

## Thoughts on Negotiations

Presented by Darin Drill, Cascade School District

Start with an honest self-assessment of where you are with your school board and where the district is with your community. A clear evaluation of where you stand is a key to your success in this process. "Nothing ends a new position honeymoon quicker than difficult negotiations!!"

What lens are you looking through?

1. **How well do you know your contract?**
  - a. Do you understand the contractual issues that have dominated the past negotiations...if not who can you talk to?
  - b. Are there contract items that just don't fit with your educational beliefs and how quickly can you move to make adjustments?
  - c. SUGGESTION: Spend time over winter break reading the contract, again, and make notes in the margins about any questions you may have. Find your answers in January when your staff returns.
2. **How do you determine what changes need to be made and in what order should they be made?**
  - a. Have your contract reviewed by legal counsel, OSBA counsel, or staff counsel.
  - b. Have a review of the contract with your administrative team, especially building administration who deals with issues that come up...get their input on their frustrations about the contract. You must engage them in this process, otherwise the gathering will be a waste of time.
  - c. Review the contract by YOU! Do your ideas and suggested changes fit with the organization or is there still work to do before you make that change?
  - d. SUGGESTION: Too many changes at once will dramatically slow your progress overall. Have a clear list of changes in order of importance and focus on the top two or three at each negotiation only.
3. **What do you want financially as an ending place? What can you truly live with?**
  - a. How clear are you with the district finances?
  - b. What contractual issues beyond salary suck up the funding in your district? Benefits, early retirement, extra duty, extra prep pay, class size restrictions, evaluation language, discipline procedure and process, or another issue?

- c. How much do you believe your staff should get in total compensation? Have you reviewed and compared your total compensation with other districts in your area and with districts that are of similar size across the state?
  - d. SUGGESTION: Providing a little more money is always preferable than changing language that is favorable to you and the district. This helps you in the long run, if you can afford it in the short term!
- 4. Where does your board sit with this negotiation and how far are they willing to go to hold the line that you all talk about in executive session or in caucus?**
- a. Find out if what they say in private session is what they will do in public negotiations.
  - b. Decide collectively which, if any, board members will be on the team and then educate them on the contract and also the long term effects of changes or concessions that they may want to give in to just to get done.
  - c. Be clear about any disagreements among your board regarding contract negotiations and see if you can get to consensus before public negotiations.
  - d. SUGGESTION: Be prepared and willing to call for a caucus if you have differences of opinion on your team, especially if it is a board member, and solve those issues behind closed doors. People know this, but many of our colleagues don't follow through.
- 5. Negotiate for the long term and be professional while doing so...after all most people on the other side of the table will be back tomorrow to teach our kids.**
- a. Find the right spokesperson for your team that can generally avoid getting sucked down the "rabbit hole" by arguing or bickering. If that is not you, that is OK!!
  - b. Remember that negotiations are a process, not an end game...the contract is a living document that everyone will have to live with.
  - c. In the end, you are an employee for the district, and you must find a way to finalize a contract that is right for your district and the students that attend there. That may not be what you want at the moment. Continue to educate, not debate, your board, your administrators and your staff about your ideas in a collaborative way.
  - d. Negotiations are a give and take process, be willing to give some as well.
  - e. SUGGESTION: Remember that you negotiate for the students first! They negotiate for their members first...that is a distinct difference and one that most associations will try and blend together. Stay focused on what is right for students!