During these tough economic times, many public and private employees are faced with the possibility of layoffs throughout Washington State. However, as a Local 17 member, most of the Local 17 Collective Bargaining Agreements include negotiated language regarding seniority, which plays a key role on how layoffs occur.

The definition of seniority is: “an employee’s status determined by length of continuous employment used to determine which employees should secure advantages at the workplace (e.g. promotion, shift assignment, or layoff survival), and to measure employee entitlement to benefits.”

**Just Cause Provision**

Employees in the workplace have historically organized a union for the purpose of a having a voice in the workplace and job security. Most Local 17 contracts have “just cause” provisions for the purposes of discipline, and seniority for the purposes of layoffs.

The just cause provision protects a union member from being terminated from employment without due process. This includes obligating an employer to terminate only if certain conditions are met for egregious, ongoing inappropriate behavior, or ongoing performance issues.

The seniority provision protects union members from being terminated or laid off if they have years of service with a particular employer. It prevents Management from picking and choosing who walks out the door. Instead, members are rewarded for their length of service and have job protection in bad economic times, like we are facing today.

**Skill and Ability**

In Local 17 jurisdictions that have implemented layoffs, some members have asked, “can layoffs be based on skill and ability?”

The problem with “skill and ability” is that it is very subjective. Much of the work Local 17 members perform is qualitative and not quantitative.

The membership does not build widgets and are not robots. Therefore, the determination of “skill and ability” is left to human judgment by an individual supervisor or manager. It can cause issues of favoritism, discrimination and can penalize those who have had long standing service with the employer.

As the economy continues to affect Local 17 members, stewards and union representatives are working hard to represent and advocate for each member whose job is in jeopardy.

Whether a Local 17 member works in public health keeping people healthy or is a member in a utility making sure water, roads, and electricity are safe, the work performed is a valuable asset to the community.

Be proud to be a union member and remember that with a Collective Bargaining Agreement you have a voice in the workplace and a negotiated process to address issues during these difficult times. — By Local 17 Union Representative Adrienne Thompson

Please post and distribute at your workplace