



# Talking to your producers & customers about Collective Bargaining

*Guide for Local 7 (HLS/NLS) members - Autumn 2022*

Contrary to popular belief, conflict isn't inherently bad. Difficult conversations are a necessary part of developing relationships and working well with others. Reaching an understanding is often the first step toward creating a better environment, and that is what we want to do when we are talking to customers. Ultimately, we want to reach an understanding with them so they are aware of what is taking place in bargaining and that it's better for them if we reach a negotiated collective agreement that improves working conditions for all union members.

We all need to learn how to have difficult conversations with our coworkers, managers and - in this case - producers and customers. But not every conversation will lead to agreement or understanding. You may come up with a plan to find a solution or reach a mutual understanding instead. Solutions are only one type of resolution for difficult situations, so aim for understanding first. Understanding is the foundation of any solution, so both people in the conversation must be on the same page and understand each other.

Preparing ahead of time can help you focus on having a productive conversation, building that understanding, all before searching for a solution. This guide will help you prepare to have these conversations with producers and customers about collective bargaining.

## Preparing for the conversation

Often, we go into tough conversations with our desired outcome in mind. With bargaining coming up it's normal to imagine a solution where all producers support your Local and what we are bargaining for without consideration for their questions or concerns. It's crucial to remember that these types of conversations should be a dialogue, not a monologue. Self-reflection and empathy play key roles in having an open discussion.

Without properly preparing for the conversation, it's possible that a tough talk could end in hurt feelings. Examine how you are feeling about the situation before you have the conversation so your emotions don't surprise you.

Then, exploring the other person's point of view can offer a new perspective. Imagining the other person's perspective helps you garner empathy before the conversation.

## 5 steps to help you navigate through difficult conversations

Most of us know from experience that the earlier you have difficult conversations, the better. But, starting a tough conversation can feel daunting. That makes it easy to put it off and hope that the issue disappears on its own.

### 1. Consider the situation from their perspective

Often, a conversation feels difficult because we're hung up on our own perspective and explaining why bargaining and the issues are important to me. When we have a fixed idea in mind, we may not be open to hearing other points of view. Even when explaining why bargaining is important to you set your view of the situation aside and look from customer's perspective. Imagine how this conversation and the effects of bargaining and strike or lockout would affect them.

You may not fully understand their perspective right now. Get yourself to a place where you're interested in discovering what's happening with them.

### 2. Have a goal in mind, but be flexible

Having an agenda can make tough conversations feel one-sided. It's important to go into the conversation knowing your ideal outcome of a shared understanding of the importance to bargaining and that any disruption is worth it in the long run. However, be ready to compromise or consider once you have a deeper understanding of the other person's experience and concerns.

The objective of the conversation is to reach an understanding that a better collective agreement is better for the union members and, in turn, them -- the customer. If you already have your solution in mind, there's nowhere for the exchange to go. Entering the conversation with

an intention to be flexible can help you both see eye-to-eye quicker.

### 3. Work on your listening skills

When we expect a conversation to go a certain way, we might rehearse it in our heads ahead of time. While that helps many people define their perspective, it could hamper your listening, too. Listen intently to the producer and aim to understand their perspective. Ask questions as needed and care about their answers. Make a concerted effort not to think about your response while the other person is sharing. Active listening can help you find common ground and reach a solution. Working with a coach is a great way to intentionally develop your listening skills.

### 4. Take care of yourself

Tough conversations can be emotionally draining. It's crucial to take care of yourself to keep a difficult conversation from turning into a fight. It is better to stop a conversation before it leads to a fight as it is hard on you and the other person. If you feel you or the other person is not in the right place to have the conversation you can pause it and continue the conversation later.

Remember that you don't have to come to a conclusion right away. Take the time you need to have a respectful and intentional conversation.

### 5. Brainstorm solutions together

Even if you already have an end goal in mind, coming to a shared solution is a joint effort. You may believe you have the right solution to fix a problem, but you may come to an even better conclusion that addresses their specific concerns if you look for other ways to resolve the problem.

Explore ideas or ways to come to an understanding of the situation, even if you both agree to disagree. If you can reach an understanding, it is easier to address any concerns about disruption or service or customer service that might ease the customers

mind and move them towards supporting you during bargaining.

## What to do after a difficult conversation

Even when a tough conversation ends, reflecting on it is just as important. But we need to be intentional about what worked and what you could do better next time and keeping the lines of communication open after the fact as the customer might come back with more questions next time you talk to them.

Great leaders are experts at having difficult conversations. Developing your conversation skills can make navigating personal conflict much easier.

## Talking points for talking to producers & customers

### Disruption of service

- I understand that if there is any slow down or strike or lockout it affects Viterra and we know it does ultimately affect our customers.
- I do not want to hurt or do anything to cause problems for you, but we know that might be something that happens.
- I can tell you that if there is going to be any reduction in service because of these negotiations it won't happen over night it will take weeks, so - if we are getting closer to a strike - I'd see what can be done to plan around it. Come and talk to me or any of us here and we will do what we can to help you avoid any issues.

### Customer service

- Customer service is important, and as a worker that is serving customers every day, I am focused on ensuring my co-workers and I aren't overworked and stressed so we are able to provide the customer service you deserve.

- We live in the community and take our responsibility seriously.

## Make it personal

- I have been here working at this facility for X years. My family, my parents have been here even longer. Just like you, knowing who I am working with is important.
- I've been helping you for years and bargaining a fair collective agreement will make it so I can stay here for many more years.
- You know if you have any problems or questions about our bargaining or a strike or lockout just come to me and ask.

## Don't slag the Company

- Don't talk negatively about the company, customers may feel one way or another but you showing your professionalism to Viterra is better than being petty.
- If you have to talk about something focus on the policy, decision, or reason that you think isn't right. But even when doing that tell your customer that regardless of the issues you can help them out how ever you are able.
- If they talk negatively about the union or GSU remind them that you are the union and what GSU is just trying to do is get the best it can for all of its members.

## Understand their concerns

- Listen to what they are saying and try to put yourself in their shoes. Find something they are saying that you can agree with.
- Try not to immediately 'solve' their problem but first try to understand and ask any questions so you are sure you understand their point of view.

GSU.ca | 1.866.522.6686 | GSU@GSU.ca