

## **Union-Management Consultation Facilitation Experience**

*by Brenda O'Neill, JLP Facilitator*

This past fall, I had the opportunity to co-facilitate a 2-day Union Management Consultation Workshop for the first time. It was a wonderful experience and so when the Regional Field Coordinators asked me to present and share my experience with my fellow JLP colleagues at the annual NCR JLP Networking Event in November; I was thrilled to do so!

As part of our preparation for the UMC workshop, my two co-facilitators and I met with the organizers, collected information through the pre-course questionnaire and also conducted interviews with representatives from both the union and management). I cannot highlight enough how important the pre-course preparation is for this workshop. Given that there are at least 30 hours worth of learning activities in the UMC learning kit, gathering and analyzing the information allowed us to really tailor and adapt the workshop to the precise needs of the committee and the participants were very appreciative that this truly was a workshop for them.

We ultimately ended up facilitated a two-day workshop which focused on:

- Building their relationship;
- Enhancing communication skills;
- Conducting effective and meaningful consultation; and
- Helping the committee members improve their internal processes and establish new processes and tools in place to support their consultation efforts.

Though there are lots of excellent examples of case studies in the learning kit, the most valuable learning took place when we used real topics from their committees in their activities and discussions. At times, there were some tense moments, but the facilitated activities and discussions on real issues they were facing as a committee, allowed for the parties to really connect.

This workshop was a bit of unique experience as well, in that we were originally a team of 3 facilitators. Unfortunately, within the last few days leading up to the workshop, both original co-facilitators had to withdraw from the facilitation team due to a family crisis. Thankfully, Linda Iezzi was available and seamlessly stepped in to co-facilitate. In those few days prior

to the workshop, Linda and I had quite a few planning conversations and develop plan A and a plan B! One of the lessons learned from this experience is to be adaptable and always have emergency back-up plan.

The most fulfilling aspects of facilitating this workshop were to see the union and management representatives building their trust, relationship and communication and consultation skills over the two days. By the end of the workshop, participants were more committed to working as a team (rather than an “us versus them” stance) and felt they were starting to “truly listen” to each other. For the participants, the workshop was a starting point and they were dedicated to continuing the work they began in the workshop, in order to continue to improve their relationship, tools and processes for meaningful and effective consultation. A few weeks after the workshop, we received an email update from the committee and were very ecstatic to hear that the great work they had started on was continuing in the workplace, as they continue to work on their Terms of Reference!

It was a very wonderful and rewarding experience to facilitate the UMC workshop. I strongly encourage other facilitators to put their names forward when the next facilitation opportunity arises. If you are apprehensive about not having experience working with union management consultation committees, don't worry, I had no experience with UMCCs. This workshop is truly about facilitating the conversations between the participants and helping them build their relationship and skills in terms of communication and consultation.

Hope to co-facilitate with you soon!