

Frequently Asked Questions



1. **What is a Union?**

A Union is a group of employees who join together within a company to bargain collectively for better wages, stronger benefits and safer working conditions.

2. **What do Unions do?**

A Union's primary objective is to secure good contracts for its members and to enforce the provisions of that contract. The Union also administers some of the contract's important benefits directly. Often these may include health plans, pensions and labor/management partnerships and trusts.

3. **If I sign a Union Card. Do I have to vote yes?**

The Teamsters are committed to organize workers who want Teamster representation. Organizing is not about signing cards or even holding a vote.

It's about gaining a voice over the terms and conditions of your employment. This is accomplished through legal and binding collective bargaining agreement or contract.

Remember cards don't vote. When the NLRB conducts an election, it's a secret ballot election just like when you vote for the President. No one will ever know how you voted, unless YOU tell them.

4. **What does it mean to be a Teamster?**

Being a Teamster member means that you belong to the strongest and most democratic labor union in the world. For more than 100 years the Teamsters Union has been a leader in setting the standard for higher wages, better benefits and improved working conditions for workers throughout the United States and Canada. The Teamsters Union is strong because of the participation of many of its 1.4 million members. Teamster members can find a variety of ways to participate to help build a stronger union in the workplace — from supporting coworkers in their struggle for justice or helping with the bargaining process to joining a local union committee or becoming a volunteer organizer.

5. **What is a Bargaining Unit?**

A Bargaining Unit is all of the employees who are eligible to vote for and be in the Union. This is the group of employees who will be covered under the contract.

6. Who negotiates the contract?

The Teamsters and the Company will each choose who will negotiate the contract. The Company's team usually consists of lawyers, local management and upper management officials.

The Union negotiating team consists of bargaining unit employees, who were elected by their co-workers, and expert union negotiators.

7. What is Collective Bargaining?

Collective bargaining (also called contract negotiations) is the heart and soul of the labor movement. It is when workers band together to negotiate workplace matters with their employer. The end result is a **collective bargaining agreement** or **contract** that spells out in black and white all of the terms both parties agree to, from pay rates and benefits, to a grievance procedure, time off and more. The employees, or **bargaining unit**, generally nominate a few of their coworkers to represent them, along with expert negotiators from the union. Once the negotiating team reaches a **tentative agreement** with management, the bargaining unit meets to vote the contract terms up or down. This is called the ratification process. The contract only goes into effect if a majority of the employees approve the tentative agreement.

8. What does my contract cover?

Contract specifics will vary from one worksite, or employer, to the next, but generally include provisions on:

- Wages, hours and fringe benefits;
- Health and safety;
- Non-discrimination;
- Contract length;
- Discipline;
- Seniority;
- Dues collection;
- Union security;
- Grievance procedures; and
- Arbitration.



Most contracts in the Teamsters Union are **white paper** contracts. These are contracts that cover workers at one employer, generally in one location. However, the Teamsters also negotiate **master agreements** that cover employees from one company at all of the company's locations, or cover many employers under one agreement. For instance the Teamsters have one master contract with a number of freight employers and one master contract for UPS

9. **What kind of say do I get in a contract?**

Before contract negotiations start, the bargaining unit employees decide what they would like to have in their contract. This is done by surveys, information collected during the organizing process and meetings. The issues are reduced to writing on proposal forms, filled out by bargaining unit members. Once the contract is negotiated, only you and your co-workers get to vote whether to accept the terms and conditions or reject it by a secret ballot vote.

10. **How can I support my Union?**

There are a number of things members can do to make the Teamsters Union even stronger than it is today. Participating in your local union, sticking together, and educating potential members and the public about our union are simple, everyday ways we can support our union. Here are a few others:

- **Attend local union meetings regularly.** If you cannot attend meetings, talk to your shop steward or other members about what took place and try to make the next one.
- **Stay informed.** Keep up with current events and what's happening in your workplace. Visit Teamster.org and your local union's web site to keep up with news that affects you and your union.
- **Participate in union elections.** Whether it's elections for officers, contract votes or local union business, your opinion counts and can make a difference.
- **Get to know your steward,** he or she is your primary contact with your union and can answer many of your questions or refer you to the appropriate resources.
- **Get to know your local officers** and trustees. Many local unions provide contact information and bios on their web sites.
- **Review your local union bylaws.** Each Teamster local is autonomous and has its own set of rules and guidelines.

- **Attend union rallies** and events when you can. You may not be able to make them all, but standing together shows strength in numbers.
- **Become an e-activist.** If you are online regularly, register with Teamster.org and be sure to **sign up for Teamster Action Alerts** to be notified about key issues and ways you can take action online. Read and participate on blog sites in your community or state, or start your own blog. Join other Teamsters on MySpace, YouTube, Facebook and other social networking sites. Comment on local newspaper or TV station web sites to provide the Teamster perspective.
- **Spread the word.** If you hear about an issue that concerns you, tell your friends, relatives and coworkers and show them how to get involved. Educate others. Talk about what being a Teamster means to you. Tell your friends, relatives and other workers you bump into about benefits of being a Teamster.

11. How much will I pay in Union Dues?

Teamsters Union dues are 2.5 times the hourly wage rate per month. For example, if you make \$12 an hour, your dues would be \$30 per month. However, if you make less than \$11 an hour, then your dues rate is 2 times your hourly rate. And if you are a public sector employee, your dues rate is 2.25 times your hourly rate.

- In addition, Local 455 has a \$2.00 per month for the Teamsters Local 455 Strike and Defense Fund. (See question #19 - What is strike pay and how much would I receive?)

12. How will my dues be used?

Dues provide the resources to stand up for good jobs and benefits, decent working conditions and a better future for our families. That's why union members in private industry earn 38 percent more on average than nonunion workers. They also receive 54 percent more in benefits. None of this would be possible without the strength that comes from our Teamster dues.

Most of your dues, 78 percent, stay with your local union in order to fund activities that give workers more power at the bargaining table, in the statehouse and in the community. Some of these activities include:

- Organizing expenses;
- Office equipment and regular administration expenses;

- Attorneys to assist in negotiations, grievances and arbitration;
- Training;
- Research into companies and industries to gather information for negotiations and organizing; and
- Accountants to analyze the company's books.

Members receive information about how dues money is spent by their local at regular monthly membership meetings, and local unions also file annual reports with the U.S. Department of Labor. The International Union publishes its annual audited financial statement in Teamster magazine, which is sent to every member.

13. **What is a Steward?**

The steward is the go-to union representative on the job site. He or she has a number of responsibilities, from on-site contract enforcement and assisting in grievance procedures, to keeping members informed and motivated about their union. Many locals will hold steward training sessions to help you grow into your new role. Contact your local or review its bylaws for more information.

14. **What is a grievance procedure?**

The grievance procedure is a negotiated article within your contract that enables the union to enforce the terms of the contract and protect the rights of workers. If management violates the contract, the grievance procedure allows the member to follow a process that can provide relief or justice.

Teamster contracts may define a grievance in several ways: It could be “a dispute between the union and management over the application and/or interpretation of the agreement,” or “any dispute or difference arising between an employee and management or between the union and management.” Each grievance procedure has specific steps with time limits that must be followed. The steps in a grievance procedure vary, but a typical one may include:

- Step One: The steward and the grievant meet with the supervisor within 10 days of the occurrence to resolve the grievance. Management has five days to respond.
- Step Two: If there is no settlement at Step One, a union representative, the grievant and a management representative will meet to try to resolve the grievance.

- Step Three: If still unresolved, the grievance will be heard by an arbitrator or panel who will render a decision.

15. **How do I file a Grievance?**

Almost every Teamster contract has a provision for filing grievances. Generally, if you feel that management has violated the terms of your collective bargaining agreement, you should talk to your steward who will determine if there is indeed a contract violation.

The steward will first try to help you resolve the issue informally. This may include speaking with your supervisor. If the steward has determined that there is a violation of the contract but is unable to resolve the issue, then he or she will assist you in writing up a grievance form. The form asks for information such as:

- Who is involved in the grievance (supervisor and members)?
- When did the grievance occur?
- Where did the grievance occur?
- What part of the contract was violated?
- What resolution is desired?

For example, a contract may specify that overtime has to be distributed by seniority. If overtime is given to an employee with less seniority than others, the members with greater seniority may have a grievance.

16. **What happens when our contract expires?**

Sixty days prior to the contract expiration, the union must notify the company in writing of its intention to renegotiate the labor contract. The union then begins preparing for negotiations by selecting a bargaining committee, formulating proposals that will be given to management's negotiating team, doing research necessary to support the union's proposals, developing a communications strategy for the members during the negotiations as well as with the public, if difficult negotiations are expected.

If the union and management are still in negotiations when the contract expires, the union has three choices:

- To accept management's proposals;
- To extend the contract expiration date with the joint agreement of both the union and management (a common choice); or
- To agree with the employer that, they cannot reach settlement and declare an impasse in which the employer is free to implement its final offer and the union is free to strike if the members vote in favor of that option. ***More than 95 percent of contracts are settled without workers having to strike.***

17. What is a strike?

A strike occurs when employees collectively agree to stop working in order to gain concessions from an employer, typically after contract negotiations break down. While strikes tend to grab media attention, they are rare and typically a last resort. More than 95 percent of all Teamster contracts are negotiated without a strike being called.

Before a strike is called, the union typically notifies the company that it intends to call a strike vote. A majority of workers in the bargaining unit must vote in favor of a strike before one can be called. The decision rests with the affected workers. Most strikes are called for economic reasons—to improve wages, health benefits, retirement benefits, etc. And because most contracts include a **no-strike clause**, they typically occur only after a contract expires, not during the term of the contract.

Strikes can be called at any time if extremely unsafe working conditions occur or if the company has participated in an “unfair labor practice.” But these types of noneconomic strikes are very rare.

Most Teamster contracts also include language that protects Teamster members who refuse to cross active picket lines of other striking unions. Check with your steward or local for more information on the language and protections in your contract.

18. What is a No Strike Clause?

Most employers insist that the union agree not to strike for the duration of a contract. Such an agreement is enforceable in court and makes **wildcat strikes** illegal.

No-strike clauses have been interpreted to ban almost all strikes during the life of the contract, except strikes in response to abnormally dangerous working conditions. Strikes are still legal, of course, when the contract expires.

19. What is strike pay and how much would I receive?

A. When strikers stop working, they do not receive their normal paychecks, but they will receive some money from the **International Brotherhood of Teamsters Strike Fund**. Many local unions also maintain their own strike funds to help their workers through difficult times. Local strike benefits are determined by the local. Strike benefits from the International Union are based on the following formula:

- If you earn less than \$11 per hour, you will receive no less than per week. For all other members, strike pay is equivalent to five times your monthly dues amount per week. For example, if your monthly dues payment is \$70, you will receive \$350 per week ($70 \times 5 = 350$).
- Newly organized members who have voted for Teamster representation or have a majority of workers who have signed cards designating the Teamsters as their collective bargaining representative but do not yet have a contract are entitled to \$150 per week.
- Benefits will be paid at the end of the eighth day of being out on strike.

B. **Teamsters Local Union No. 455 Strike and Defense Fund** is established solely for the purpose of helping to sustain our members and their families during a legally sanctioned strike.

- Each member will be assessed the amount of \$2.00 per month, to be used exclusively for the strike and defense benefit fund. For all purposes this assessment will be considered as Union dues.
- Strike benefits shall be paid at the rate of One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00) dollars per week for the first full week of a legally sanctioned strike and at the rate of One Hundred and Twenty-Five Dollars (\$125) per week for each full week thereafter.
- Such Benefits would supplement any out of work benefits received from the International Union.
- To be eligible for Strike and Defense Fund Benefits, a member must be in good standing and shall be available and serve on picket duty when assigned by the Local Union.

20. What is an Unfair Labor Practice?

Employers may be charged with unfair labor practices (ULP) if they attempt to deprive their workers of the right to form, join or assist a labor union; the right to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing; or the right to engage in “concerted activity” for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection. Specifically, section 8(a) of the National Labor Relations Act makes it unfair for the employer to prevent workers from exercising the above rights by:

- Interfering, restraining or coercing their workers;
- Dominating or seeking to control the union;
- Discriminating against workers for union activity;
- Discharging a worker who files a ULP or testifies to a ULP; or
- Refusing to bargain in good faith with a duly elected union.

Since the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, labor organizations have been restricted in ways similar to employers. This amendment to the National Labor Relations Act makes it illegal for a union to:

- Coerce people to become union members;
- Use threats, intimidation or violence;
- Force an employer to punish a worker because he/she doesn't get along with the union;
- Charge excessive union dues; or
- Refuse to bargain in good faith with the employer.



