Negotiators Are the Critical Element

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Without question, the most crucial step in preparing for collective bargaining is the selection of negotiators. These men and women must be intimately familiar with the operation of the employer or representative employers.

They should ideally be methodical and cool. Depending upon the size of the bargaining unit, most employer bargaining committees are composed of two to four people.

Usually the members are the labor committee of the management trade associations.

The role of an association executive in bargaining varies widely in local management trade associations.

An association executive may function as a member of the committee, be the spokesman of the committee or may merely assist the committee without being an official member.

Do not let the union bluff the management committee by refusing to negotiate with an association executive representative or a professional negotiator. The employer trade association has a legal right to appoint any representative it wishes.

Attorneys Help

The complexities and pitfalls of labor law have persuaded some employer associations to have attorneys aid the committees by advising the committee constantly before and after each meeting and assisting the committee legally. In some cases the attorney actually enters directly into the bargaining.

Once the committee is appointed, a spokesman should be selected. The spokesman will be the main gun for the committee, and he or she will also be the primary target for the union. Therefore, an ability to listen and to take abuse is as important as an ability to express the views of the employer. The spokesman is the quarterback for the committee and does most of the talking; however, the other members of the committee should be prepared to carry the ball when called upon. It is preferable that the spokesman decide when

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a committeeman should speak, and such a decision may easily be indicated by the spokesman simply asking for a committeeman’s opinion or knowledge on a given subject. If the spokesman has doubts about the committee’s reactions on a certain matter, then he should call a caucus. Caucuses should be called frequently, and members of the committee should exercise patience and realize that a point is never won in anger.

Your spokesman should be a person of integrity, capable of making an offer and making the other side believe what he says. If the union believes that he is the type who says one thing and does another, then little bargaining will take place. You must have a person they feel they can trust and rely on when he tells them something, whether it is a rejection of the union’s offer or a demand by the company.

The spokesman should obviously be knowledgeable and have had some experience in negotiating labor agreements. It is also a good idea to have one or two representatives on the committee who may be inexperienced in order to train and build experienced management negotiators for the future. The negotiators should also build their education and experience by attending educational seminars sponsored by national employer trade associations.