

# Strength in Numbers

## Why we are forming a Union at Konikoff

Many of us working for DCA at Konikoff dental offices are seeking union representation. The COVID crisis has opened our eyes to the fact that corporate dentistry has left us very little say in our working conditions. It's clear that DCA could care less about our well-being. We've been asked to return to work without adequate safety measures and with reduced wages and/or hours. Many of us feel the only way to truly make a change for the better is to join together and form a union. Therefore, we have reached out to the IAM for help getting this done. Below are some questions that have come up about forming a union.

### **What exactly is a "Union" and who is the "IAM"?**

A union is a group of co-workers that come together under federal law to negotiate with their employers over their wages, benefits and other working conditions. It's really all about us at Konikoff joining together to demand better. By speaking up collectively, we can accomplish more than we could on our own. The IAM is one of the country's largest labor unions. They represent roughly 600,000 active and retired members from all fields and professions. This includes nurses, EMT's, aircraft mechanics, behavioral therapists, librarians, automotive employees, customer service agents, baggage handlers, engineers, psychologists and more. There are currently nearly 4,000 collective bargaining agreements in place between the IAM and various employers.

### **What is collective bargaining?**

Collective bargaining is the process in which working people, through their unions, negotiate contracts with their employers. By law, the employer is required to bargain over "wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment." This includes:

- Wages
- Health and safety procedures
- Discipline and grievance procedure
- Arbitration
- Seniority

Fringe Benefits are also negotiable. This might include:

- Vacation and sick time
- Holidays
- Pensions
- Health insurance

## **How could being part of a union have helped us with our return to work during COVID?**

Because COVID was declared a public emergency and because employers are required to bargain with the Union over changes to terms and conditions of employment, unionized workforces have the right to demand the employer meet to negotiate over issues such as changes to wages and return to work safety protocols. Examples of negotiable items include:

- Screening
- Job protections for absent employees
- Paid leave
- Workplace cleanliness procedures and gear
- Workplace cleaning procedures

## **What do we have to do to form a union?**

The first step is submitting an authorization card online. The authorization card's purpose is to show the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) there is sufficient interest in a Union to hold a secret-ballot election. The NLRB is the federal agency charged with conducting union elections and enforcing U.S. labor law. If there is enough interest among our group, the IAM will file a "Petition" for representation with the NLRB. A "hearing" is then needed to define the "unit". There are certain individuals such as supervisors that may not belong in the union. On average, there is 25 days between when a petition is filed and an election. Elections are secret ballot and typically held at the place of employment. Because there are multiple Konikoff offices, there is a good chance we will have a mail ballot. The IAM becomes our official bargaining representative if 50% +1 of us voting cast a "yes" ballot.

## **How will Dental Care Alliance respond to our efforts to form a Union?**

In a perfect world, they will let us make an educated choice absent any intimidation. However, most companies – especially large corporations like DCA – usually oppose any efforts to form a Union. That's because right now they have all the power and can just make the rules up as they go. Sadly, the first thing they will probably do is go out and hire an anti-union law firm or consultant. It's their job to work with management to convince us things are fine just the way they are. We can expect them to hold "informational" meetings about the Union and beg us to give them a second chance to make things right. We should also be prepared for managers to equate our offices to being a family and claim the union is just an outsider trying to break that family up. They are trying to distract us from the reasons we are looking to form a Union. It's on us to work with IAM representatives to get any questions answered, as well as do our own research as to what we feel will be best for us and our families. And remember, WE are the union. WE will be the ones driving change in our offices.

## **What happens after we vote to form a Union?**

One of the first things is we will work with the IAM to survey all of the workers at Konikoff to identify issues and problems we would like to see addressed during negotiations with the company. A negotiating committee is then formed, consisting of some of our co-workers. Alongside an experienced IAM representative, this negotiating committee meets with the company to start contract negotiations. Once a "tentative agreement" is reached, we will be able to vote on whether to accept or reject the contract offer.

## **Does it cost to belong to a Union?**

Yes. Union members pay monthly "dues." IAM dues are established through Local or District Lodge bylaws. We can expect our dues to be somewhere around \$60/month. Dues secure all the benefits, rights, services and privileges that are negotiated through collectively bargained contracts. We understand that dues amount is always a consideration, so we do our best to keep dues affordable. Therefore, in situations of extreme disparity in an hourly wage and dues amount, a request modifications can be made

## **How do dispute resolutions work at a unionized facility?**

Without a union contract, employers can make whatever rules they choose, and change the rules whenever they choose. With a union contract, we will have rules and legal rights in the workplace that the employer cannot change without negotiating with the union. Everyone covered by the contract has the legal right to appeal – that is, to file a "grievance" – if they believe the rules have been broken. Trained IAM stewards and business representatives will meet with management to attempt to resolve the grievance. Ultimately, cases can be taken before an impartial arbitrator to be resolved.