

## Union Basics

A union is simply a group of workers who join together to have a greater say in their working conditions. When employees join together and form a union or “organize”, they increase their ability to bring permanent, positive change to their workplace. Because once you organize a union, your employer is required by law to bargain with you and your co-workers over your conditions of employment.

It’s only as part of a united group that workers can gain the economic and legal leverage necessary to bargain with their employer. One person telling management that wages or healthcare should be improved does not carry the same weight as a bargaining proposal that represents *all* of the workers demands.

Many workers form unions for the purpose of gaining:

- Equality and respect on the job
- Better wages and benefits
- More flexibility for work and family needs
- A counter-balance to the unchecked power of employers
- A voice in improving the quality of their products, services and work life

When workers unite, they can win better wages, benefits, and a voice on the job through collective bargaining. Good union jobs also mean stronger communities. Unions continue to lead the fight today for better lives for working people, such as through expanded family and medical leave, improved safety and health protections, and fair trade agreements that lift the standard of living for workers all over the world.

Unions have also made life better for all working Americans by helping to pass laws ending child labor, establishing the eight- hour work day, protecting worker’s safety and health, and helping create Social Security, unemployment insurance and the minimum wage. So even if you have never been a union member, you have already benefited from some of organized labor’s efforts.

A wider range of people than ever before, including many women and immigrants, are building unions today. Doctors and nurses, poultry workers and graduate employees, home health care aides and wireless communications workers, cable television technicians and service reps, auto parts workers and engineers, are just a few of the professions that are seeking a voice in their workplace through union representation.

In today’s uncertain economy, having a union and the right to bargain collectively with your employer is more important than ever before.

## How CWA Can Help

Interested in getting a real voice in your workplace? If you are, then CWA, the Communications Workers of America, can help you and your co-workers build the majority support that you will need to organize your union. Our union's purpose is to help workers like you organize together so you will have the power to negotiate good contracts, increase your standard of living, and have a real voice in decisions about your workplace and working conditions.

CWA represents about 700,000 men and women in telecommunications, cable television and information technology; media and publishing; health care, higher education, law enforcement and public service; in the airlines, and in manufacturing.

Getting union representation is the best way to gain the advances in working conditions that you and your co-workers desire. Statistics compiled by the U.S. Department of Labor show that unionized workers enjoy higher wages, better benefits and pensions, and have greater job security than workers who don't have a union. In almost every industry, union workers fare better than non-union workers doing the same type of work.

Without union representation, you are an employee "at will". This means that all of your wages, benefits and conditions of employment, including your employment itself, may be reduced, modified, or terminated by your employer at any time, and for any reason. Your employer has no legal obligation to you at all.

With a union, Federal law requires your employer to bargain with you about your compensation and working conditions including: pay, benefits, job security, health and safety, paid time off, retirement, etc... And a union contract is a legally enforceable document that will hold your employer to their word. Contract violations and unfair management decisions can be challenged through the grievance process, and if necessary, a neutral third party arbitrator.

Working under a contract will provide the stability, equality, and security in working conditions, pay, and opportunities for advancement that you deserve. You are invited to join 700,000 CWA members who have decided that being a union member is best for them, and for their loved ones who depend on them.

# How To Organize Your Workplace

Experience tells us that it's best when workers organize themselves. This is essential if you want to create a viable worker-led and inspired organization where you work. CWA organizers and staff will work with you throughout the campaign and provide guidance and resources. But it's you, the employees, who must be willing to join together to create and build your union.

CWA's organizing model moves through four stages. Each of these stages may last a different period of time depending on the campaign, but every campaign goes through each stage. The four stages are:

1. **Contact**
2. **Committee**
3. **Campaign**
4. **Certification/Contract**

The first stage of organizing is Contact, where you will be gauging support by talking to your co-workers. Once you and your CWA organizer have determined that there is sufficient support to continue, you will begin to build an Inside Organizing Committee from workers who are representative of the unit.

Building a strong, effective Inside Organizing Committee is the ***most critical*** step in winning representation, and improving your workplace. Committee members help collect data, educate and evaluate co-workers, clarify the issues, and confront and challenge misinformation claims made by management or anti-union workers. Committee members must be committed to the union, and willing to show their support publicly.

Once the committee has been trained and is solid, the campaign will "go public". This will involve asking others to sign a petition or cards, having meetings, and initiating one-on-one discussions with your co-workers about the issues. When there is strong majority support, a petition for union recognition will be filed with the National Labor Relations Board for private employers, or a request for recognition from public employers.

An election (if required) will be conducted by secret ballot, usually at the work site. If more than half of those voting vote for CWA, your employer will be legally required to negotiate in good faith with CWA on your behalf.

## CWA Organizing Fact Sheet:

*The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) Section 7 and 8 give you the legal right to join a union, and protects you from employer actions.*

<b>You Have The Right To:</b>	<b>Your Employer May Not:</b>
Attend meetings to discuss forming a union with your co-workers.	Punish or discriminate against any worker because of union activity.
Read, distribute, and discuss union literature (as long as you do this in non-work areas during non-work times, such as during breaks or lunch hours).	Threaten to actually fire, layoff, discipline, harass, transfer, or reassign employees because they support the union.
Wear union buttons, t-shirts, stickers, hats or other items on the job.	Favor employees who don't support the union over those who do in promotions, job assignments, wages, hours, enforcement of rules, or any other working condition.
Sign a card asking your employer to recognize and bargain with your union.	Threaten to or actually take away jobs, wages, or any benefits or privileges employees already enjoy in order discourage union activity.
Sign petitions or file grievances related to wages, hours, working conditions, and other job issues.	Promise employees a pay increase, promotion, benefit, or special favor if they oppose the union.
Ask other employees to support the union, to sign union cards or petitions, to file grievances.	Surveil or interrogate employees to determine union support.
Participate in a secret ballot election conducted by the National Labor Relations Board.	Use coercive statements or actions or unspecified threats to communicate that union supporters will be punished.

***If your employer has violated any of your NLRA rights, you should make a written record of the incident(s) and report them immediately to your CWA Organizer. If appropriate, CWA will file an Unfair Labor Practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board.***

## CWA Organizing Fact Sheet:

### *Difference between represented and non-represented workers*

<b>With Union Representation</b>	<b>Without Union Representation</b>
You will be working under a contract of employment, which is a legally enforceable document that will hold your employer accountable to their word.	You are an “at will” employee which means that the terms and conditions of your employment can be modified or terminated, at any time, and for any reason by your employer.
Through contract negotiations you will have input on every area of your conditions, and terms of employment.	You can accept whatever management offers, or you can quit.
The grievance procedure provides an effective way to address, and resolve workplace concerns, and contract violations. You can appeal all the way to an independent arbitrator if necessary.	You can try to address your concerns as a single voice.
Your annual increase will be a negotiated part of your contract, that will spell out the amount of each increase, and when it will become effective for the duration of the contract.	You can hope that you get an annual increase.
The contract has the final say on what is fair. Seniority will be the tie breaker, when all other categories are equal.	All working conditions and policies are made unilaterally by management.
You can only be fired for “just cause”. Layoffs must be done in accordance with the procedure spelled out in the contract.	You have no guarantee that you will have a job next year, or next week.
You will be represented by a Steward in all disciplinary meetings, and your guilt will have to be proved.	You have no advocate.
Almost all union decisions are determined by a majority vote.	Decisions are made without your input.

## For Additional Research:

The following websites contain additional information that can help you make an informed choice about union representation.

CWA main site:

[www.cwa-union.org](http://www.cwa-union.org)

AFL-CIO:

[www.aflcio.org/](http://www.aflcio.org/)

American rights at work:

[www.americanrightsatwork.org/](http://www.americanrightsatwork.org/)

Government statistics on union advantage:

[www.bls.gov/home.htm](http://www.bls.gov/home.htm)

CWA District 7:

<http://www.cwadistrict7.org>

If you have questions, or would like additional information on how you can form a union at your workplace, please contact:

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