

WHAT IS A LABOR UNION?

AND WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN ONE

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WHAT UNIONS ARE AND WHAT THEY DO

A union is simply a group of workers who join together to make their lives better by giving themselves a voice in their workplace.

Union workers organize together for representation and to negotiate, vote on, and enforce a contract with their employer for better working conditions. This process is also referred to as "collective bargaining." The union speaks with one voice on behalf of all workers in a workplace.

Unions negotiate for better working conditions such as:

- better wages
- healthcare benefits
- retirement
- a stable and consistent work schedule
- no mandatory overtime
- cost-of-living adjustments
- paid leave
- free legal services
- binding arbitration
- grievance procedures

Union workers make more money, enjoy more benefits, and have greater job security than non-union workers.

YOUR LEGALLY PROTECTED RIGHT TO ORGANIZE

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) gives you the right to organize and join a union at your workplace.

You have the right to:

- join a union
- talk to your co-workers about joining a union (in non-work areas during non-work times)
- circulate and sign petitions with your co-workers (in non-work areas during non-work times)
- join with your co-workers for the purpose of forming a union
- join with your co-workers for the purpose of improving working conditions in your workplace
- participate in meetings to discuss joining a union
- distribute, read, and discuss union literature (in non-work areas during non-work times)
- wear union buttons, stickers, t-shirts, and hats to show support for a union
- sign a union card and demand union recognition
- join together in other activities to protest unfair treatment or demand improvements in wages, hours, and working conditions
- organize other co-workers to support the union, sign union cards, or file grievances

These rights are protected by Section 7 of the NLRA.

IT IS ILLEGAL FOR YOUR BOSS TO...

- fire or threaten to fire, layoff, discipline, harass, transfer, or reassign an employee because they support the union
- favor employees who don't support the union over those that do in promotions, hours, enforcement of rules or any other conditions
- close or threaten to close your place of employment or take away benefits or privileges in order to discourage union activity
- promise employees a pay increase, promotion, benefit, or special favor if they oppose the union
- ask your opinion of the union and whether you are for or against it

Under Section 8 of the NLRA it is illegal for your employer to commit any of these acts.

IF YOUR WORKPLACE IS NON-UNION...

- you are an "employee at will," meaning that your employer can discipline or fire you at any time for any reason. The only exceptions are termination for discrimination, whistle-blowing, or union organizing
- your employer determines wages, benefits, and other terms and conditions of work. If you are not satisfied, your only option is to find another job
- wages, benefits, and other terms and work conditions can be changed by your employer at any time

IF YOU JOIN A UNION AND HAVE A CONTRACT...

- discipline, up to and including discharge, is subject to a grievance procedure and binding arbitration, depending on the terms of your contract
- contract negotiations require both sides (labor and management) to listen and reach reasonable compromises acceptable to everyone

- wages, benefits, and working conditions are negotiated. If you are not satisfied, you can work for changes during contract negotiations - instead of simply finding another job.
- neither labor nor management can make sudden changes to a signed contract. If modifications are necessary, both sides must agree to it
- hiring and promotion is covered by contract. Seniority and other factors can be written into the agreement
- once you and your co-workers successfully form a union, your employer is required by law to bargain with you. After you reach a settlement and vote to approve your first contract, your employer cannot change or take away what you negotiated. **It is a legal and binding document.**

DOES "RIGHT TO WORK" MEAN I CAN'T JOIN A UNION?

No! "Right to work" just means that a worker cannot be required to join a union as a condition of employment. In a "right to work" state, workers still have the right to form and join unions.

It is your legally protected right to organize and join a union in any state.

ARE UNIONS NO LONGER NEEDED THESE DAYS?

Employers like to say that unions are no longer needed in today's modern workplace. If this is true, then why do top executives at every major corporation also negotiate their own legal contracts that detail their compensation, retirement, and severance packages? That sounds just like what unions do, right? Why should workers have anything different? Labor laws do exist, but they don't require companies to provide union wages, benefits, binding arbitration, or a grievance process.

Do all companies treat their workers fairly? And do they guarantee it in a written, legally binding contract? No.

Until that day comes, workers will need unions. Unions are needed now more than ever because corporations are more powerful than ever.

UNION DUES

Employers always try to scare workers from unionizing by telling them they will have to pay expensive union dues. How much union members actually pay in dues is a world apart from the made-up amount that the bosses say they pay.

Most union dues are multi-tiered or on a sliding scale. This means that lower-paid workers pay a lower percentage. Some unions pay a flat monthly amount. The most common structure sets the union dues as a percentage of gross earnings. Dues typically hover around 1% to 2% of a member's earnings. Regardless, the benefits secured by a union membership far outweigh the cost of union dues.

Being in a union doesn't cost - it pays!

The money that union members contribute comes back to them through a collective bargaining agreement and a wide range of union services. Union members also have a say where their money goes. Dues are set democratically at the union's convention by delegates that include members from your own local union. As a union member, you help oversee how your dues are set and administered.

Furthermore, union members know where their money is going. Every union is required by law to submit annual financial reports to the Office of Labor Management Standards, a division of the Department of Labor. These reports detail union income and spending, and shows where every cent of income has been spent. All of this information must be made available to a union member upon request.

Union members aren't "paying to work." Union member

dues help sustain their own organization and gives the union the power to fight for their member's rights, to protect them from being taken advantage of or fired for no reason.

ARE UNIONS "OUTSIDERS?"

At some point, you've probably been forced to watch anti-union videos at work orientation where an actor says something like "I don't need someone else to speak for me," meaning unions. A union is not, as some employers falsely claim, some "outside" third-party organization that enters your workplace to come between you and your employer. The truth is, you and your co-workers **are** the union! You formed it! You work there!

With a union, workers are speaking for themselves. It's not someone else speaking for you. The only outside third-party that tries to come between you and your employer and that tries to speak for you are union busting groups. Companies spend millions hiring these groups to try to intimidate and mislead workers to not unionize.

ORGANIZED GREED VS. ORGANIZED LABOR

By joining together in a union, workers can accomplish more than they can on their own. Trying to negotiate by yourself with a billion-dollar corporation doesn't work. The only hope of workers is to stand together. When workers have a union, the employer loses their powerful advantage of dealing with workers one at a time. When workers have a union, the employer has to deal with all the workers united together.

There's strength in numbers.

Without a union, the only terms are the employers': their way or the highway. Without a union, your employer decides what's good for you without you having a say. Without a union, workers and employers don't face each other on a level playing field. Don't listen to these profit-driven companies when they try to convince you that being overworked and underpaid is a good thing. If companies can offer better without unions, why don't they?

You sign a contract for your house, apartment, cell phone, utilities, and your vehicle. Sign a union contract to protect your income!

It doesn't matter what your job is. All workers deserve to have a voice at work and the best pay and benefits they can negotiate for.

The promises of your boss are temporary. A union contract is in writing and is legally binding. Why give the boss all the power? You can't quit your way to worker's rights - stay at your job and unionize!

Big business is organized and works together to further their own interests. Why shouldn't workers organize and work together to do the same?

United we bargain. Divided we beg.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Joe Lee - United Food and Commercial Workers Union
joelee@ufcw1000.org | 1-918-319-8611

How to Form a Union: perfectunion.us/how-to-form-a-union

Search: "How to Form a Union - Two Chefs Explain"

Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee

workersorganizing.org

312-574-3122

National Labor Relations Board

NLRB.gov

817-978-2921 (Fort Worth office)

1-844-762-6572 (National office)

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