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‘Having a Job With a Contract Means Everything’

Teresa Balderson started working for Verizon, then GTE, in 1998. Previously, she’d been a union member for two years at Bell Atlantic. In her new job she was given a management title even though she didn’t supervise anyone. In 2002, she started an organizing drive for other workers with bogus management titles. This is her story in her own words.

After coming from a union environment I realized there were a lot of differences in the way things were handled. I saw favoritism all the time. I saw big discrepancies in pay. Employees with many years of service were getting much lower pay than some hired for only a short time. At raise time, if you weren’t one of your supervisor’s favorites you got the lowest raise and if you were your supervisor’s best friend you got the better raise. It didn’t matter how hard you worked. I was one of the ones that got the lowest



Teresa Balderson

raises and worked very hard.

Knowing that more than half of the company was union, I decided to make a phone call to CWA to question whether we could unionize because of our management title. I was told as long as we didn’t supervise anyone we could. I then took on the task of organizing. I sent a petition around the office to see how many employees would be interested.

The supervisors and manager soon found out about the petition and were very upset. They threw some threats around that if employees attended the meetings they would get fired. Workers were also told not to talk to me because if they were seen talking to me they would get fired. I was called to the manager’s office quite a few times to be questioned.

I let the employees know that they didn’t need to be scared because they could not fire anyone for attending the meetings. At one of the first meetings,

some workers only showed up to take information back to their best-friend supervisor. But after several meetings, we collected signatures and got 50 percent plus 1 of the votes needed to become part of the bargaining unit. When the vote was announced, our manager stood in front of everyone and cried. A few tempers flared after this and I was very unpopular with the management team. I was told numerous times that I needed to be careful because I was not liked.

But that didn’t stop me. I attended meetings on how things would change for our office and was on the bargaining committee that helped make all the necessary changes to our titles, pay scale, etc.

Now that I look back, it was all worth it. People now realize how lucky we are to be part of a represented group. With all of the changes that Verizon has made and is continuing to make, having a job with a collective bargaining agreement means everything. More employees every day realize this and my goal is to get 100 percent membership by the end of this year.