



LMI

Labor-Management Initiative

Case Studies

**Labor Management in the
“real world”**

Case #1



- Our Local Union *had* an **excellent working relationship with the city staff and elected officials** for decades;
- The City and the Local signed a three year agreement in 2006 that was one of the best in our history;
- **Relations with the city manager were at an all time high**, and it was excellent to begin with.
- ***With the economy came a quick change in the relationship.***
- In keeping the relationship high, **the firefighters offered up wage freezes, insurance concessions, overtime concessions and other concessions all to help the city in its budgeting woes** and that was prior to opening negotiations for the successor agreement to the 2006-2009 contract. This was done to keep a favorable relationship with City Leaders and to show our understanding of the financial woes hitting the city.
- With the opening of negotiations in May 2009, came **a fall from grace as the city proposed massive cuts** in all areas of the contract. **Even non-economic issues were under attack.**
- **A media circus ensured portraying firefighters as greedy**, unreasonable, etc. The concessions made prior to May 2009 seemed forgotten.
- **It is now January 2011**; we are still at impasse and still attempting to sign a contract. City staff and leadership still are portraying not just the firefighters union, but also the department as a whole as costly, and a serious burden to taxpayers. The only bright side is that in November 2010, we were able to **change the make up of city council from 3-2 against us, to 3-2 for us and that benefit is starting to show, very...very slowly.**

Case #2



- A. City declares “Financial Urgency”
- **What happened?**
 - On April 15, 2009, the mayor declared **“Financial Urgency”** in our City to avoid promised cost of living raises. State Statues allow municipalities to declare **“Financial Urgency”** and reopen union contracts when they have a financial problem. After several months of lobbying the City Council, working with legal staff, and building a coalition with PBA, FOP, and other City unions.
 - The Mayor officially rescinded the financial urgency a few weeks later.
- **How your labor management relations impacted the outcome?**
 - We had little or no help from our Fire Department management team. *“Management felt we should not take our raises.”*
- **What could have been the outcome had Labor and Management worked together?**

Case#2 cont.'



- *B. Staffing a ladder truck*
- **What happened?**
 - One of our District Chiefs submitted a memo to the Fire Chief with his concerns over staffing on the ladder truck; this memo made it to the press. The District Chief was disciplined, and the union represented him at a subsequent grievance hearing. The arbitrator ruled in the city's favor (it was a bad ruling). Staffing remained at 2 person companies.
- **How your labor management relations impacted the outcome?**
 - Obviously our management worked against us on this one, the Fire Chief held his ground on two-man ladder truck staffing.
- **What could have been the outcome had Labor and Management worked together?**

Case#2 cont.'



- C. SAFER Grants
- **What happened?**
 - The Union encouraged the City to apply for a SAFER grant, due to recent rule changes on funding and retention. 17 positions had been previously eliminated in the 2009 budget. Our Union gave testimony to the City Council on the need for increased staffing and restoring the 17 lost positions. It came down to a tie vote within the City Council.
- **How your labor management relations impacted the outcome?**
 - **The Fire Chief and his staff sided with the Mayor** and worked very hard against the Union's request to apply for a SAFER grant. **The Union did not support the Mayor** in his recent election.
 - Ultimately the City did not apply for the grants and staffing remained status quo at a subpar level. **17 positions remained vacant from a previous reduction in staffing during the 2009 budget.**
 - A spokesman for the International Association of Fire Fighters said ***"This is free money, no strings attached, and it doesn't make sense to risk public safety when the money is there to keep the firefighters working."***
 - The Fire Chief said ***"The grant requirements would put too much pressure on the City's budget."***
- **What could have been the outcome had Labor and Management worked together?**

Case#3



- During the last 5 years we have filed four Unfair Labor Practice charges, one Federal FLSA lawsuit, and multiple grievances with two of them going to binding arbitration. *We won all of them!*
- Deal with these issues in a **professional and business-like manner**
- You **attack the problem as vigorously** as possible **but you do not personally attack** those involved.
- Even though you are fighting a battle with them **you must preserve the relationship** for long-term progress.
- I compare it to two boxers entering the ring. They shake hands then proceed to try to knockout each other. Afterwards, they shake hands again and exit the ring with **mutual respect**.
- Because of this philosophy we have been able to work with management in organizing special events, establishing a Fire Ops 101 program, developing a Wellness and Fitness program, fight with management against bad legislation, and the list goes on.
- More recently, the President and Vice president of the Local teamed up with the Fire Chief, Assistant County Administrator, and the Budget Director to confront a Commissioner in an effort to get him to support an alternative funding source for the Fire Department.
- **This recent meeting was successful because of the united efforts of both labor and management doing what was best for all.**



Walter J. Dix
wdix@iaff.org