

## **FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING—DEFINITIONS**

**Percentage of electrical workers organized** – This is one of the most important factors and one that can be influenced by local union policy. It is a factor over which we exercise real control. If too many qualified electrical workers are employed at substandard conditions outside the union wage structure, the best contract in the world will have no one working under its terms.

**Union market share** - Is defined as the percentage of work that is done by our employers under the terms of a collective bargaining agreement. Market share may be measured in different ways, including percentage of our total dollar volume of the inside electrical construction work and/or our percentage of hours worked on inside electrical construction. There is a direct relationship between market share and bargaining strength. Both rise and fall together.

**Support of union members** – The importance of this factor has all too often been minimized by negotiators who may be genuinely concerned with the members' welfare, but forget that a local union's greatest resource is its rank-and-file membership.

**Skilled negotiators at the table** – Many members consider this factor to be among the most important largely because business managers who experience success at the bargaining table are apt to take personal credit for a good contract. While skilled negotiators are extremely important, the best negotiator in the world cannot win a decent contract if a local union does not control the skilled labor supply, enjoy a significant share of the local construction market, and have the solid support of its membership.

**Good relationship with contractors** – Union members and unionized contractors have many mutual interests. If contractors cannot win the work and earn a meaningful profit, it is unlikely that the union members will long enjoy decent wages and benefits. But a good relationship without good market share will not yield a good contract.

**Economics of the industry** – This is an important factor over which the union exercises very little influence. Certainly, if the local industry is experiencing a slump, bargaining strength is weakened. But if, during a boom, every electrical worker in a local market is employed, and only a small percentage of those electrical workers are in the IBEW, bargaining strength remains weak.

**Political Influence** – Union organizing in North America increases the ranks of the labor movement and thus strengthens our political power. We can then more effectively advocate for government policies that protect union standards. Our unions political influence can help elect worker-friendly politicians that will fight for our issues and not those of big business.

**Public support of unions** – The building trades unions have not been sufficiently sensitive to the role of public sentiment in labor relations. Our negotiations do not attract attention in the way public sector union bargaining does (i.e., firefighters or teachers). Nevertheless, construction is a highly visible industry and negative public opinion creates an unfavorable environment for collective bargaining. Creative use of public support can help bargaining. (If possible, provide an example of the creative use of public support.)

**Negotiating team's access to reliable information** – Too many bargaining teams enter negotiations without a reliable picture of the union's market share. Such negotiations may deteriorate into empty bargaining. When a union can demonstrate a legitimate claim to represent a majority of electrical workers in a given jurisdiction, its bargaining clout is enhanced. But it is hard to gather reliable information about the conditions in a local market without enlisting the support and help of the rank-and-file membership to survey the jurisdiction.

**Skill and productivity of union members** – Many members consider this to be one of the most important factors. The reason: Since the first day of the apprenticeship, they have been told that the reason they enjoy higher wages is that they are the most skilled and productive electrical workers in North America. In order for the union sector to remain competitive, we must have a high degree of confidence that our members are, in fact, the most skilled and productive workers available. The skill and productivity advantage that the union sector has historically enjoyed has been declining in recent years. The reality now is that there are many, many highly skilled electrical workers available outside the union supply. Bargaining strength is based on control of the supply of skilled and productive workers. Our members must continue to be the best-trained, and most-skilled and productive electrical workers. Union workers must have the proper attitudes about their work and must bring a good work ethic to the job. The only meaningful way to ensure that skill and productivity are genuine factors in bargaining is to organize the supply of skilled and productively employed electrical workers.