

Collective Bargaining: Vocabulary and Sequence of Events

VOCABULARY:

Labor union: An organization formed by a particular group of workers to deal with the power of their employer by taking collective action for better working conditions, such as negotiating a contract, striking, picketing, boycotting, or lobbying for favorable laws.

Management: Employees who “manage” or supervise the workers, and represent the owner or employer’s interests at the workplace.

Collective Bargaining Agreement or Collective Employment Contract: a written agreement between the union (represented by the elected union bargaining team) and the employer (represented by the management bargaining team). The agreement or contract usually lasts a year or more and sets out the wages, hours, benefits, and ways to settle disputes that may develop during the life of the contract.

Benefits: Compensation in addition to wages, such as paid vacations and holidays, medical insurance, bilingual bonuses, pensions, etc.

Seniority: An employee’s status according to her or his years of employment. Employees with the greatest seniority are usually the last to be laid off and may be given preference for shift changes, promotions, etc.

Power: The ability to change or influence things. This information is confidential, and teams should prepare privately in a caucus.

Strike: A collective power action by employees who refuse to work or report to work, for the purpose of influencing a change in the working conditions.

Lockout: The shutting down of a workplace by an owner or employer in order to withhold work and wages from a group of employees.

Mediation: An attempt by an impartial third party or person, called a mediator, to bring the two sides in a labor dispute together. The mediator has no power to force a settlement, but rather operates primarily through persuasion.

Caucus: A meeting by a small group with a common interest.

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS: (See also the Collective Bargaining Institute Agenda)

On bargaining day, union and management teams will meet in a negotiations session on 4 issues for about 4 hours. The goal for each side is the same—to reach a harmonious conclusion in a collective bargaining agreement or collective employment contract that is acceptable to both sides. The session will occur in several rounds, with the union team and the management team taking turns to present proposals and counter-proposals to each other on the issues until an agreement is reached or time runs out. Union Team #1 will bargain with Management Team #1, Union Team #2 will bargain with Management Team #2, and so on. All teams will have 4 students and the same 4 issues; each student on the team will be responsible for one of these 4 issues for the entire negotiations.

For the first round only, teams cannot change any of the proposals that have been given in the Union and Management Team Fact Sheets. The task of the team is to explain clearly to the other side why their proposals should be accepted. This information is confidential, and teams should prepare or rehearse for Round 1 of face-to-face negotiations privately in caucus meetings at separate tables with their coaches.

(Use Planning Form). No new proposals should be developed until Round 2, on bargaining day, with help from “coaches” (adult advisors—teachers, union leaders, invited guests).

In Round 1, the Union team presents first, followed by the Management team. Both sides take notes on their Negotiations Charts. After Round 1 presentations are finished (with questions allowed for clarification), both sides break to caucus (meet privately) with their coaches to prepare for Round 2. The Union presents new proposals first, and will signal Management when ready to return to the bargaining table. Management can ask questions. Then Management caucuses to adjust their new proposals to the new information from the Union, and signals the Union when ready to return to the bargaining table to present their new proposals. The Union team listens, takes notes on their Negotiations Chart, asks questions, and then caucuses to prepare new proposals for Round 3....and so on until finished or time runs out. We expect that each set of teams (Union #1 and Management #1, Union #2 and Management #2....) will reach a different outcome, and we will compare the outcomes in brief oral reports from the teams at the end of the session. The final step in real life is for the teams to take the agreement back to the workers and the employer for their approval. (The workers would vote on it.) If the workers or the employer rejects the agreement, the teams go back to the negotiating table to try again.....or a strike or lockout could occur.