

AN OPEN LETTER FROM PAUL VASQUEZ

May 14, 2009

I was sworn in as President of NABET-CWA Local 16 on April 10, 2008.

I am writing to you about what has happened since then and what is planned for the future. Simply put; we are moving in the correct direction, but not nearly quickly enough.

This letter is evidence of both of those things.

I had planned to finish writing this by April 9, post it on our web site that day and then e-mail the membership a notice of its posting on the 10th. The existence of this letter is a good example of the improvement in Local 16. It will be both honest and frank about our condition and our problems. It will be realistic about our prospects. It was also late.

That is due to the coincidental timing of my anniversary as President with the SL24/HH buyout/layoff process we are going through in BO&E and the already overwhelming workload it greatly added to.

The purpose of this letter is to inform the membership but I hope it also provides a starting point for members to think about their future and ours and to discuss how to improve both.

I hope each of you takes the time to read this and speak with each other about it. I look forward to speaking with many of you directly.

BEGINNINGS

The election for President went into a run off which extended it into April. I was in Washington DC at the CWA National Legislative and Political Conference as part of Local 16's delegation when the runoff ballots were counted on Monday, April 7. I received word of the results that evening but remained in Washington until Wednesday evening for the rest of the LP conference. The next Executive Board meeting was scheduled for the following day, Thursday, April 10, and after the Election Committee report on the results, new officers, Unit 5 E-Board Rep Artie Mazzacca and I were sworn in.

That was my transition period- approximately sixty-four hours, fifty or so of which were spent in Washington - and absolutely no preparation by anyone to take over the job. This had numerous negative effects on the Local and the membership. Some of them were tangible like the extra cost of keeping former VP Jim Joyce on the Local payroll longer than should have been necessary. Most were intangible but more damaging in the long run. Principally, the lost time and momentum at the start of a new administration as both new Local VP Jim Nolan and I had to figure out the day to day routine workings of our new jobs. That was time that should have been spent on fundamentally changing the nature of Local 16 and we are still suffering from the slower and later start than we should have had.

The major events of the last year has been the loss of staff jobs, principally through multiple uses of SL24/HH and a significant cut in the amount of Daily Hire work. Those will be dealt with separately from this letter.

My first year in office has been devoted to internal rebuilding of Local 16 with, honestly, poor results. Examples follow.

COMMITTEES

Among the changes I instituted were the creation of some new, and a revival of some old, committees of members. These committees will consist of members, not just officers and stewards, and each will have responsibility for a particular area of the Local's work.

Each committee will have genuine authority in its area to make decisions on policy, subject to E-Board review, that will determine the direction of the Local and actions we undertake.

The previous paragraph is written in the future tense because none of the committees are truly functional. No member, not a single one, has come forward on his or her own to volunteer for any committee. Some members have agreed to serve on a committee after being approached by myself or another member of the E-Board, but even those few committees with members are not functioning well. **Yet.**

IDEAS

I established ideas@nabet16.org as a simple tool for any member to communicate any idea he or she may have about improving the Union to the Executive Board. I committed that every idea submitted would be discussed by the Executive Board at a monthly meeting.

At first this was a major success with many submissions from various members. The Board has discussed each suggestion and some have and will lead to improvements.

Unfortunately, the flow of ideas has nearly stopped with submissions coming only after a monthly reminder e-mail is sent and with the majority of the submissions not being ideas at all but rather comments or complaints. Each of those is welcome but it would be better if they were sent to individual people rather than the ideas address. It would be even better if ideas continued to flow from members.

MEMBER TIME

I promised to visit members in their workplace one on one without an agenda simply to hear from members directly about their experience at work and with NABET. I started these talks my second week. They shortly came to a crashing halt. I had anticipated some positive reactions simply because I took the time to listen to members directly and personally. I had anticipated negative reactions about both ABC and NABET for obvious reasons. What I did not anticipate was members refusing to speak with me at all.

That however happened - and more than once. It stumped me and I pursued several members over weeks with telephone calls and/or e-mails, because I could not understand why any member would simply refuse to speak with me - in private- about how to make Local 16 better. Frankly, I still do not understand but I will no longer let it concern me. I will make three attempts to contact the members randomly selected for member time talks and then move on to another member. With that change, the number of members I speak with in this manner will increase substantially.

NEW MEMBERS

A way to welcome new members to the Union and integrate them into the Local has been on our collective radar screens for years. Early in Gene Maxwell's first term the Board discussed developing a new member's welcome packet. I wrote a several page document for Gene about what I believed should be in that packet. Nothing came of our efforts. After I became President I returned to the idea of the welcome packet and was pleasantly surprised to discover the Sector was developing a packet as well. That project is still unfinished but I did not want to wait for the Sector to complete their version to begin the process of new member integration so I decided to hold new

member luncheons once a quarter. I scheduled a date and invited all the people accepted into Local 16 for the three previous months to come to our office for lunch with the local's Executive Officers where we would explain who we are and what we do while answering any questions the members had. Exactly one person out of more than twenty who were invited even responded to the multiple invites and he said he could not attend.

SHOP VISITS

I committed to visit every shop, every shift, during my term. VP Jim Nolan readily agreed to the idea and has been with me for every visit we have made. There have been a number though not nearly as many as I would like. We have asked Stewards to arrange these visits so their knowledge of their shops would allow us to schedule the visits when the most members would be available.

When we asked Stewards to do this only a handful responded. A second (and third) reminder did produce a total of about a dozen appointments which we have kept. Better results than the other attempts described above but not nearly good enough.

As we have just been through Steward Elections, we will shortly ask Stewards to arrange visits again.

UNIT PLANS

Among the ways to involve members I wanted to use was individual planning sessions for each of our eight Units. I began my attempts with Unit 7, WABC-TV. There were two reasons for this Unit being first. I came out of it and had the most and best contacts among members of any Unit and the problems there were more numerous and severe.

I invited more than twenty members to a barbeque that I would pay for, not the Union. The event was social both to relax people and remove it from any formal union structure. It was away from work so there would be no concerns about speaking freely. Those invited were told we would discuss how we would address the problems at WABC-TV.

Only six members even responded and only two said they would come. I cancelled the event and have not attempted another.

If you read all of the above, two things should be apparent.

1- I have spent the entire year attempting to involve members in every aspect of Local 16.

2- Few, almost none, responded.

The obvious conclusion is the Union is broken. That is the bad news.

The good news is it does not have to stay that way.

Most unions that fail do so because the leadership fails first. They fail to plan for the future. They fail to adapt to a changing environment around the union, whether it is specific to their employer(s) or the world at large. They fail to meet their members changing needs, and most of all, they fail to involve their members in every level of the union, including decision making.

You probably thought of examples of each of those failures as you read the last paragraph. You could because each of those failures has occurred at Local 16. Repeatedly.

None of the above describes the current leadership's attitude or approach.

We ARE planning for the future. We ARE willing to change our methods to fit the different environment we face now and expect to face later. We will employ our members directly, which is the best single example of the two previous statements. We want nothing more than to not just meet our members' needs but to become a vital asset in each member's management of their careers.

The essential missing ingredient is member involvement.

The first part of this letter listed the many ways I have attempted to involve our members in Local 16. I will continue these and any other things I can think of to give this Union back to its members just as I promised during my campaign. I will not give up.

Next year, I will write another letter like this. It will list another year of failures or it will detail the revitalization of Local 16. Which it is up to you.

If you respond and get involved we will succeed. If not, we will fail.

You may wait for someone else to fix the Union but you may lose your job while you do.

Or, you can take responsibility for helping to fix the Union and give yourself the best chance to have a long, successful, rewarding career in our industry.

The choice is yours.