

# Preparing and Presenting an Opening Package

Although contract negotiations can vary widely depending on the industry and personalities involved, the following represents a 'normal' procedure. However, the union can be ready for anything with careful preparation. At the beginning of negotiations, you will present management with an opening package of proposals. In some negotiations, management also will prepare an opener in others; management will receive your opener at the first bargaining session and prepare a response for the next negotiating session.

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Your opener should not be an unedited wish list with every proposal any member could possibly dream up that kind of opener may raise members' expectations unrealistically. It also may make management officials feel that they have no incentive to bargain seriously because they are dealing with people who either don't want to negotiate toward a realistic settlement or are incompetent.

On the other hand, the opener must ask for more than you expect to win. Management's negotiators will come to the table expecting to play the game that way. Even if you opened with exactly what you were willing to settle for and told management officials that was the case, they wouldn't believe you - and by saying you wouldn't make any compromises you might be guilty of bargaining in good faith.

Before you present the opener...

- Discuss your priorities. What are your most important issues? What combination of issues will it take to satisfy the membership? What package might make management most likely to accept your priority issues?

Your team will have to reach a consensus on those questions in order to present a united front throughout negotiations

- Think through what your fallback positions, if any, would be on each subject.

For each item, ask...is this something we are prepared to trade? To modify? If so, how? To stick with no matter what? To strike or take other strong action to win?

- Prepare evidence and arguments to support and defend each proposal. The committee should brainstorm likely management arguments and objections.

Then plan responses, including facts or examples negotiating team members can present from their own experience.

These preparations are not necessarily designed to convince management that you are right. Management decides what to give in negotiations based on your bargaining power, not your debating skills.

- Your ability to explain and defend your proposals is important, however, because it shows management that you are prepared to argue your case with the membership, customers, clients, investors, the news media, the general community, or others whose opinions management may be concerned about.

Similarly, good research and preparation sends a signal to management negotiators that they will not be able to get away with misleading propaganda for instance, if a management official says, "This proposal would cost us X dollars over the next year." It has a significant psychological impact to be able to say, "No, actually we already figured it out and it would only cost Y dollars."

Examples you use to argue for a proposal must be thought through carefully. There is nothing more embarrassing than having management use your own example to show why your proposal doesn't make sense.

- Plan to involve as much of the team as possible in presenting your proposals. This sends a message to management what your committee is firmly behind the proposals and prepared to organize membership and community support.

This doesn't mean that committee members should feel free to speak whenever they feel like it - just the opposite it means that participation of committee members should be planned so management doesn't get mixed messages.

Some teams change which member serves as chief spokesperson from negotiating session to negotiating session in order to demonstrate the involvement of the entire team.

Planning to have a variety of team members speak is especially important in coordinated or coalition bargaining, when you want to show management that employees from different worksites, SEIU locals, or unions are united and actively involved.