



Draft Code of Conduct for Union Members Involved in Joint Programs

This is a draft code of conduct for union members who are going to be involved in partnership programs, involvement programs or joint labor/management activities of any type. Note that this code is not much different than what we would expect of a union member in other settings - especially when the members are engaged in any type of discussions with the company.

Many consultants in the labor-management field have tried to convince us that we are in a new era - a new period of history where we can (or have to) all just work together. They say that the code of conduct for us as union members therefore has to be different. They focus on trust, listening, respect in meetings, looking out for the needs of everyone, etc.

But there are certain basic union values, and a code of conduct that goes with them, that cannot be abandoned no matter what the new situation is. Here are some suggestions:

1) **Never go into any discussion alone.**

You can't be a union if you are by yourself. We should always try to make sure that when we are in discussions with management, there is at least one other union member present. This helps build the presence of the union, it allows us to show unity and it gives more union brainpower to come up with ideas and evaluate actions.

2) **When in joint meetings, stick to the union agenda. If you are not sure what the union agenda is or how to respond to something that management is saying, call a caucus or wait until the next break.**

It is important that the union act together when dealing with management. Otherwise we have very little ability to get what we need. This means that significant disagreements should be saved for caucus rather than being aired in front of management. It also means that the union agenda should be aggressively pursued by everyone and that if the discussion moves to something that the union is not prepared for, a caucus should be called or the issue should be tabled.

3) **When in caucus, talk about all your hesitations, concerns, etc.**

While it is important to work together when in meetings with management, it is equally important that any disagreements be aired in caucus. People should feel free to raise issues and concerns in caucus. In fact, they should see it as their responsibility. This is the only way to build unity of action.

4) **Evaluate all proposals and ideas for their impact on the members and on the union.**

Ideas, proposals and activities should always be evaluated for their impact on the members and the union, in both the short and long term. This takes more time than simply looking at "how it affects me today" but it is critical to keeping the changes from having significant negative impacts. A good evaluation can rarely be done by a single person - it needs many different points of view to be thorough.

5) **Report to the union on all discussions, meetings, teams, etc.**

The union cannot act in a unified manner if it doesn't know what is going on. It is very common for joint activities to multiply in a way that makes it difficult for the union to keep on top of. It is therefore important that all union participants communicate with the union leadership about what is going on in their particular group.

6) **Don't keep secrets with management.**

One of the "principles" of many involvement programs and some forms of consensus decision-making is that the content of discussions (and particularly any disagreements) stay within the group. This is in essence an agreement with management to keep secrets from the members and the union. Full and open communication and discussion with other members is the only way to keep things on a union track.

7) **No involvement, direct or indirect, in disciplining other members.**

There are many ways, besides the formal discipline procedure, for members to be involved in disciplining other members. Peer pressure can be created around issues that are essentially the company's concerns. This will create divisions within the union.

8) **UNITY.**

This cannot be said too many times or in too many ways. Building unity with other union members (within and outside the committees) must always be on the minds of any participants in joint programs.

9) **Take good notes.**

The union needs a record of what goes on in all joint meetings in order to coordinate across committees, to keep track of management's activities and to have a paper trail in case the union needs to use its legal rights as the sole collective bargaining agent.

10) **Do not give away information that could be used to undermine skills or eliminate jobs.**

The "harvesting" of critical knowledge and skills is often a key aspect of involvement programs. We must never give away knowledge without understanding the impacts and without being clear about what we are getting in return.

This list is a draft. You should add, change or take away points. But then print the finished product, post it around the union hall and the workplace and make sure that all your members who are involved in any joint activities have a copy and know what is expected of them.

This fact sheet was prepared by the Labor Extension Program, University of Massachusetts, Lowell, MA 01854. For more information, call 978-934-3266.