

HUCTW Open Letter
to
HUCTW Members and the Harvard Community

March 22, 2010



**HUCTW in Negotiation:
Thoughtful Advocacy and Constructive Partnership**

After months of preparation, HUCTW and Harvard are beginning negotiations on a new Agreement. For some time now, staff members and managers across the University have been asking questions, expressing hopes, and raising concerns about our workplace. Union and management leaders have been listening, gathering data, and developing ideas.

As contract talks are getting underway with an optimistic spirit on all sides, this is a good time to consider the philosophy of union-management relations that HUCTW has pursued for many years. This letter attempts to describe that philosophy, as well as the style and strategy of negotiation that HUCTW and Harvard have developed together over the past twenty years.

Since its very beginnings, our Union has stood strongly for a constructive, thoughtful style of unionism. In the 1980's, when Harvard staff organized and voted to create HUCTW, one of our organization's most urgent rallying slogans was "It's not anti-Harvard to be pro-Union." HUCTW members and leaders have striven enthusiastically to make our voices heard and to earn a dignified, equal place in workplace decision-making. We have worked just as fervently to be reflective in our advocacy, listening and considering the aspirations of everyone in our community.

Our Union's leaders have applied these values in simple but powerful ways in negotiating over the years. We believe that negotiation and labor-management relations should be an exercise in shared learning, careful listening, persistent creativity, and a diligent search for ideas of mutual advantage. When Union and University leaders disagree, as we often have and will, we should commit ourselves to talking and listening until minds change and accord is possible. All too often in our modern world, negotiating partners act as combatants: withholding information, manipulating data, cancelling meetings, publicly attacking reputations, suing each other, and generally trying to achieve unilateral victories through forceful tactics. HUCTW and Harvard negotiators have consciously rejected that antagonistic approach, in favor of an earnest pursuit of collaboration and mutual gains.

Our efforts to build a constructive partnership have been highly effective, particularly during the past ten years. HUCTW-Harvard negotiations have generated a series of innovations and accomplishments, to great mutual benefit. Harvard staff members have impressive skill levels and a commitment to continuous learning. Our employee benefits are the envy of many, and the University workplace has a strong reputation for flexibility, work/life balance, and support for working parents. Disputes get resolved in constructive, effective, informal ways. Overall, our working environment is productive and energetic. A significant share of Harvard's day-to-day excellence as a center of teaching and research is attributable to the sound, supportive policy framework that arises from collaborative union-management efforts to shape a great working environment.

Within the American labor movement, unions participating in partnership efforts are sometimes portrayed as weak or naïve. Our 21 years of experience on the Harvard campus have shown exactly the opposite. **Constructive partnership has been the strongest, surest way to make meaningful improvements in the working lives of HUCTW members.** Philosophy and strategy point down the same path. Our Union’s record of accomplishments—in salary growth, innovative benefits programs, time off and flexibility, and employee participation—is unmatched among private, service-sector unions. Over and over again, we have seen the powerful, positive outcomes that result from building respectful, human relationships with our negotiating partners wherever possible.

Our Union’s pursuit of partnership in union-management relations has its roots in our even longer-term commitment to organizing and building community within the Harvard workplace. Over many years, thousands of HUCTW members and activists have shown a deep commitment to listening broadly to each other in the union, considering every idea, and creating supportive connections. **The basic belief that everyone matters and every voice should be heard motivates all of the work that HUCTW does—both in building connections within the Union and in negotiating constructively with Harvard.** Healthy communities and strong institutions are founded on the same principles of respect and participation for all.

The negotiation of a new Agreement in a tough financial environment will undoubtedly be a challenge. Thoughtful listening and constructive engagement are always difficult, and more so in a time of constrained resources and strong feelings about hard choices. At the same time, leaders in HUCTW are confident that the deep commitment and creativity of our Union’s members will bring us through the negotiations successfully. Although the context may be significantly changed in 2010, the foundation is the same: with persistence and skill, and relying on a clear philosophy, **HUCTW and Harvard can work together and find a way to move forward that meets the goals of both the University and the staff, and strengthens our community.**

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