GUILD LEADER

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New Ad Dept. Rules Attack Employees, Violate Contract

The company appears to have started a campaign of harassment of employees, setting in some cases unreasonable performance goals and threatening workers with dismissal if they don't achieve them.

The Guild plans to file and grievance over the new policies, since they are unreasonable and arbitrary standards that fail to meet contract standards.

Guild members in classified are being given verbal warnings for not hitting new targets for number of calls taken a week, percentage of time on the phone, and submitting "insufficiently" detailed reports about their calls to and from customers. Guild members complain that the new rules require an excessive amount of paperwork that takes away from their time available to sell ad on the phone, meaning they are forced to choose between being punished for not getting the paperwork in on time or being punished for not making enough calls.

The reporting problem is made worse because they are expected to submit reports to Vice President of Advertising Paul Farrell as well as their supervisor. The problem is that reports to Farrell are done on one computer format and the supervisor reports in another and not all employees have been trained in both formats.

The new rules don't appear to have been developed with any consideration as to whether they can actually be done. They look more like the company has set arbitrary revenue projections, figured out how many upgrades and new calls they need to meet them and simply divided those numbers by the number of salespeople.

Supervisors have told groups of Guild members that they aren't working for the "old Journal" any more. They say the new standards will be rigorously enforced. Some verbal warnings have already been issued and managers have said if whatever problem was warned about at the verbal meeting isn't fixed in a week, a written warning will be issued and a week after that, if the problem still exists, the worker will be fired.

We have a problem with that.

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Belo Considers Freezing Pension Plan

The Belo Corp has announced that it is considering "freezing" the pension plan possibly as early as next year.

The announcement has, obviously, raised a number of concerns among Guild members at the Journal.

The Guild has consulted with its attorney and the national union. We believe an attempt to unilaterally freeze the pension benefits of Guild members is prohibited by the contract. Company officials disagree with this position.

The pension plan, formally known as the G.B. Dealey Retirement Pension Plan, is a defined benefit plan that provides monthly payments to Belo employees upon retirement based on length of service and average annual earning. The benefits run for the life of the

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RULES

"All employees want the Company to succeed," said Guild Vice president Jeff Andrade. "But scaring employees is not the way."

Because our members are covered by a union contract, they can only be fired for just cause. The company can set reasonable goals, and can cajole, us into meeting them, but if they are going to issue warnings or threats of dismissal, there is a process they must follow.

For a missing standard to be a fire-able offense, the new rule must be relevant to the employee's job, be reasonably achievable and take into account the circumstances employees work under.

Employees need to take verbal warnings SERIOUSLY. Under federal law, if you are in a meeting or your job performance that could lead to disciplinary action, such as a verbal warning, you are entitled to have a union representative present. If you are called to meeting to get one, call the Guild Administrator Tim Schick at the Guild office at 421-9466, Guild President John Hill at 277-7381 or Vice President Jeff Andrade at 277-7151. The meeting will not take place until your union representative is available.

If you get a written warning, call the Guild office, Hill or Andrade immediately.

From now on, keep copies of all correspondence you have with you supervisors; if it's an e-mail, print it out. If your department meets with a supervisor as a group, as many of you as possible should take notes about what was said as soon after the session as possible. All these pieces of information will be crucial in our defense against this harassment campaign.

The sad fact is that the contract gives the company the right to mismanage the paper. "They appear to have decided that, when confronted with one of the most challenging periods in the newspaper industry - where we all have to come up with new and imaginative ways to doing virtually everything -- that rather than create a sense of unity and team spirit, they would rather use the whip," Hill said.

Pension

employee. The pension plan was closed to new members in July 2004, when Guild-represented workers were offered the option to staying in the pension plan or enrolling in the Star 401k plan. About 325 Guild represented workers remain in the retirement plan.

401k plans, unlike pensions only provide retirement benefits to the extent employees have saved money in an individual account. When the money runs out, so do the benefits. All employees hired since June 2004 and about 35 Guild workers who switched plans are enrolled in the Star 401k plan.

Under federal law, if the pension plan were frozen, covered employees would not lose vested benefits. However, the years of service and average annual earnings would be calculated based on the dates the plan was frozen.

Journal managers have emphasized to the Guild that freezing the pension plan is just one item under consideration and no final decisions have been made (although they concede they were not informed of the announcement in advance).