



## Tips on Bargaining for Work Family Balance

Unions have made remarkable strides in recent years in bargaining provisions that help workers to balance work and family. THINK BIG! You may be able to accomplish more than you expect. These efforts will build your union.

Here are some bargaining tips shared by experts:

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Tell us about your successes or lessons learned. Send your story to [info@working-families.org](mailto:info@working-families.org) so that it can be shared on our website.



### **Understand the Work Family Needs of the Workforce**

- **Conduct a work family survey** (separate from the bargaining survey done for negotiations) which rates issues of importance to members. A **sample survey**, which can be modified to reflect work family issues confronting specific worksites, can be found at:  
<http://working-families.org/network/pdf/bargainingquestions.pdf>
- **Involve members** when conducting the survey by having them talk to other members, collect responses and report back to the membership.
- **Collect information that will help in bargaining.**
  - Show that your proposals may also meet the employer's needs. For example, having information on the percentage of workers that had to miss work to care for an elderly parent/relative makes a case for services such as an Elder Care Resource & Referral program.
  - Determine what work family benefits are offered to non-union, salaried and/or executive workers by your employer. Union members often have relatives and friends at work who are salaried or non-union. Obtain as much detailed information as possible about cost, vendors and policies.
- **Be careful not to set unrealistic expectations** of what can be won on the first try.

**Build Support in the Union**

- **Frame the issues broadly to include all members.** In discussing work family issues, include caring for parents, grandparents, and domestic partners as well as children.
- **Think strategically.**
  - Get support from key leaders and caucuses in the union.
  - Find out if your International union has ways to support your efforts. For instance, the International may be able to assist with research, member surveys, public relations, etc.
  - Pass resolutions to support work family issues.
- **Get members involved**, especially those with family responsibilities.
  - Members with small children can help make calls to other members in the evening.
  - Members can speak to their clergy about writing letters of support.
  - Members can talk to other members about their family responsibilities and how they are coping.
  - Develop tasks that can be carried out by people who may not be able to attend meetings.

## **Develop Proposals**

### ➤ **Get background information.**

- Use the **LEARN WorkFamily database** to find out about work family provisions negotiated by other unions in your state, industry or sector.
- Use your survey/assessment results to determine proposals. Be sure to include both cost and low-cost items.
- Research other employers that have agreed to the types of provisions you are seeking in bargaining. Use the **LEARN WorkFamily database** and other resources such as **Families and Work Institute** ([www.familiesandwork.org](http://www.familiesandwork.org)) and **Corporate Voices for Working Families** ([www.cvworkingfamilies.org](http://www.cvworkingfamilies.org)).
- Be aware of state and federal laws on work family issues. These provide the “floor” for bargaining.  
*See: [http://www.nationalpartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=issues\\_work\\_database](http://www.nationalpartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=issues_work_database)*
- Collect statistics on the scope of the problem, from survey and other resources.
- Ask your International union for resources such as employer information, industry trends on work family, analysis of bargaining approaches, and strategies.

### ➤ **Consider the context of bargaining.** What external factors will influence the next round of bargaining? How can you be responsive to those factors? What concerns does the employer have that might be met by improvements in work family balance?

- For instance, you may be bargaining at a time of economic meltdown in your state or industry, or at a time of growth. The context may lead you to focus on higher or lower cost proposals. Remember, times of economic hardship can be good times to make non-economic gains.
- Employer issues can be addressed by work family policies. For example, if absenteeism is a serious problem for this employer, back-up child care, child care for sick children or flexible work hours may help prevent absences caused by child care issues.
- Consider various options in your contract proposal. For example, propose developing a child care fund, expanding the definition of family in the contract, allowing workers to use more sick leave to care for ailing members of the (expanded) family, and instituting flexible schedules. Put more than one approach to improving work family balance on the table.

### **Develop a Campaign Strategy**

➤ **Analyze your leverage and power.**

- Who has ultimate decision-making authority?
- How can you influence them?
- If you are bargaining with a public employer, which elected officials might be helpful?
- Are you asking for rights that others in the workplace already have?
- Are there certain times of the year when your leverage will be greatest? For instance, the beginning of the school year for teachers or right before the start of the concert season for symphony musicians is the time of greatest leverage.
- Is the boss a leader in the church or community? Can that work to your benefit?
- Analyze the possible “pressure points” available to you and plan your strategy accordingly.

➤ **Use the issues to dramatize your demands.**

- Bring children to a meeting of the employer’s board of directors.
- Wheel in elderly parents in wheelchairs to observe bargaining and dramatize the need to use sick leave to care for parents.
- Wear hospital masks to work one day, or to a meeting of the employer’s board of directors to emphasize the lack of a decent sick leave policy.

➤ **Recruit allies. Be creative. Think outside the box.**

- The local school principal may be willing to support the need for flexibility for working parents who need to pick up sick children from school.
- Local law enforcement may support the importance of programs for latchkey children.
- Clergy may weigh in on the need for bereavement leave.

**Keep the Pressure On**

- **Work family issues are sometimes the most likely to fall off the bargaining table quickly.**
  - As in all bargaining, pace yourselves.
  - Success is often determined by involving members in activities related to negotiations. Increase member participation gradually – start by wearing buttons or t-shirts. Then build to bigger actions such as a rally or job action.
  - Plan your strategy to keep the pressure on over time.

**Do Not Retreat**

- **If you don't prevail in bargaining, DO NOT WITHDRAW your proposal OR HORSE TRADE for another unrelated proposal.** This sends a signal that you are not serious.
  - If you must withdraw work family contract proposals, get a letter of understanding that a joint committee will be established to explore resolutions to the problem.
  - If management will not agree to a committee, let the proposal "die on the table" (that is, keep it in your last set of proposals passed to the employer). This helps keep the issue alive for the next round of negotiations. The bargaining committee should make it clear while agreeing to take their offer to the members that the problems related to work family balance have not been solved and no method for solving them has been established.
  - Continue to build your case for new benefits or improvements in established benefits during the period covered by the new agreement. Tell the employer you expect to continue to make progress toward resolution of the problem administratively during the life of the new agreement through an appropriate labor-management committee, or through problem-solving meetings.