

GUILD LEADER

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Downsizing Update

State: Unemployment Doubtful for Members Taking Buyout

Guild members have begun notifying the company that they want to take the recent buyout offer. So far, 11 employees have signed up. The buyout is being offered to 260 employees; the company will allow no more than 54 buyouts and hopes to get at least 35.

If too few people accept the buyout by the Aug. 20 deadline, the company may next move to layoffs. We don't know how this will play out, but have some information and thoughts to share.

Unemployment benefits

The Guild has been informally advised by state officials that Journal employees who accept the company's buyout offer will *not* qualify for unemployment benefits.

The company said it would not oppose any Guild member's request for unemployment benefits after taking a buyout. But Guild Administrator Tim Schick checked with the people who administer unemployment insurance and was told -- unofficially, but pretty clearly -- that people who take the buyout cannot collect unemployment.

Unemployment benefits are intended to help those who lose their jobs for economic reasons beyond their control. But anyone who accepts the buyout offer is leaving his or her job voluntarily (the company is calling it a "voluntary severance offer," after all) and so will be disqualified from collecting unemployment.

In other words, people considering the buyout shouldn't count on any money beyond the buyout package. It does no good to argue that you took the buyout because you knew you would be laid off.

However, if you are laid off, you can collect.

A better offer?

Some members are saying they aren't going to take the company's buyout offer because they think a better one will come later if the company doesn't meet its goals. Please be advised that we consider this highly unlikely. Company officials have said on more than one occasion that if this buyout doesn't accomplish what they hope for, layoffs are a possibility. They have consistently and clearly said there are no better buyout offers on the horizon.

Please be kind.

We'd also like to renew a plea we made at the July 30 membership meeting: Be considerate. As you speculate on what lies ahead, keep in mind that there may be two or three people within earshot who are wondering whether they will have a job and health insurance in eight weeks. A coworker does not need to be reminded that you can take his or her job.

Corporations make decisions without compassion. That part -- compassion -- falls to us. Please consider the feelings of your coworkers during this difficult time.