

**Improving Labor Management Relationships:  
From Confrontation to Collaboration**

Presented by

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**Changing Traditional Labor/Management Relationships**

“Let us begin anew, remembering on both sides that civility is not a sign of weakness, that sincerity is always subject to proof. Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us not fear to negotiate.”

- John F. Kennedy  
35<sup>th</sup> President of the United States

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**Traditional Labor/Management Bargaining Relationships**

- An Arranged Marriage without the option of a Divorce
- Traditional Bargaining
  - Adversarial Roles
  - Leverage
  - Win/Lose
  - Impact – Short Term Outcomes/Long Term Scars
  - Us vs. Them Mentality
  - Distrust
  - Rigid Communication Structures - Representatives/Timing (negotiations/grievance procedures)

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### Indicators that traditional approaches are failing

- High numbers of grievances or repetitive grievances on the same issues
- Lack of use or improper use of the grievance procedure
- Few settlements at lower grievance levels/excessive arbitration cases
- "Relationship type" demands during negotiations
- Distrust leading to poor attitudes at the bargaining table and within the workforce
- Breakdowns in communication at all levels of the organization

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### Understanding the Obstacles To Overcome

- History
- Personalities
- Politics
- Limited Skillsets
- Interests
- Processes
- Fear/Uncertainty
- Legal Constraints

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### Foundations for Change

- Two (2) things must change in order to dig ourselves out of a dysfunctional labor management relationship
  - Communication
    - Processes
    - Who/What is the Adversary?
  - Trust
    - Built over Time
    - Win/Lose to Win/Win approaches

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### Engagement Mechanisms Outside of Bargaining/Grievance Process

- Labor Management Committees
- Ad-Hoc Committees
  - May be contractually based (e.g. Safety; Insurance, etc.)
- Process Improvement Committees

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### Engagement Mechanisms Outside of the Bargaining/Grievance Process

- Not a simple solution, silver-bullet, or panacea to organizational labor woes ... even these processes have perceived issues to overcome
  - Time
    - Staff Commitment/Consensus Building
  - Perception
    - Management (Compromising the rights to manage)
    - Union (Too Close with Management; Tool to placate and patronize, not make serious contributions)
- Not a shifting of power away from an Employer, merely a better way of communicating and carrying out the responsibility of leadership

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### Labor Management Committees

- For an Employer – An opportunity to:
  - Review operational conditions, service quality issues, citizen needs, and other related matters that link the relationship of employees to the success or failure of the organization
  - Advance discussions about operational problems, scheduling, and other matters having a direct impact on employee schedules and functioning in the workforce

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### Labor Management Committees

- For an Employer – An opportunity to:
  - Have an open channel for top management to establish rapport with union committees and leaders without getting bogged down in day-to-day problems
  - Be responsive to constructive discussions and valid complaints, demonstrating its desire to the union and employees to bring about workplace improvements

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### Labor Management Committees

- For the Union – Provides:
  - Clear channel of communication to top management
  - Chance for input on operational problems and employer plans that can impact employee schedules and other work conditions
  - Avenue to communicate employee concerns outside of the normal grievance process

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### Labor Management Committees

- For the Union – Provides:
  - Opportunity to resolve minor problems before they become significant grievances or issues at the bargaining table.
  - Recognition by management of the union's role as a constructive partner, beyond just the negotiations and grievance process
  - Means to strengthen communications with membership

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### Labor Management Committees

- For the Employees:
  - Provide a mechanism to involve employees in solving workplace problems
  - Promote workplace engagement which can impact waste due to absenteeism, turnover, low morale, and employee dissatisfaction

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### Labor Management Committees

- For the Employees:
  - Utilize more fully the skills and knowledge of employees
  - Bring about changes that, when implemented, intrinsically link employees to the success of the organization through more efficient work and cost competitiveness in service delivery

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### Committees: Do's & Don'ts

- **Do:** Keep focused on Issues.
- **Do:** Resist letting personality or philosophical differences become deterrents to the process.
- **Do:** Make a commitment. Cancelling meetings or relegating them to a non-priority status sends the wrong message to employees and the union.
- **Do:** Stick to an agenda and clearly outline all items to be addressed, and circulate it in advance.
- **Do:** Maintain detailed minutes, including a record that reflects items that have been completed, resolved, or continue to be ongoing.
- **Do:** Fully explain the committee concept to employees and supervisors (i.e. purpose, limits, authority, etc.).

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## Committees: Do's & Don'ts

- **Don't:** Attack difficult or sensitive issues early on. Early successes with minor problems will build a foundation for addressing more difficult issues later.
- **Don't:** Allow meetings to become gripe sessions.
- **Don't:** Don't deal in generalities. Be specific about problems and suggestions for corrections.
- **Don't:** Minimize any issue on the agenda.
- **Don't:** Delay in communicating outcomes and solutions to serious or agreed upon issues in the committee.
- **Don't:** Expect immediate results.

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## Questions?



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