

Labor's Language: Glossary of Union Terms

Labor agreements, publications, and even officials often use terms that are almost exclusive to the labor arena. To help stewards feel more comfortable operating in this area, "Labor's Language: A glossary of Labor's Terms" is a regular Steward Edition feature.

Closed Shop: An agreement between an employer and a union that, as a condition of employment, all employees must belong to the union before being hired. The employer agrees to retain only those employees who belong to a union. Closed shop agreements were declared illegal by the Taft-Hartley Act.

Collective Bargaining: A process which workers, through their bargaining committee, deal as a group to

determine wages, hours and other conditions of employment. Normally, the result of collective bargaining is a written contract which covers all workers in the bargaining unit.

Common Law: The law of a country or state based on custom, usage, and/or the decisions and opinions of a court.

Comparable Worth: A pay concept or policy that calls for comparable pay for jobs that require comparable skills, effort and responsibility and have comparable working conditions, even if the job content is different.

Company Union: An employee organization, usually in one company, that is dominated by management. The

National Labor Relations Act declared that such employer domination is an unfair labor practice.

Complaint: Formal papers issued by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to start an unfair labor practice hearing before an Administrative Law Judge. The complaint states the basis for the NLRB's jurisdiction and the alleged unfair labor practice.

Concerted Activity: The rights, protected by the National Labor Relations Act, of two or more employees to act in concert to form, join, or assist labor organizations in order to affect their wages, hours or work or working conditions.



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Farmer Jack Stewards Can Assist Co-Workers Preparing for the Worst Helping Members Facing Job Loss or Layoff

As of press time, Local 876 and Farmer Jack members were anxiously waiting to learn which Farmer Jack stores would be closed, and of the store's purchased, which employers would be hiring current workers.

One of the best ways stewards can assist help members during this uncertain time is to encourage them that, while hoping for the best, to plan for the worst.

"The unfortunate reality is that when the sales and closures of the stores are complete, some Farmer Jack members will be unemployed," Roger Robinson, Local 876's president, said. "Since we have received no indication of who these workers are likely to be, the best thing members can do right now is to plan for the worst care scenario, a layoff."

Now is the time for members for member to assess their current circumstances and future goals, and explore available options

"Losing your job is a devastating blow, emotionally, and financially," Robinson said. "Many laid-off workers can be overwhelmed by the situation."

In June, Local 876 will be conducting an open house where various

agencies will be available to assist laid-off workers and their families in numerous areas, from unemployment compensation and free job retraining, to finding low-cost health insurance options and emergency financial aid.

"There are many programs and agencies to help laid off workers, that people don't know about," Robinson said. "We are going to do our best to make sure members who are laid off get the help they need to for themselves and their families."

While the stores remain open, stewards should advise members to begin collecting information they will need from Farmer Jack, in the event they need to conduct a job search in the future.

"Stewards should remind members to request letters of recommendation on company letterhead, along with their dates of employment and any job descriptions available from the employer,"

Robinson said. "Contact information from supervisors members may want

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2-1-1: Help Just a Call Away

2-1-1 is a single telephone number that cuts through the red tape and connects individuals to a trained information and referral specialist who suggests community and government organizations who can provide needed help.

The 2-1-1 service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to both english and non-english speaking callers.

2-1-1 specialists help individuals navigate the health and human service system in times of national or regional crisis or meeting everyday needs and challenges, including situations involving job loss, abuse, child/elder care, counseling, and financial aid.

"Think of the 2-1-1 system as the equivalent to 9-1-1, for non-emergency individual or family needs," Roger Robinson, Local 876's president, said. "When stewards learn of a member who may need assistance for a personal situation, they should urge them to call 2-1-1. The 2-1-1 service can be a great help to Farmer Jack and other members facing a difficult situation."

2-1-1 can be accessed outside the tri-county area by calling 1-800-552-1183.

Assisting Members When Layoffs Loom

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to list as references should also be obtained now. It will be much harder to get this information after the stores close and people begin to move on."

As members begin to make adjustments to their budget in preparation for a potential layoff, stewards should remind them to review an often overlooked area of the family budget -- insurance policies.

"Stewards can urge members to call their insurance agent for each of their policies, explain their situation, and see if there is a way to reduce their premiums through changes in coverage levels or multi-plan discounts," Robinson said. "Insurance companies are often willing to work with clients rather than lose their business, and members can always shop around for a better deal on their insurance."

Members who receive their health insurance from Farmer Jack will also want to begin exploring their options for in this area.

Members will have the option of continuing their current health under the federal COBRA law. COBRA allows displaced workers to continue their current health insurance by paying the full cost of the coverage plus two percent for 18 months.

"CORBRA is very expensive, and is not a realistic long-term health insurance option for most people," Robinson said. "Members should begin looking for other more affordable sources of health insurance."

Before they purchase health insurance from a company, members with a working spouse should inquire about the health insurance options provided by that employer. Members should also contact their county Department of Health and Human Services to find

out if they are eligible for any county health insurance programs.

"Many counties have good health insurance programs that underused because people just don't know about them," Robinson said. "Wayne County has the most programs, but all members should call their county to see what options are available for them and their dependents."

Personal pride may make it hard for some members to ask for help and/or take advantage of the community and state programs.

"By talking openly and positively about these programs, stewards can

help members realize it's OK to ask for, and take help," Robinson said.

"Members have helped pay for public assistance programs through their taxes, and more than likely gave to the United Way, or another civic or church group to help others in their time of need. Now it may be their turn to accept some assistance. We all need a little help at some time in our lives.

Even companies get subsidies and tax breaks from the government during hard times. There is simply no reason members shouldn't get help they need as well."

Labor Liaisons Available to Assist Members

No one at the Local 876 office is an expert on the state and community agencies designed to help workers during their time of need, nor does the union expect stewards to be experts in this area.

Fortunately, for union members, individuals exist in every community who are not only experts in this area, but their job is to assist union members experiencing difficulties. United Way Labor Liaisons work exclusively with unions and their members to strengthen the relationship between the organization and unions. Liaisons also work with individual union members to make sure they are getting the all help they need from community and state agencies.

Local 876 stewards and members are encouraged to call the Labor Liaison in their county, as listed below, when they need assistance with a personal crisis.

Bay County: Steve Rajewski -- (989) 893-7508

Genesee County: Cindy Cromwell -- (810) 762-5827

Jackson County: Margaret Grose -- (517) 796-5121

Ingham County: Glenn Freeman, III -- (517) 203-5026

Midland County: Hollie Hawkins -- (989) 631-3670

Monroe County: Michael J. Smith -- (734) 242-1331

Saginaw County: Robert Cramer -- (989) 775-0433 x 204

St. Clair County: Charlie O'Boyle -- (810) 985-8169

Washtenaw County: Rickey Banks -- (734) 677-7214

Wayne, Oakland, & Macomb Counties: Erkeisha Terry -- (313) 226-9200

All Other Counties: Chuck Kennedy -- 1-800-396-3066

NLRA Gives Stewards Legal Right to Information

One of the most useful tools provided by the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) is the union's right to obtain information from employers. In 1967, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that this right to information is not limited to data needed for contract negotiations, but also includes information relevant to contract enforcement, which includes all aspects of the grievance procedure.

Under the ruling, stewards and their unions have the right to request information needed to:

- Gauge compliance with the contract.
- Investigate if a grievance exists, or should be continued.
- Prepare for a grievance meeting.
- Prepare for arbitration

The kind of information that must be provided by employers -- as long as it is relevant to the grievance -- is very broad. However, stewards and unions are prohibited from using the right to information to "go fishing" to see what violations they may uncover, or to simply harass the employer.

The types of documents that employers must provide includes the list of commonly requested items accompanying this article. The company is not required to provide information deemed confidential such as employee medical records, and sensitive company data such as trade secrets, product research and profit and loss details.

Employers must provide information requested in a timely manner that allows for due process and is within the time limits specified for each step of the grievance procedure. If the employer claims more time is needed, than an agreement must be reached for extending the grievance time limits.

The cost of supplying the requested information is the employer's, unless "substantial costs" are involved. In these cases, the union and company must bargain over sharing the costs.

If you have any questions regarding your right to information, contact your union representative at the Local 876 office at 1-800-321-6406.

Documents You Can Request

The following is a list of the most common types of information requests made by stewards and their unions that employers must furnish -- provided the information is relevant.

- Accident Reports
- Attendance Records
- Bargaining Notes
- Bonus Records
- Collective bargaining agreements for other bargaining units or other facilities
- Company Manuals and Guidelines
- Contracts with customers, suppliers and subcontractors
- Correspondences
- Customer Complaints
- Customer Lists
- Disciplinary Records
- Equipment Specifications
- Evaluations
- Inspection Records
- Insurance Policies
- Interview Notes
- Investigative Reports
- Job Assignment Records
- Job Descriptions
- Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs)
- Payroll Records
- Personnel Files
- Photographs
- Piece-rate Records
- Security Reports
- Security Guard Reports
- Seniority Lists
- Supervisors' Notes
- Time Study Records
- Training Manuals
- Videotapes
- Wage and Salary Records
- Work Rules

Help Spread the Word: Union Survey Return Deadline Extended to June 15

Members working for all employers except Kroger and Farmer Jack received a survey at their homes earlier this month. The survey asks members their opinions on a wide variety of issues related to Local 876 and their employer. The results of these surveys will be used by Local 876 to make decisions about union programs and priorities.

As an incentive to complete the survey, all members who return the survey by the deadline will be entered into a random drawing for one of 15 U.S. Savings Bonds valued up to \$1,000. To give members more time to participate in the drawing, the deadline for receipt of the surveys has been extended to June 15, 2007. Stewards are encouraged to spread the word about this extension. Members must use the survey sent to their homes. Replacements are not available, as each survey is uniquely coded by the researchers at Wayne State University.