

# What to expect when IMPLEMENTING A FIRST CONTRACT

*Once their first Collective Bargaining Agreement is ratified, the employer and the union begin a new era of their relationship, marked by having a shared agreement to guide them. Having established a comprehensive written package of agreed provisions—in effect, a new workplace “constitution”—the parties are now tasked with implementing the particulars and testing how their contract provisions work on a day-to-day basis. It can sometimes be challenging to put aside the disagreements and position-taking of negotiations and build trust. It’s important for management to work towards partnership with the union, and to see the roles of workplace union leaders as a key part of organizational administration and a potential long-term asset. Moving from the more adversarial nature of negotiations to a labor-management partnership requires time, grace, intentionality, and candor.*

## **Management Forms an Implementation Team**

Management can take the lead in this phase by forming its own implementation team and creating internal project-management tools and resources to assure contract provisions are acted upon and enforced. For example, the team can create a summary of the contract provisions—usually a chart that lists each article, implementation steps, timeframe, and who is responsible – to guide their work. The team can also create an annotated reference copy of the CBA in which they can compile questions, interpretative notes, flags and operational reminders, etc. as the contract implementation proceeds.

## **Supervisors, Managers and Confidential Staff are Educated on the**

**Contract** All staff – including supervisors, managers and confidential employees excluded from the union-represented Bargaining Unit – are potentially impacted by the new CBA. Supervisors will need to know the frontline responsibilities and tasks the CBA assigns to them and how else their roles will change; and all staff will want to understand how any contractual changes in employment conditions will apply to them. It is therefore important to review the contract terms and discuss how they will impact current policies and procedures. Talk with the union about how to

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educate all staff about the contract. If possible, collaborate with the union to plan and carry out those education efforts.

### **Contract Provisions are Put into Effect**

One of the first steps is to implement agreed upon financial changes affecting individual employees, such as benefits and pay. Policy manuals, personnel procedures, and forms may need to be adapted to align with the CBA (and management can also add a useful note up front in its employee handbook, confirming that in the event of a difference between the handbook and the Collective Bargaining Agreement, the CBA will control as to employees covered by the CBA). Often, hiring and onboarding procedures will also need to be adapted to include an opportunity for new Bargaining Unit hires to meet with workplace union stewards and be introduced to the union.

### **Consult with the union to implement key contract provisions.**

Some contractual agreements require further discussion and clarification between management and the union. For example, the employer and the union will want to work out the specifics of setting up payroll deduction for union dues and keep each other updated on their designated workplace representatives and points of contact. New CBA protocols and/or sound labor relations practice can call for engaging with the union as you create new policies or procedures (for example regarding evaluation or work planning). Constructive communication during this implementation phase sets the tone for the relationship going forward.

### **Management works to Improve the Relationship with the Union**

Sometimes, negotiations leave a residue of distrust and bad feeling. If that is the case, it helps to engage in an intentional process of reflection and repair. These can be challenging conversations and we recommend the help of a trained facilitator with experience in restorative processes. Even where contract negotiations went smoothly, the parties can benefit from debriefing what they experienced and learned in negotiations, and creating working agreements and practices that will support the labor management partnership going forward.

### **The Union Selects its Member Representatives**

Once there is a contract, the union will typically select official workplace representatives from among employees in the Bargaining Unit. These positions are often called “shop stewards” or “delegates”. Some unions also have a “Unit Chair” or

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“Chief Steward” who is the overall leader. The union may assign one of their own staff (such as a full-time local union officer or field representative) to support the bargaining unit. Management should ask for clarity about whom they should contact to engage and inform the union, and should keep the union updated on management’s principal point of contact for day-to-day CBA administration and labor relations matters.

### **Together you Form a Labor Management Committee**

Many contracts include provisions for the establishment of a labor-management committee (LMC), which can become a valuable forum for cultivating the labor-management partnership. If the contract includes an LMC, the CBA will typically outline the Committee’s function and composition (for example, management and the union each appoint representatives to the committee).

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