

PREPARING FOR COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Collective bargaining can be a valuable opportunity for a well-prepared organization to achieve the economic and non-economic changes it needs to operate more efficiently, effectively and profitably. Too often employers view negotiations as a task to get through as quickly and inexpensively as possible. They fail to recognize that thorough preparations can help provide them with the ability to shape the organization's culture and change behaviors through integrated labor and communications strategies.

IRI believes that strategic preparation will help employers to:

- Craft a negotiating strategy that supports the business plan and organizational goals and improves operational performance
- Strengthen management cohesion, confidence and problem-solving – top to bottom
- Develop communications that help control the message and blunt union rhetoric
- Improve employee relations and engagement

IRI'S NEGOTIATING APPROACH

Key to effective negotiations is guidance from a senior-level steering committee with input from human resources, labor relations, finance, communications, and departmental leaders working together to guide the bargaining process. This commitment helps:

- Develop and promote a strong, consistent labor relations philosophy
- Set strategic goals for bargaining, including costs, timing and priorities
- Foster and manage a process to consolidate and evaluate management input
- Provide guidance to the negotiating committee
- Oversee communications and outreach to key stakeholders to support the organization's negotiations strategy, goals, operations and challenges

STRATEGIC PREPARATIONS FOR NEGOTIATIONS

Thorough and extensive preparation will ensure that organization enters the collective bargaining process with a clear plan, a supporting structure and well-positioned to manage the process and message. Specifically, IRI provides support in the following areas:

- **Union Research:** IRI maintains a national database of labor contracts, communications and information to help you understand the union’s internal structure, common tactics and negotiating strategies. We also provide analysis of bargaining trends and contract outcomes, including regional and local agreements that may influence your negotiations.
- **Contract Analysis:** Our comprehensive analysis of an organization’s collective bargaining agreements helps identify opportunities to simplify work rules, reduce costs and make contract administration more efficient and effective. This analysis includes interviews with labor relations and human resources managers and front-line managers, grievance policies and outcomes, and bargaining history.
- **Organizational Communications Assessment:** Our communications assessment helps an organization assess existing communications and determine how to better reach employees and other stakeholders, increase leadership visibility, improve manager skills and provide channels for two-way communications.
- **Corporate Campaign Vulnerability Assessment:** Unions often use public attacks and efforts to tarnish an organization’s reputation through “corporate campaign” tactics designed to gain leverage at the bargaining table. These campaigns are designed to undermine trust and force leaders on the defensive when they should be focusing on negotiations. IRI will assess the organization’s strengths, vulnerabilities and opportunities, and provide expert counsel about the best strategies and tactics to defuse negative publicity campaigns, maintain your reputation and positively engage employees and community allies.
- **Comprehensive Communications Support:** IRI works closely with an organization to develop issue-specific messaging to direct the dialogue and stay ahead of union communications. IRI works with your internal communications team to design effective negotiations communications, respond to union charges and develop tailored messages for employees, supervisors, managers, boards, political and community leaders and the media.
- **Communications Training:** Experience has taught us that the best way to control the message with employees is through direct, face-to-face communications. IRI’s proven communications training courses provide managers with skills and practice in techniques essential to effective organizational communication. These courses are tailored to your needs, whether as a comprehensive series, stand-alone modules or in special sessions. IRI also helps organizations develop manager and employee communications and “Meetings-in-a-Box” including manager talking points, Frequently Asked Questions, employee handouts and business education materials.
- **Code of Conduct Training:** IRI will help employers draft or promote a “Code of Conduct” to support your culture and workplace expectations through manager training and employee education. Managers are trained to use a Code of Conduct to encourage adherence, promote a positive workplace and support employees.

- **Social and Traditional Media Monitoring:** IRI provides early warning and real-time intelligence about what's being said about an organization in the media and social media sphere. Real-time intelligence enables your organization to respond and balance the dialogue and develop a public presence that promotes your organization's mission and position in the community.
- **Negotiations Website Development and Management:** IRI will help you develop and maintain a website dedicated to contract negotiations to keep key stakeholders informed throughout the negotiations process. By creating an online resource, whether through an intranet or public negotiations site, you can provide easy access to manager talking points, factsheets, FAQs, media statements and negotiations updates designed to help you frame the debate and manage the message.
- **Operational Continuity Planning:** IRI will work with a multi-disciplinary organizational team to create an effective, comprehensive contingency plan in the event of a strike, work stoppage or other union activity that could affect operations.

NEGOTIATING TEAM PREPARATION

The strongest tools that the organization can have during contract negotiations are proper preparation, a highly trained negotiating team and flexibility.

IRI can prepare the negotiations team to bargain effectively, cost out proposals, help explore proposal alternatives, provide tactical advice on achieving settlement and help structure organizational communications. Each effort is designed to be mutually supportive to help reach a successful management conclusion.

POST-CONTRACT IMPLEMENTATION

Many organizations fail to achieve the full benefit of gains earned through the negotiations process because they have difficulty confronting union defiance and institutional resistance to change. Your human resources and representatives and managers need to understand changes in the contract that affect their jobs and are important to effective contract administration. IRI works with clients to help develop and implement contract training for management and employees that will help organizations sustain positive change.



CONTACT IRI CONSULTANTS TODAY

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