

All local reps need to talk to management. Discussions could range from informal conversations with supervisors on the shop floor to formal negotiating committees involving senior management. Whatever the situation, effective negotiations need:

- members' support
- a well-prepared case
- negotiating skills and tactics

Members' Support

No matter how good your case, strong arguments are not enough for negotiating success. Good union organization and membership support are vital. Otherwise, management will be able to ignore arguments.

This doesn't mean you need to threaten industrial action at every stage, but your members' feelings on an issue are central in your negotiating strength.

So be careful to keep members informed. Report back regularly and make sure members understand the importance of the issues you take up. Don't try to bluff management about members' feelings – sooner or later your bluff will be called if you don't have real support.

Preparation

The approach to handling problems sums up the steps you must take to prepare for negotiations:

- **Problem** – What is the problem? Get the facts and check them; talk to members; get advice from fellow local reps.
- **Information** – Check agreements, legal rights, association policy and custom and practice. Again, get advice from other local reps.
- **Plan** – Decide on the best way to use the facts and arguments you have collected. Planning is vital. You need to take a number of steps.
- **Aims** – Decide what you want. This will depend on the problem, and on the information, you have about rights, agreements and association policies. It also depends on your members' views, so you must consult them. If the problem affects other groups, you should consider their views and talk to other local reps.
- **Arguments** – Pick the strongest arguments to support your case. You may decide to use some of these and keep others in reserve. You shouldn't "show your hand" completely in negotiations – you may need to change tack during discussion. Think about management's likely arguments, and how you are going to respond to them.
- **Fallback** – It's rare in negotiations to get everything you want. Normally you have to compromise. Work out the minimum you would accept, bearing in mind the case, union rights and your members' view.

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- **Sanctions** – if management doesn't respond to your case, you may need to point out problems this could cause. It's unwise to make threats unless you can carry them out, so make sure you have real support.
- **Tactics** – You must have a unionside meeting before seeing management – to agree on what arguments to use, who will be the main spokesperson, and who will come in with extra points. You must also be clear about what compromises are acceptable.

Meeting Management

In negotiations, you should be careful about the following points:

- **United front** - Having one main union speaker is necessary to keep unity. The basic rule is: never disagree in front of management. This would show a lack of preparation by the union. More important, it would allow the management to split the union side, and divide and rule. Other members of the union side should only speak if the spokesperson asks them to. If disagreement seems likely, use an adjournment to sort things out.
- **Notes** - Someone on the union side should keep notes.
- **Adjournments** - Use adjournments to:
 - regroup if there are divisions or confusion
 - consider new facts and information
 - consider a management offer

You will have limited time and you will need it all. Good notes will help you to review the key points. Avoid a rambling discussion; the spokesperson should draw firm conclusions about the union's new position, and make sure everyone has agreed on any new tactics.

- **Control the discussion** – Keep the discussion on your best arguments. Ask management questions, get them to try and justify themselves. Keep the emphasis on your complaints and grievances. Object if you get evasive answers, and ask for facts if vague statements are made.

Getting a settlement – Your aim is to reach a satisfactory settlement. This means:

- Keep your overall aims in mind. Be careful that you don't fall below your minimum acceptable position.
- Watch out for management offers – they will often be phrased in a guarded way. If so, you will need to clarify what exactly is being offered.
- Achieve a compromise – it is often easier to get a settlement if both sides feel they have achieved something in the negotiations.
- **The agreement** – It is a mistake to leave negotiations without a clear written record of what has been agreed. Do not leave it to the management to send you their record afterwards; keep your own notes, and if necessary, insist on a form of words to be agreed on there and then.
- **Reporting back** – It is the Association's strength that really counts in negotiations. That means members' support. So, reporting back to members on negotiations should be a regular event. You might need to negotiate special facilities from management to enable you to do this.