

Collective Thoughts on Collective Agreements

Be a Stronger Voice in Your Union

Speaker: Laurie Prange
Convenor: Tina Bebbington
Date: Thursday, April 16, 2009
Time: 1:30-4:30pm

INTRODUCTION

This conference session will be very different than what you are used to at conferences. Laurie Prange, with the assistance of Tina Bebbington, will be using the “popular education” model to facilitate this session; there will be no presentation in the regular sense. As one colleague described the differences between presenting and facilitating, it’s the difference between “Power-Over the Group” versus “Power-Within the Group.”

Your contributions to the collective are as equally important to making this session a success as it is everyone else’s participation.

Presentation	Facilitation
Lights are turned off so people can see the screen	Lights are left on so people can see one another
Lots of PowerPoint	No PowerPoint
Comments from the participants aren’t recorded	Comments from the participants are recorded by the participants themselves on things like worksheets and flipchart paper
Everyone stays in one big group, listening to the presenter	Everyone is broken up into groups and the facilitators mingle around, helping discussions along
The presenter does most or all of the talking	The facilitator probably talks the least because she is busy listening.
The presenter is the only person that answers peoples’ questions	The facilitator turns questions back to the collective and says things like “what do the rest of you think?” or “does anyone have an idea about how to fix this?”
The general assumption is that the audience knows nothing and the presenter knows everything	The general assumption is that we’re all equal and that everyone brings knowledge to the group that they need to share to teach all of us
Examples to explain concepts are only given by the presenter	Examples to explain concepts are given by both the audience and facilitator
It is not important that the group form a cohesive unit	It is very important that the group form a cohesive unit
At the end, the presenter gives the final “answer” to the audience to solve the identified problem(s)	At the end, the entire group generates ways to solve the various problems brought forth during the workshop
The presenter is the only person that identifies problems	Everyone identifies problems, some being personal, some being universal
The problems that are identified rest solely with the knowledge of the presenter	The problems that are identified rely on the knowledge and experience of everyone, although the facilitator is expected to know most of them in order to know how to bring people forward to talk
The only record of the event is the PowerPoint and handout the Presenter has made (sometimes even journal articles), but nothing that addresses what anyone else says even during the question and answer period.	The record of the event could be a variety of materials. Usually the record of the event is contained on flipcharts, worksheets, and a final report the facilitators write based upon what everyone says that is shared back to everyone involved afterwards. And it’s usually a document outlining a list of Action Items to solve the identified problems

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

You will need your collective agreement to participate in this session.

If you do not have a collective agreement, either with you or through work, samples will be available for use.

Starting the session in one main group:

- 1) What is a collective agreement?
- 2) What importance do collective agreements play in the 21st century for library workers?

Breaking off into working groups:

- 3) Discuss the following questions as a group regarding your collective agreements. Record any observations made, such as differences or similarities found between group members' collective agreements. If additional observations arise during the discussion that do not fit on the main flipchart, record these comments on the special flipchart titled "Parking Lot" so that the ideas may be recorded without interfering in the group's discussion.
 - a) Are different library workers at your workplace in different collective agreements?
 - b) What determined the reasons for library workers to be in different collective agreements and is this clearly explained in the collective agreements? (E.g. qualifications, job duties, etc.)
 - c) How does the collective agreement address the unique working schedule of library workers (evening, weekend, and shift work)?
 - d) How does the collective agreement address pay levels for library workers and do you see any inequities? (I.e. by classification level, by years worked, by qualifications, by work responsibilities, etc.)
 - e) What extra or special benefits are designated for library workers?
 - f) How different are the leave benefits for library workers and other employees? How about those in the same workplace but belonging to other collective agreements?
 - g) Are work duties specified for library workers? (E.g. teaching duties, handling bills, making major purchases, etc.)
 - h) Does the collective agreement have a section defining what each library worker is and isn't? (I.e. management, faculty, etc.)
 - i) What benefits are available to foster a good work/life balance? (E.g. topped-up maternity leave, paternity leave, days off for religious or cultural reasons, choice to work time in lieu or comp. time, pre-paid leaves, sabbaticals, money for professional development, money for continuing education, etc.)
 - j) How does the collective agreement address workplace issues such as safety or injury prevention?
 - k) Are there clauses that allow library workers to run a consulting practice or have a second employer without being punished for possible conflicts of interest?
 - l) Can employees within the collective agreement enjoy freedom of speech, intellectual freedom, or the right to speak publicly about their employer?
 - m) How different are the benefits for permanent (tenured, indeterminate, etc.) employees versus those who are employed on a part-time, term, limited term, contract, auxiliary, or casual basis?
- 4) Compare your collective agreement with those of your group and discuss what benefits you see to having certain terms included in your collective agreement and in those of other group members.

Returning to the main group:

- 5) As a working group, report back to the group the various differences (and inconsistencies) that you found between collective agreements.
- 6) Contribute to the group discussion to answer the following questions regarding the various benefits that are found and not found within the wide range of collective agreements:
 - a) What do you see missing from your collective agreement that you would like to know more about?
 - b) If you have these benefits, what can you share with the group regarding what you, or coworkers you know, have benefited from having these items included in your collective agreement?

Working in the main group to plan for the future:

- 7) Since library workers are usually the minority within their union, we often find that it is difficult to get library workers needs addressed within collective bargaining. As a group, discuss ways to help fellow (non-library workers) bargaining unit members see the advantages to including in a collective agreement items that are important to us but may not necessarily apply to any other employee group within the union.
 - a) Which benefits do you identify as the highest priority?
 - b) As what point in the consultation process would it be most beneficial to introduce your proposals to the negotiating team?
 - c) If you have tried to change collective agreements before, but were unsuccessful, what lessons did you learn about the process that others would benefit from hearing?
 - d) Are there typical library worker skills and services that we can tap into to make a persuasive argument with our fellow union members to help us change our collective agreements?
 - e) When do you plan to take action?