Having the Difficult Conversation at the Bargaining Table

Difficult conversations at the bargaining table are going to happen whether you have been negotiating for years or you have just started. This presentation will give you examples, resources, tips and ideas for bargaining. We will be focusing on:

Why preparation is important. - Preparation begins the day you ratified the Agreement. Trust is being built and is part of the preparation. Preparation should be consistent and thorough. Preparation includes budget documents, audit documents, grievances filed, and any language issues that have surfaced since the last negotiations. Interview principals, supervisors, and payroll clerks for input on areas of concern.

How establishing the parameters and clear expectations for the bargaining team by the full board assists with difficult conversations. - Prior to negotiations it is important to make sure the bargaining team has had a chance to discuss any questions and potential interests with the full Board. The Agreement is between the Board and the Association and the entire Board will have to vote on it. By having other options or alternatives that would meet the same interests, it gives the bargaining team flexibility when having the difficult conversations.

Why it’s important to listen when having a difficult conversation. - By using active listening techniques: acknowledging the feelings/validating the emotions; paraphrasing you are able to get the facts; and explore ways to solve the problem. Make sure your rebuttal is answering the actual concern not the assumption. When you are listening, hear what they are really asking for, don’t assume.

The Caucus and how it will give you a breather when bargaining becomes contentious. - Caucuses are an important tool for any bargaining team and should be called whenever the team would like to step away from the table. Think of the caucus as a chance to take a break, breathe and discuss the next steps.

How to represent the best interest of the School District. - It’s important to know, understand and articulate your interests. Saying “no” is never easy so be prepared with your rationale for the “no”. What are the board’s goals? What are the school district’s plans for student achievement, or staff development?

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Ways to build bridges. - How creating solutions that meet key interests validates your staff. Identify areas where there is conflict and listen to solutions. Asking for suggestions and brainstorming as a group are collaborative processes that help with difficult conversations.

How the Public Employees Collective Bargaining Act (PECBA) establishes the collective bargaining process. - The Public Employee Collective Bargaining Act (PECBA), ORS 243.650 - 243.782, establishes a collective bargaining process for Oregon’s public employers and unions representing public employees. Employers covered by the PECBA include, among others, the State of Oregon, cities, counties, school districts, community colleges, public hospitals, and special districts. The PECBA is administered by the Employment Relations Board (ERB), a state agency. The three members of the Board are appointed by the Governor.

QUESTIONS:

REFERENCES:
Fisher, Roger and Brown, Scott, Getting Together Building a Relationship that Gets to Yes, Houghton Mifflin Company Boston. 1988
Stone, Douglas, Patton, Bruce, and Heen, Sheila, Difficult Conversations, Viking Penguin. 1999
Ury, William, Getting Past No, Bantam Books. 1991