

Breaking In a New Administration

Welcoming a new administration to govern your workplace can be one of the most daunting aspects of being a public employee.

There is often changeover in management be it a new Governor, County Executive, Mayor, Council members, Commissioners or Board of Health members. In this change, there is both excitement and apprehension with the paradigm shift that can easily be navigated by utilizing the right resources.

With the uncertainty of how your wages, hours and working conditions will be dealt with by the new administration, it may seem appealing to stick your head in the sand and hope it all stays the same. But times like these call for you to face these challenges head on and become proactive instead of reactive.

Becoming a leader in shaping the path of the new administration as it relates to labor issues, positions you and the union at the forefront of change— with a strong voice for the future. Often, new administrations have little knowledge of the existing circumstances and sometimes even less knowledge of needed changes. Front line workers are an invaluable asset with historical knowledge and technical know-how to ease a new administration into business.

Communication

Regardless of whether or not the union endorsed the incoming administration, chances are the leader knows who Local 17 is and has some idea of labor's role. It's best to begin communicating directly with the new administration early on. There are several ways to reach out and welcome the administration, but no matter how you approach them, timing is key. The sooner you make the union's presence known as an entity of interest and support, the sooner you will be able to garner first hand information and be at the helm of upcoming changes. There are a number of networking opportunities available to engage the administration with our organization.

Coalitions

If your chapter participates in a coalition with other unions, one opportunity to welcome the new administration is by inviting them to a coalition meeting. This provides them an opportunity to “meet and greet” the major labor players in one setting. It also gives the administration a forum to share their goals and direction for the upcoming term. Question and answer sessions have proven to be an effective gateway to uncovering each side's interests and aspirations for the days ahead.

If your Coalition does not meet regularly or there is no immediate opportunity to invite the administrators, consider asking the chair or co-chairs to meet one on one with the administration on behalf of the Coalition and report back what was learned.

Membership Meetings

Another prime opportunity to engage the new administration is by inviting them to a chapter or bargaining

unit meeting. Again, this is an opportunity for an open forum discussion on what lies ahead. Members rarely have direct access to upper level administrators and coordinating a meeting that involves their participation and input directly to the decision makers will go a long way in securing the membership's participation in the newly forged labor-management relationship. Additionally, the administrators will appreciate the chance to address their employees in an environment that is favorable to the employees.

Coordinating with All the Major Players

Often, public service arenas include several major players. For example, King County has an Executive plus a Council of nine elected members, plus an 85 percent represented workforce with a coalition of close to 20 unions.

Politics being what they are, these political and labor advocates often work one group over another, forming alliances to accomplish their goals. While this may be necessary in certain situations, there are greater benefits to true collaboration on all fronts. When a new administration takes over, another avenue of communicating labor's interests is by gathering all decision makers in one forum or coordinating efforts amongst each other.

Another King County example illustrates this point perfectly. One department is in dire need of a fee increase to support their staffing and business models. The union has a vested interest in securing jobs for our members and will work on achieving the increase. The Executive has an interest in seeing the business of that department thrive and will be in charge of proposing the new fee increase, and lastly, the Council's interest lies in providing its constituents with the services they depend upon and will ultimately be the ones who approve or deny the fee increase.

All parties have related interests and it's to everyone's benefit to communicate and coordinate their efforts. Partnering, instead of splintering, can lead to common interests being discovered, supported and achieved. While there will be some discord and varying interests—as is the norm in politics—the reality is that more can be accomplished working together than working against each other.

In conclusion, while the road ahead may seem bumpy and uncertain, there is much value to be gained by being proactive, collaborative and at the forefront of making the changes that will benefit and shape the working world of our membership. — *By Local 17 Union Representative Behnaz Nelson*



Photos: Above: King Co. Executive Dow Constantine, below: The King County Council

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