

Collective Bargaining!

What It Is.....How It Works

Every three years, CWA members at Qwest get caught up in something called collective bargaining. This year, more than ever, it is critical for all of us at Qwest to understand the bargaining process, the players involved in the process, and the procedures involved. Each of us must also understand our own role and responsibility to make the process work for us. The following information will answer questions about collective bargaining, help dispel some misconceptions, and inform and educate members. The goal is to encourage every member to participate in the collective bargaining process, to help build a stronger Union so we can improve our living standards and working conditions.

Just What Is Collective Bargaining?



Collective bargaining is a process of formal negotiations between representatives of the employer and the elected representatives of the workers. During collective bargaining, the Union and management conduct discussions to determine wages, benefits and working conditions. Agreements reached at the bargaining table are written in a legally binding contract or collective bargaining agreement. Every member is entitled to have a copy of the collective bargaining agreement.

Why Do We Have Collective Bargaining?

The goal of collective bargaining is to provide a process in which workers have equal power with management in order to influence their working conditions. The right to bargain collectively is found in the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) passed by Congress in 1935. The Act recognizes that, one by one, individual workers have little power to obtain what is fair, but collectively, acting together through our Union, we have the right and the power.

How Do We Get Power From Bargaining Collectively?

When we combine our efforts and unite around mutual goals we gain power. That's what a Union does for us: it is our organization and through it we can determine for ourselves the best way to improve the conditions where we work. Union power is member power. Without members actively organizing behind our agenda for improvements, without members participating in the bargaining process, we have no power.

How Can I Have Input Into Our Bargaining Demands?

The Union is a democratic membership organization, and so it is important for the Union Bargaining Committee to receive membership input and direction on bargaining issues. To facilitate that input, District 7 sponsored a bargaining survey to all Locals representing Qwest workers. In addition, each Local Union submitted proposals received from its members to the Union Bargaining Committee. All

submitted proposals were reviewed, discussed and voted upon by the Union Bargaining Committee. Committee members try to meet the priority needs of the membership, but sometimes demands are revised and not every demand is approved.

How Are Union Bargaining Committees Members Chosen?

CWA members elect the Bargaining Committee from among Local Union members who work at the Company. They are workers who understand the jobs, the work, and the needs of their co-workers. Bargaining Committee members are elected to represent everyone in the bargaining unit, not just their "home local" or their particular work place within the company, and they are not to give special treatment or exclusive information to their home local. The Chair of the Union Bargaining Committee is appointed by the CWA District Vice President.

How is the Management Committee Chosen?

Management committee members are appointed by top company directors. The representatives usually come from the company's labor relations department and senior management of other key divisions.

What Do Bargaining Committees Do?

For Qwest, collective bargaining usually takes place in Denver, so committee members must relocate temporarily to participate in negotiations. The Union committee members write proposals based on the demands submitted by members and on surveys of the members. Once bargaining starts, the Union and company committees meet face to face for several weeks. The Union committee presents the written proposals based on members' demands. The company bargainers also present demands, and frequently they are in direct conflict with the union's demands. The process can be grueling because of the give and take of negotiations, because of the difficulty in convincing an employer to change its ways and because the process often requires long days that extend into the night. Bargainers must also research the demands so the Committee can defend the demand effectively. Other duties include writing reports to the Locals and the members; presenting periodic updates to members during conference calls; participating in the process in order to coordinate what's happening during worksite actions with what's happening at the bargaining table.



How Do We Find Out What's Going On At The Bargaining Table?

After bargaining begins, the Union Committee communicates with Local Union leaders and membership in a variety of ways: weekly conference calls, a web site (www.cwa-union.org/) and faxes. We also communicate to the public through press releases to TV, radio and newspapers: The Union's mobilization network is also a key source of information and it provides a way to send messages back to management. Mobilization activities can let management know that Union members are against certain company proposals (No Health Care Cost Shifting) or supportive of Union demands (Pension Increase).

What is Mobilization?

Mobilization is a way for CWA members to actively demonstrate their support for Union demands. Mobilization activities range from leafleting, to wearing matching t-shirts with pro-union slogans, to rallies. Active and vocal membership support for the Union's demands is a critical factor in obtaining a good contract. If it appeared that the Union Bargaining Committee were acting on its own and that members didn't know or didn't care what the committee was doing, the company would notice. Just imagine what kind of contract we'd get.

NOT MUCH! When we mobilize, we demonstrate our unity and our power, and the company notices. With mobilization, we win!

Is Mobilization the Same As a Strike?

Mobilization has a number of phases:

Education, so that every member understands CWA's bargaining goals. Solidarity actions, like t-shirts and pencil tapping, to show support for Union bargaining demands.

Confrontation, like rallies and workplace demonstrations or quality and safety actions, to show our commitment to fight for the Union agenda. Experience has shown that if most of our members participate in the actions, then the ultimate job action a strike - is unnecessary. Usually the company, when confronted with massive membership support for the Union's position, will find a way to get a contract without a strike. That's why a prepared and mobilized membership is the best way to win a good contract. Prior to bargaining each member will be asked to vote for strike authorization. A strong yes vote is needed to show support for your bargaining committees and to send a strong message to management that we deserve a fair contract. If a strike is members deserve, the president of the union will set a strike date, and all CWA members will be informed. It is the intent of the bargaining committees to achieve what we deserve, and mobilization on the job is the best way to give the Committee the power it needs. However, we will never give up our ultimate right to withhold our labor from Qwest.

Who Has the Final Say on the Collective Bargaining Agreement?

The members do!! Once the Bargaining Committee reaches a tentative agreement with management, the agreement is put out to the membership for approval. CWA District 7 will hold a contract explanation meeting for Local Union Presidents to review and explain the negotiated contract provisions. In turn, each Local Union will hold membership meetings to explain the contract and answer questions. In addition, CWA will send a copy of the final bargaining report outlining the tentative agreement to the home of every Union member. After that, it is the duty of every Union member to vote on the contract. Votes are conducted by secret ballot. A majority vote means the contract is accepted. If the contract is rejected, the committee must go back to the bargaining table; often a vote to reject the contract is a vote to strike.

Usually not everyone is happy with every element of the new agreement. That is the nature of bargaining. The elected Bargaining Committee tries to win everything it can for the membership, but the company has its own agenda. If we only had to bargain with ourselves, undoubtedly we'd get everything we wanted.

Some Myths About Collective Bargaining

There are some common myths about the bargaining process, for example:

- The company can never take anything away; it can only add to the contract.
- The company proposes wage increases and benefit improvements.
- The Union will win demands that makes good business sense.
- The Union will win every demand that is fair and logical.
- The Union Bargaining Committee has all the power; it doesn't need the support of the members.
- The company isn't affected by mobilization actions.



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