

Organizing: Frequently Asked Questions

How does the union work?

A union is a democratic organization of a majority of employees in a facility. The basic idea of a union is that by joining together with fellow employees, workers have a greater ability to improve conditions on the job. In other words, "In unity there is strength."

What will the union do for me?

The union negotiating committee, comprised of union leadership and customer contact center employees, negotiates all aspects of the employees' wages, benefits and working conditions. One of the most important services that the union provides is the grievance/arbitration process. This allows the employee/employees the ability to find resolution through a binding and legal process pertaining to issues involving discipline, contract disputes, etc.

Who runs the union?

The union is democratic organization run by the members. Members elect the local officers. You vote on issues of importance to you. You vote on your contract. Union members elect delegates to national conventions, where delegates elect national officers and vote on major issues affecting the union, such as constitutional amendments. The union is the people themselves.

Won't it cost the company a lot of money if the union comes in?

In the short run, it's true that unions cost employers more in terms of wages and benefits.

But in the long run, that doesn't necessarily hurt the employer. Many unions are good for the employers as well as for the workers.

The reason is simple. With a union there is higher morale, and there is a mechanism for workers to have a voice in how the workplace operates.

Satisfied employees are more productive, and less likely to quit, so there is less turnover. Also, management benefits when it gets input from the workers on how the operation could be run better.

Can I be fired for participating in the campaign?

First of all, the law prohibits any employer from discriminating against people in any way because of their union activity. If an employer does harass or discriminate against a union supporter, the union files a charge with the Nova Scotia Labour Relations Board and prosecutes the employer to the fullest extent. The best safeguard against the employer harassing anyone is for everybody to stick together and win their union election. Without a union, management has a free hand to treat people as they please. But with a union, everyone has the protection of a union contract through the grievance process.

What will be in our contract?

It is for the union employees to decide what to negotiate into your contract. Your co-workers are already talking about many issues that are important to them. After you win union recognition, you will select a negotiating committee from among your co-workers. They will form a list of

issues you and your co-workers would like addressed. Then, with the assistance of union negotiators, the committee will sit down with management to negotiate a contract.

The law says that both sides must bargain “in good faith” to reach an agreement on wages, benefits and working conditions. The contract will only take effect after it is approved (ratified) by a majority of the workers.

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What happens to the current benefit package?

The current benefit package would stay in effect unless the employees wanted to negotiate changes to it. The employees are a part of the negotiating process and any changes to the benefit package would be brought before the employees for a vote, as part of the collective bargaining agreement.

Will the union change job classifications and specifications?

No. The employees are a part of the negotiating process and will vote on the collective bargaining agreement. If the current job classifications and job descriptions are acceptable to the employees, then there would not be a need to change them.

What can the union do about favoritism?

Fairness is the most important part of the union contract. The same rules apply to everyone. If any worker feels that he or she is not being treated fairly, then he or she still has the opportunity to voice concerns to the supervisor, just like before. But under a union contract, the supervisor or manager no longer has the final say. They are no longer judge and jury. If the worker is not satisfied with the response of the supervisor, the workers can file a grievance.

The first step of a grievance procedure is for the steward to accompany the worker to try to work it out with the supervisor. If the worker is not satisfied, the steward and the employee, with help from the union business manager, can bring the grievance to higher management. If the complaint is not resolved, then the issue can be placed before an outside neutral judge called an arbitrator.

Why is the company against the union?

The company could probably answer this question, if they would be upfront and honest. The union’s position is that the company currently has all of the power and control. They do not want to “balance the playing field,” which would be the case if the employees voted to have the union represent them as a collective unit.

The employer says the union can't guarantee us anything. Can you?

The union can guarantee when workers stick together, as a union, they have more bargaining power and more of a voice than they do as individuals.

If you vote to form a union, you will negotiate a contract with the employer. We can make no promises on what the contract will contain. That is for you to decide when you vote on your contract. We can guarantee that the contract will be legally binding, and the union will make sure the contract is enforced./

Management says that the union is just after our dues money. Why should we pay money to the union?

Dues are used to run your union and keep it strong. The dues are divided between the local union and the international union. The money is used to provide expert services to your local union, including negotiators, lawyers, economists and educators; to pay the salaries of officers and staff, including organizers; to provide newsletter and conferences; and more. The local union's money is used for reimbursing stewards for lost time, for the union hall, and for other expenses of your union.

Did you know that the employer also pays dues to organizations? Employers have their own organizations, such as the Customer contact center association of Nova Scotia They pay for representation – so why shouldn't you?

Besides, since when is the company so concerned about your money?

How much are union dues?

The dues will depend upon what the local needs to operate efficiently and effectively. However, the dues will be set by you, as a local union, with the exception of the international portion of the dues, which is set and voted on by all local unions at the International Convention every five years. However, no dues are paid until the majority of workers vote to accept a contract they helped to negotiate. All initiation fees will be waived for members in newly organized units. .

What if management hints there will be a strike if we organise?

Management talks a lot about strikes during an organizing drive. Did they tell you that more than 98% of union contracts are settled without a strike? There could only be a strike if the employees vote for the strike. And it's only smart to vote for a strike if you know you can win. The employer doesn't want a strike any more than the workers do, so everyone has an incentive to reach a compromise during bargaining.

Unions have developed a lot of other tactics that can put pressure on management to reach a fair agreement. For example, unions use boycotts, corporate campaigns or community support rather than having to resort to striking.

How do we go about forming a union here?

You've already taken the important first step in forming a union. You're taking the time to see what you can do to improve the conditions in your workplace by forming a union with your co-workers. Soon we will be forming a voluntary organizing committee made up of some of your co-workers and possibly you, if you'd like to be involved. The committee will be utilized to investigate and inform your co-workers about the ways a union can help negotiate better

conditions at your workplace, as well as explain what their rights are now and the rights they gain by forming a union.

What does signing the authorization card mean?

It means you want the union. The card is a commitment of support. When enough cards are received, they will be submitted to the OLRB and trigger an election where you can vote by secret ballot to decide if you want to form a union and have a voice at your workplace and in your future.