

Negotiations at a Glance

On the demise of one gadget and the birth of another

Many years ago, I bought a Casio calculator. It was small, about two inches by three, but mighty. It saw me through the tail end of an undergraduate degree and an Honours thesis that employed quantitative methods, through an MA thesis that also used quantitative methods and, eventually, a PhD that had tables and played with change over time as expressed through numbers and quantities. That little calculator saw me through my desperate attempts as a grad student and sessional instructor to balance a chequebook and budget for bills. It helped me to calculate the weight to time ratio for cooking oodles of Thanksgiving turkeys. And it has seen me through my career at UPEI and the many hundreds of students' end of term grades I have tallied. It almost saw me through negotiations, but early in the second week of September it quit.

I was asking a lot of it, evidently too much given the long life of service it had given to me. Our team was by that point sharply focused on the financial aspects of our would-be new collective agreement. There was much checking of percentages and combinations of percentages. There was much number crunching around cumulative effects and partial nets. There was much effort to make absolutely certain we understood the effects of the money on the table *and* the money that wasn't there yet, but that we were committed to securing. And finally the little machine, slightly injured a week earlier by a cup of coffee, packed it in. The 8s looked like 3s. It needed a literal shake now and then to stay alert. It was replaced quite quickly, but the new one isn't the same and I was surprised by the sense of loss I felt for a small gadget.

And so our latest round of negotiations ended as I suspect almost all do – in a discussion of

salaries with almost everything else settled. By the end of the week of block bargaining in late August, the teams had made several exchanges around salaries. At that point we remained significantly apart and called it a week, not because of animosity or tension, but because a few things had to happen away from the table in order to move us forward. A meeting with the University President and two marathon sessions running into the wee morning hours followed in September. And now we all have a new gadget of sorts – a tentative revised collective agreement – designed to regulate the relationship between our employer and ourselves and to establish our salaries and rates of pay. We ask much of this gadget too, and rightly so.

And we asked something of the negotiating process this time that has not occurred previously at UPEI. In what many will regard as a commendable move, President Abd-El-Aziz gathered together Michele Dorsey, Chief Negotiator for the Employer, Betty Jeffery, President of the UPEIFA and me. In that meeting, he presented an offer concerning salaries and pension with the intent to resolve the issues surrounding these important items. His offer, which we continued to discuss in September and improve upon, forms the basis of the financial settlement in the new agreement. Interventions by university presidents into negotiations are not unheard of, but they more often occur at times when discussions have fallen apart. This was not the case in this context. The intervention appears to have been a sincere effort to resolve an issue that could easily have escalated into much unpleasantness.

But his offer, as I suggested, also required something of the negotiating process that was entirely new to us; namely, that the other unions

on campus receive and accept the same offer. In essence the financial adjustment that has resulted from the FA BU#1 negotiations will now be extended to the entire unionized staff of UPEI. Part a product of the President's will, this is also in some senses an outcome of the hard work done at the pension table by the coalition of unions over the past few years and the cross campus solidarity and larger body politic the coalition has fashioned.

The Executive of the UPEI Faculty Association met the afternoon of September 21st and approved the tentative agreement. We are now waiting to hear that the Administration has formally offered the same salary and pension arrangement to the other campus unions. News of a tentative agreement will be announced by the FA Executive as soon as we receive such

confirmation, and this bulletin will accompany the announcement.

The Executive will recommend that our Membership accept the tentative deal at our meeting on September 26th. The negotiating team echoes their recommendation. We know the agreement is not perfect, just as we know you recognize the challenging economic context we currently share. That said, there is much in this agreement to commend it, including very modest salary improvements. The end results of our bargaining process will be described in detail during the meeting of the 26th. We look forward to presenting the tentative agreement to you then.

Sharon Myers, Chief Negotiator, UPEIFA BU#1



Please vote.

We are each other's harvest

The Pulitzer Prize winning poet Gwendolyn Brooks wrote "we are each other's harvest; we are each other's business; we are each other's magnitude and bond." She was writing about the civil rights activist Paul Robeson and her poem is an expression of a politic that values those who contribute to the welfare and benefit of others, who watch out for their community and advance its collective interests, sometimes at significant personal costs to themselves. We are part of

each other, a community, each other's bounty and harvest, she reminds us. The FA Negotiating Team has benefited from the support and hard work of many throughout this process who, implicitly by their actions if not explicitly by their speech, have helped us to take care of each other in the way Brooks subtly reminds us is our human obligation and our claim on dignity. We thank them, and apologize to anyone who we have missed, most sincerely:

Wayne Cutcliffe, for initial work on the salary grids and advice throughout the process

Susan Gallant, for numbers in good form and quickly produced, for all round support, and for good cheer

Debbie Good, for analysis of financial documents, work with the salary grids, and being in the “backroom” the final night of negotiations

Laurie McDuffee and Dave Seeler, for their patient instruction and good advice in response to our questions about AVC and the Supplementary Health Care Plan; also to Laurie for coordinating the work of the FA’s Research and Advocacy Committee

Joann MacDonald, for patient instruction and good advice in response to our questions about Nursing

Jane Magrath, for work on comparators, graphs and Powerpoint presentations, often on short notice, and for her “soundtrack for negotiations”

Tammie Muise, an excellent adjunct member of our team, who worked with the CNIs to clarify their issues and brought them to us, and who then sat with us at the table to effectively – very effectively – and clearly explain and advance those issues; super work

Shannon Murray, for gathering research on teaching stream appointments and her very helpful observations about these

Wayne Peters, for his leadership at the pension table, for being in the backroom the second last night of negotiations, and for challenging us to take risks

Neil Tudiver, Assistant Executive Director of CAUT, for advice, support, the wisdom of his experience, and his warrior spirit

Chris Vessey, for technical support early in the process

The Grievance Officers – Anne Furlong, Malcolm Murray, Philip Smith and especially Doug Dahn -- for their rapid response to some language that was developing at the table and some very late night work by Doug

Members of the UPEIFA Research and Advocacy Committee, in particular Shannon Fitzpatrick and Donald Moses for an excellent brief on post-tenure review and Don again for work on salary histories; Linyuan Guo, Sami Khedhiri and Henrik Stryhn for top-notch work on health benefits at universities within the region and comparatively across units on our own campus, and Jim Sentance, for very helpful analyses of various financial documents, and penetrating dissections of both the University and provincial budgets

Members of the UPEIFA Executive who have served during the course of this round of negotiations -- Susan Brown, Cezar Campeanu, Nola Etkin, Debbie Good, Dave Groman, Laurie McDuffee, David Seeler and Lori Weeks – for sound leadership, steady hands and strong minds (and good humour) throughout the process

And especially among the Executive, Betty Jeffery, for almost daily contact and support, for engendering a clear sense of purpose and a level-headed sense of responsibility, for insightful calculations of reasonableness, and for *everything else* ... thank you

And to everyone and anyone who has sent a note of support, forwarded a useful resource, stopped one of us on campus to offer a word of encouragement, attended a meeting or

offered to assist ... thank you -- it matters more than you might know

The team: Valerie Campbell, Geoffrey Lindsay, Andrew Trivett and Sharon Myers

We are each other's magnitude and bond

I want to say something about the team I've been working with for the past year, who I have shared some 200 hours with at the table and surely as many hours in prep meetings: Valerie, Geoff and Andy. And while I want to say something about them, I find I hardly have the words to express it. Maybe the words just don't exist. They aren't big enough, capable enough, meaningful enough.

This team – and this was genuinely a team in all the best senses of that word – were focused, hard-working, sharp-eyed and steel-spined, open to healthy debate and happy resolution, smart and balanced. They were flexible in right measure and assertive at the proper pitch. They were strong, and brave, and brilliant. They were insightful and wise and riddled with integrity of the highest order. They were amazing. They were fun. And still these words are not enough. But, thank you.

Being a part of this team has required a tremendous amount of time away from

home. The forgotten contributors to this process were our families who tolerated our physical absences, our mental distractions and our unpredictable schedules. And so to partners and children who have borne the burden – thank you too.

Sharon

