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A UNION CONTRACT IS BETTER FOR YOUR HEALTH

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Everybody knows about "the union advantage" in pay and benefits on the job. But now it appears there's another union advantage, too: Having a union contract may be better for your health. Now all we must do is dig up the numbers to prove it.

We base that on notes from a seminar, one of a series by the AFL-CIO Department for Professional Employees, on depression, anxiety and stress and how they affect the workplace.

Speakers noted stress and depression cut worker productivity, increase the number of absences and off-days, cost firms money and costs workers their jobs.

They also noted studies show a direct correlation, ranging up to 70 percent, between the incidence of stress and depression--depression afflicts almost one in every 10 adults--and physical ailments such as diabetes, heart attacks and strokes.

The causes of stress are many and varied, ranging from divorces and worries about paying for medical bills to caring for sick parents and kids to worry about if your job will be there when you arrive for work tomorrow.

But one cause of stress and depression that caught our eye was a statement by Dr. Dianne Polowczyk, president-elect of the New York State Psychological Association and a member of the American Federation of Teachers:

"A psychologically healthy workplace is one where employees are recognized and respected, where they're involved in decision-making, where conditions are adjusted for the work-family balance and where communication is open," she said.

Wait a minute...that sounds familiar.

"Employees are recognized and respected." That's a union shop.

Workers "are involved in decision-making." That's a union shop.

"Conditions are adjusted for work-family balance." That's done through items in your contract such as paid vacations, adequate vacation time and sick leave and pregnancy leave. Those are all in union shops.

"Communication is open." That's a union shop--or at least it's supposed to be.

Do you see a pattern here? We do.

The result, panelists said, of such "psychologically healthy" workplaces is higher morale, better productivity, lower turnover, a sense of sharing and joint "ownership" of the enterprise and its products, and, to top it off, lower workers' comp costs not just for depression and stress but for the related physical ailments.

Considering that stress and depression alone cost firms \$51.5 billion last year in lost time, lost productivity and added workers' comp, it would seem that anything that reduces or eliminates that drain would benefit not just workers, but companies, too.

And what's obvious to us, from the description above, is that a union shop with a union contract goes some way towards providing that benefit.

Now all we must do is quantify how much of a gain there is, just as the Labor Department compares union wages and non-union wages side by side. We should compare union shops and non-union shops for "the health advantage," side by side.

We'd bet there would be another union edge--a BIG union edge--not just for workers, but for their companies, too. Now, let's find those numbers. ###

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