

STEWARDS ORIENTATION

Collective Bargaining



Collective Bargaining for Stewards

What is collective bargaining?

- Watch the short video below.



The Process of Bargaining

- Members elect a team to sit at the table, call the shots and make decisions. You don't have to do that job, but it helps to know the general structure of bargaining.
- **At demand** setting at the local level, members decide what changes they want in the contract. The employer may also propose changes.
- The bargaining team, assisted by a professional from union staff, works to negotiate a settlement it can recommend to the members for approval (ratification).



The Process of Bargaining

- If the two sides become bogged down, the process of conciliation brings in a labour relations expert to try overcome the differences. If this succeeds, there is a settlement to be ratified; if it fails, it starts a clock ticking toward a legal strike/lockout deadline or to contract arbitration.
- There can be no strike until the deadline is reached, and until the members of the bargaining unit vote by secret ballot to strike.
- Lockouts must also wait until the deadline.
- Where strikes are outlawed, the dispute will be referred to an arbitrator at this point.



The Process of Bargaining

- In the days leading up to a strike, a mediator is normally assigned to help avert a walkout. If this succeeds, you have a settlement to be ratified; if it fails, you have job action.
- If talks collapse and a strike occurs, there is usually a period with no negotiations. Eventually the two sides return to the table, and usually reach a settlement which can be ratified, ending the dispute.
- Throughout this process, there is constant **opportunity** to involve members; and the strength and commitment of members throughout the process have a direct bearing on the gains in the new contract.
- Be guided by your elected team in everything you do.



NITTY-GRITTY BARGAINING

Setting bargaining demands

- Involve members well before your contract runs out.
- Evaluate your contract's strengths and weaknesses.
- Set up an informal educational and/or survey your members before your demand-setting meeting.
- Members' support for the bargaining team is linked to their ownership of the demands. Demands must reflect the desires of all members, not just the energetic few who attended the meeting.



NITTY-GRITTY BARGAINING

A typical workplace canvass follows these steps.

1. Leaders meet to plan the overall strategy for the survey.
2. Decide what issue will interest most of your members.
3. Design and print a leaflet presenting the issue and alternative solutions.
4. Organize the canvass, with a member of the LEC to co-ordinate the stewards' activities.
5. Train the stewards and activists who will run the canvass in the issues, the leaflet and the process.
6. Keep the survey period under two weeks, and follow it with a short meeting to discuss and assess the canvass and its results.



NITTY-GRITTY BARGAINING

Examples of bargaining surveys can be found in the Steward's PowerTool

Download the PowerTool here



Support your Team

Demonstrate Solidarity

Anything that shows members will act in an organized way helps your bargaining team reach a settlement. Actions can originate locally or with central teams. The point is for all stewards, and as many members as possible, to take part.

- Plan events to be inclusive and enlist as many members as you can.
- Be creative. Doing something fun gets people involved.
- If it's a lunch time event, supply refreshments.
- Plan your event. If it needs signs or leaflets, have them ready.



Support your Team

Solidarity events could include:

- a large demonstration,
- informational picketing,
- a petition on a bargaining issue or workplace problem,
- all members coming in to work together on a specific date,
- donating money to a special cause,
- wearing buttons, stickers, or the same colour clothing.



Support your Team

Ridged contract contract enforcement

- **Remind the employer how nice it is to have labour piece.**
- **Give the employer an incentive to settle the contract on reasonable terms.**



Support your Team

Mini campaigns on workplace issues

Identify a workplace problem, ideally one related to your bargaining proposals, of concern to many members, with a clear “winnable” solution.



Support your Team

Mini campaign ideas

- Survey members to document the problem and educate workers about it and the union's efforts to correct it.
- Circulate a petition summarizing the survey results and promoting the union's proposed solution.
- Organize protests in an escalating pattern, moving from symbolic protests like button days toward mass meetings or refusal to do certain tasks until the problem is solved.
- Claim victory if the employer agrees to a solution. If the employer refuses because workers have no rights under the contract, use the refusal to generate bargaining support.



Support your Team

Work to rule

- One worksite tactic is for members to do only what they are required to do under the contract.
- Working-to-rule requires careful preparation, training, and consultation with experienced activists, union staff or lawyers.
- Workers must understand the difference between doing the bare minimum that is required (legal), and a work slowdown or refusal to follow directions (usually not legal).
- Some work-to-rule campaigns have been ruled to be illegal strikes.



Support your Team

Work to rule examples

- Taking all lunch and collective agreement breaks
- Refusing voluntary overtime or optional assignments as temporary supervisors.
- Following supervisors' instructions to the letter, even if they are wrong or key steps are missing.
- Declining initiative to solve problems; waiting for instruction.
- Strictly obeying all the employer's rules.



Support your Team

Work to rule examples

- Reporting every equipment problem and insisting it be fixed before work can proceed.
- Not talking to supervisors unless it would be insubordinate not to respond to a question or directive.
- Stopping small talk with bosses on the job, sharing rides, or eating together.
- Refusing to participate in employer-sponsored social events or other activities that aren't part of the job.



Support your Team

Strike preparation as a tactic

- Get ready; set up a headquarters; choose picket captains and picket teams...it shows the employer you're serious. It also reassures members during the tense countdown to a strike deadline.
- Members may accept a weak contract because they aren't confident the union can run a successful strike. We must never put our members in that position.
- Publicize your strike deadline. Hold a registration day to sign members up for strike duty.
- Encourage non-members in the bargaining unit to sign union cards.



The Steward and Collective Bargaining

Q: What can you do as a Steward to support the team?

A: Demonstrate solidarity

Ridged contract enforcement

Mini campaigns

Work to rule

Strike preparation



Steward and Collective Bargaining

For more information:

Visit the OPSEU Member Education web page at <https://opseu.org/member-education/> and download the Stewards orientation sessions.



Steward and Collective Bargaining

Please take a moment to share your feedback.

1. Did you find this orientation useful?
2. Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

Thank you for your time. Please share your insight by sending a quick email to education@opseu.org





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