

# CWA @Cingular

CWA's online update for Cingular customer service, sales and network employees

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Two and a half weeks until the Cingular bargaining deadline...

*An interview with Jermiah Greggains, Cingular Customer Contact Rep and bargaining committee member.*

Q: Jermiah, you are a Cingular employee and a CWA Local President?

J: That's right - I'm a CCRI at the Atwater California Call Center and I was elected president of Local 9407 two years ago. We have about 1,400 members in our local; about 1,000 Cingular employees, and about 400 SBC, SBC Inc., Bass Communications, and Avaya employees.

Q: How is the contract mobilization going in your local?

J: It's really strong - our members are very active and they're willing to do more if needed. They're constantly jumping the gun on the mobilization efforts - they're way ahead of schedule. Workplace mobilization provides an amazing amount of energy to this bargaining process. We can tell that management is aware that mobilization is growing as we approach the contract deadline.

Q: What issues are Call Center employees focused on?

J: The four big ones are job security, pay increases, and stress on the job and the lack of a career path in the call centers. Job security is the number one issue facing every Cingular employee since the merger.

Q: What about management's commitments to keep all call centers open?

J: They have said that our call centers are safe as far as they can tell. That's good - we hope it's true. But we want them to put it in writing and sign it; that's how I tell if our call centers are safe. There is too much history of contracting out for us to be comfortable with verbal promises. Example: there are two ATT Wireless call centers within 4 hours' drive of our center, and they both have a history of contracting out to a Monterey Mexico call center. In fact, new Cingular customers generated by those two centers are routed to our Atwater call center, and any overflow that we can't handle is still routed to ATT's Monterey contractor. We want to get these issues resolved. That work has to be brought back into Cingular - we have a competent and competitive workforce to handle that work and they owe us the job security.

Q: Have you begun talking about these issues at the bargaining table?

J: Yes, but we still have a lot more to discuss. Our very first proposal at the bargaining table was a job security demand that no CWA Cingular member should lose his or her job due to the ATT merger.

Q: You said there is no career path at the Cingular call centers?

J: Yes, by that I mean there is no progression from CCRI to CCR II. Our contract contains job titles, but management has been forcing what we feel is CCR II work down into the CCRI title, and refusing to open up sufficient CCR II positions. My call center is a good example: there are about 80 positions performing work that under the contract should be defined as CCR II work, but at least 50 of those positions are filled by CCRI's. They're doing the work but they are not being advanced and are not receiving the income they deserve. That makes the CCRI job title a dead-end job and that's a big contributor to our high employee turnover rate.

Q: Have you gotten to this issue in bargaining yet?

J: Yes, we've raised it at the table and through a joint bargaining subcommittee dealing with the "blending" of work functions within several job titles. Blending is just a polite term for the practice of moving higher rated work from a higher paid title into a lower paid title. These issues primarily affect network and call center employees, but not exclusively, so we are trying to look at it all. We've had fairly good discussions about it in the subcommittee meetings, now we have to prepare to move it at the main table. The management members on the subcommittee are "back-room analysts" for the company - we will have to see how Cingular responds when proposals land on the full bargaining table.

Q: You said stress is a major issue at the call centers?

J: Yes, we have presented a "stress relief package" of proposals to management and so far their response is inadequate. Our members need assurances around call observations as well as other measurements that are expected of our members. Each one of these expectations adds a lot of stress to their job.

Q: Tell me more about some of the requirements that contribute to stress?

J: We have no guidelines for monitoring - QA can monitor us an unlimited number of times per month, we're not notified at the time we're monitored, and there are no specific monitoring standards or rules. At this point monitoring is more of a harassment tool than a development tool.

Our average handle time - the set number of minutes we have to handle a customer's call - is not adjusted for additional customer issues that come up due to our "one call resolution" program. And we get only two seconds between calls - no close time to finish up work from the previous call.

We have to stay within the average handle time, but we also have to draw out any other issues or problems the customer may have, whether or not they called about that particular problem, because if the customer calls back within the month it can lead to discipline against the CCR. Your choice is to keep questioning the customer to draw out other issues and watch your call time go up, or to end the call and risk having the customer call again within the month. Either way the CCR loses and can start down the road to discipline. That's a major factor contributing to our job stress. We intend to address it in this bargaining. We believe in providing good customer service; however, when employees are stressed, we don't think that the current practices accomplish this.

Q: Are there other call center issues you are raising in these negotiations?

J: The big majority of our bargaining issues affect all Cingular employees, not just call center employees.

Q: You've just completed the second full week of bargaining in Atlanta - how's the committee holding up?

J: We're doing great. We have about two and a half weeks until the contract deadline. We have a very well-rounded committee - lots of experience in all the Cingular job functions and lots of bargaining experience. We can feel the support coming from the workplace mobilization all across the country. But you can never have too much! This is the time for the employees' voices to be heard within this corporation, and we need to take advantage of every minute of it!