract is due to expire the employer will figure that interest has diminished. So it is better to time the big rally to coincide with a key bargaining session.

Strong tactics that can be used towards the end of the campaign are called bargaining 'in public' - that means talking to the media about the bargaining issues, holding public hearings on a crucial issue, or moving on a legal action.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the strength we have to improve our working conditions through bargaining is directly linked to our strength at the worksites.

Little can be gained at the bargaining table without the support and unity of members on the ground. In anticipation of any bargaining campaign, it is critical to build networks, identify issues widely felt by the membership, and develop roles and activities to engage members in their support for bargaining the contract.

Section 2 Review

Bargaining campaigns should only happen during bargaining.

- a) True
- b) *False*

The answer is False - Campaigns should be held throughout the life of a contract to help build the unity needed at the time of bargaining.

How can issues be organized to help bargaining teams?

- a) Organize goals around a theme to increase community support
- b) Local activities should support the theme
- c) Bring the worksite into negotiations

d) *All of the above*

The answer is D – Organizing around a theme will convey our goals to the community. Activities and campaigns held at the worksite should support that theme. These activities will bring the worksite into negotiations and help the state to better understand the issues affecting their employees.

When holding actions at the worksite, escalation into larger mobilization efforts should be:

- a) Negotiated
- b) *Gradual*
- c) Elected
- d) A rally at the worksite

The answer is B - Escalation into larger mobilization efforts should be gradual. Save the stronger tactics for the end of negotiations.

End of Course

This completes Bargaining 200.

Your next step is to take and pass the Final Exam to complete this course.

Continue to take the other required courses to earn the Certificate of Completion in the Bargaining track.