

The MidWest Wireman

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BY ELECTRICIANS, FOR ELECTRICIANS

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The MidWest Wireman
 8946 L Street
 Omaha, NE. 68127
 Phone 402-331-8147
 Fax 402-331-0836
 www.ibew22.org

Special points of Interest:

- **A Valuable Service**
- **Workman's Comp**

"I realize that there are certain limitations placed upon the right of free speech. I may not be able to say all I think, but I am not going to say anything I do not think."

Eugene Debs

CEO contract VS. UNION contract

Many parallels can be made between a Chief Executive Officer's contract and a Union Contract. In both cases the contracts are there for the benefit and protection of both the employee and the employer or management. A CEO contract lays out the terms and conditions of employment. The expectations are clear and the result is that the Board of Directors (the employer) has an understanding of the work to be performed by the employee (in this case, the CEO). In both a CEO contract and a Union contract the negotiations are not a free-for-all. The terms and conditions are closely negotiated with accountants and attorneys as well as representatives for the interests and benefit of both parties.

This is why it is strange that the media will portray a CEO's contract as something that cannot be questioned, but that a firefighter's, teacher's, or electrician's contract is something that can be torn up at will.

This is a strange separation because regardless of who benefits, the contract is a fundamental element in our society. All contracts are binding documents in American law and business. It's simple. Without a contract, you really have nothing that can be supported in a court of law. You've heard the old adage about doing business, "If you don't get it in writing, you probably aren't going to get it." That is as true today as it was the first time it was ever uttered.

Contracts spell out the pay, benefits, and working conditions and quite possibly severance packages associated with everyday work of the business. This is for all types of companies. Law firms, cell phone service providers, contractors, engineers, and the like count on contracts to manage their affairs.

Just ask your boss how often he performs work without a contract that defines scope, duration, payment, and possible penalties of nonperformance. I would suspect that the days where deals are made with handshakes are long gone.

The only way to get what you are promised is to ask for it in a legal binding contract. Just like every deal done in America today. Do you wonder why you sign your name when you use a credit card? It's a contract! It's a promise to do what you said you were going to. That works for banks and businesses and it should work for you!

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UNITED WE BARGAIN, DIVIDED WE BEG

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Use #12 To Fish Insulated Walls: A length of twisted #12 solid wire can make a great flexible fish leader for working in walls. Take 18 to 20 feet of #12 solid wire and double it together. Now hook the folded end into a vice or something to keep it from turning, then chuck up the two ends into a drill and slowly twist it into a solid flexible fish leader with an eyelet at one end. Works great in insulated walls.

One Man Wire Pulling: If you need to pull wires into 1/2" or 3/4" conduit without any helper, using a plastic or metal funnel works good. Tape or wedge the funnel so the spout goes into the conduit and pull the wires through that. The wires won't get nicked when they go past the fitting edge and the funnel helps keep the wires from rubbing.

Use Tape On Holesaw In Live Panel: I always like to use a drill stop if I have to holesaw into a live panel. Take some electrical tape and wrap it around the outside of the holesaw about 3/8 of an inch up from the teeth. Make sure to wrap it about 15 times. This will prevent the saw from pushing right through the panel can.

Make Template Top Hang Lights: If you're hanging fluorescent fixtures on a drywalled ceiling and you're using toggle bolts, use the cardboard box the fixture came with to make a template of the fixture. Knock out the holes you need removed from the fixture, and transfer those holes directly onto the cardboard. Cut out the cardboard in the appropriate places, and you'll find the cardboard is much easier to work with on the ceiling while standing on a ladder. You can square up your marks on the ceiling much faster.

How To Keep Cables Straight in Tray: When pulling long multiple cables pulls, in cable tray it is almost impossible to do without getting the cables tangled up, making it hard to tie down neatly! Try this next time, Get a piece of 4/0 ground cable or the like and form a loop about the size of the cable tray you are pulling in. Tie each cable to the loop and drag it down the cable tray, being careful not to let the loop twist. This will help to keep the cables in order making them much easier and faster to tie down!

Grounding and Bonding

Excerpts form Mike Holt.com

What is the difference between “grounding” and “bonding”?

Grounding and bonding are two related concepts that can cause confusion and are probably one of the most discussed issues. The following is based on a solidly grounded conventional wiring system. For simplicity's sake, I will not discuss corner grounding, impedance grounding, or ungrounded systems.

The terms are defined in Article 100 and 250.2 of the NEC. Section 250.4 provides the performance requirements of Article 250. Grounding is a connection to earth, and bonding is the connection of items to each other.

Bonding is crucial inside a structure or building. Without it, in the event an ungrounded conductor comes in to contact with a piece of metal that someone can touch, that someone will receive a shock and potentially be electrocuted due to the fault. A definition for bonding is connecting electrical devices together to provide a low resistance path back to the circuit breaker if an ungrounded conductor touches surface metal associated with the system.

Then why is it called an “Equipment Grounding Conductor (EGC)” in the NEC if it’s primary purpose is to “bond” things together? Simple answer: tradition. It’s always been called that. Proposals have been made to change the term, and progress has been made, but the EGC continues to hold it’s misnomer.

Electricity and the path of least resistance. You’ve heard that electricity takes the path of least resistance. It is more correct to say that electricity takes all available paths to the lowest available potential, in proportion to their resistance. That could be through you. Electrical potential is like a stretched rubber band; all that it wants to do is become slack. The reason that a person gets shocked when touching an ungrounded conductor and the earth is because they become part of the path from high potential to neutralized or zero potential.

Driving a ground rod to ‘ground’ any electrical equipment does not provide the low-resistance path required to trip breakers. Driving a ground rod, using a Ufer, or a metal water pipe is not a substitute for a system’s Equipment Grounding Conductor. A ground rod with 25 ohms to earth will allow almost five amps to escape the system into the earth when directly energized from a 120V source. Five amps will never trip a 15A or 20A breaker, and in the meantime everything bonded to this ground rod will be energized to 120V.

A VALUABLE SERVICE

I recently spoke with the owner of a non-signatory electrical company about the value of the service electrical contractors provide to the public. Electricity is a fundamental of modern life and has the potential to be very dangerous. The rules, regulations, and requirements that surround electrical work are there to protect the life and property. Getting the proper permits, following the electrical code as required, using the proper parts, equipment, and tools are part of what makes an electrical system safe and useful for the public at large.

This contractor suggested I add an article covering the value of these very services. The revelation is that these elements have a true value in the electrical contracting marketplace. Those in our industry racing to the bottom and cutting corners, cheating the system, are undervaluing the services provided by legitimate contractors.

It's one thing for businesses to compete on speed, value, and service. These are the elements that make a good company great, or put a bad company out of business. But it's entirely different to degrade our industry, when a guy does electrical work "on the side" and cheats on the lawfully required permits, ignores the code, etc., in order to gain a competitive edge. Often employees doing "side work" are the very ones cutting these corners. How can a legitimate business stay competitive when their own employees are undercutting them for work by cheating the system? What is the risk to the property owner for a shoddy install using substandard parts and a disregard for the code? Is the liability and risk worth the miniscule savings gained by hiring someone "on the side?"

If employees have the skills to get out and secure their own work, then by all means, they should step out on their own. If this is you, be your own man and run your own shop. You'll see very quickly the problems caused by the degradation of our industry.

Marketing and salesmanship play a huge part in negotiating business. We need to remind customers that the services provided by legitimate electrical contractor's go beyond the lowest bidder. These services include showing responsibility for the project by pulling the proper permits, using licensed electricians, bonding, liability insurance, having the right tools and parts for the job, having access to a trained workforce for larger projects, offering areas of special certification, warranties, on-call emergency service, the list goes on.

Let's face it, electricians are the smartest of all construction crafts and we need to get the word out that the service we provide is not only a necessity of life but has a great value and shouldn't be left up to just anyone.



JOB RELATED INJURIES OR ILLNESSES

Workers need to know the basics of how to deal with a work related injury or illness if presented with those situations. Knowledge is power and the practical suggestions that follow will help you receive the benefits you are entitled to. These suggestions are based on Nebraska law.

Protect your rights if you get injured or sick from something related to your job **1.** Report your injury/illness to your supervisor or company nurse. **2.** See a doctor for your problem. You have a right to see your family doctor. If you don't have a family doctor, ask family or friends for the names of doctors they trust. **3.** Tell the doctor you are claiming a work injury or sickness. Ask the doctor to send all bills to your employer. **4.** Explain to the doctor and your employer how you were injured or became ill. Be sure to tell them details about the accident or work activities that injured you or made you sick. **5.** Describe to the doctor everything about your injury or illness: where you hurt, how the pain feels, if your ability to move has been affected, how doing your work makes you feel, and so on. **6.** Go to all doctors appointments and follow the doctor's advice. **7.** If the doctor recommends that you avoid doing certain parts of your job, ask for two written copies of the work restriction. Give one copy to your employer and carry the other copy with you when you are working. **8.** If surgery is recommended, **you have the right to choose your own surgeon.** Your employer (or its representatives) has no right to insist that you use a certain surgeon. **9.** If you are unable to work for more than a week, file a workers compensation claim. You have a right to be paid workers compensation checks. **10.** If you have problems getting proper medical care or receiving workers compensation pay, contact a good lawyer who has workers compensation experience.

How to tell if you need a lawyer's help in collecting full benefits for a work related injury As a general rule, you don't need a lawyer as long as the insurance company is paying all benefits you are entitled to. However you should talk to a lawyer if: **1.** Your Workers' Compensation claim has been denied. **2.** You are not sure of benefits you are entitled to. **3.** Your employer or the insurance company is trying to pick your doctor for you. **4.** You have been contacted by a nurse case manager. **5.** Your employer is taking more than 2 weeks to investigate and admit that your injury is work related. **6.** You have missed more than 2 weeks of work and are not yet receiving benefit checks. **7.** Your medical bills are not getting paid and you are concerned about your credit rating. **8.** You are being forced to go back to work before you feel you are ready. **9.** Your employer is not honoring your work restrictions. **10.** You are making less pay after you return to work following your injury. **11.** A vocational rehab counselor contacts you. **12.** You were injured or became ill from activities outside of Nebraska.

These suggestions were presented by Rehm, Bennett & Moore P.C., L.L.O., www.rehmlaw.com,
800-736-5503, Omaha and Lincoln, NE.

Want to go green? You can get the MidWest Wireman by email. Just email me at bjohnson@ibew22.org and I will add you to the growing list.



Mr. Anonymous

I am always encouraged by the letters and emails that come in with ideas for the MidWest Wireman. Many of our job tips and most of my topics come from talking to workers and employers, both union and non-union. Recently I received an anonymous letter from a reader of the MidWest Wireman asking us to take a look at “the other side.”

Normally, it is not our policy to respond to anonymous letters, calls, or emails. However, the individual who asked for insight from “the other side” sent us some anti-union propaganda covering forced unionism. I am glad to get this kind of interaction as it lets me know that people are thinking and that’s encouraging.

Forced unionism or mandatory union membership applies in states where joining a union is a condition of employment in a particular job or business. The main gripe, as we understand it, is that union membership in such states involves the payment of dues.

Whatever you want to call it, union membership as a requirement for employment doesn’t apply in Nebraska or Iowa as they are “Right to Work” states. Right to Work means the right to join a union or the right to not join a union. That’s it.

As far as dues payment, which again seems to be the biggest gripe, Mr. Anonymous wants us to pretend that there is nothing to be gained by paying dues. There are dues associated with membership in many voluntary organizations, the Bar Association, homeowners’ associations, the NRA, gym memberships, AAA, and unions. These dues, and the benefits received through membership, are clearly defined upfront prior to joining.

But let’s talk about unofficial or unknown dues that are associated with other groups, especially those dealing with employment. A staffing company may tell you there is no cost to you for employment through them, but rest assured they aren’t finding you a job out of the kindness of their hearts. Someone is paying for it. The staffing company gets paid for every hour you work from the contractor or employer. What is the amount between your pay and the hourly rate paid by the employer to the staffing company? \$8.00, \$10.00, \$15.00 per hour? If the employer pays the staffing company \$35.00 per hour and the staffing company pays you \$22.00 per hour, who is paying the \$13 per hour “dues?” These are “fees paid against total compensation” and are often unknown which can have a much more dramatic cost effect with far fewer benefits.

Membership in a union gives you the right to voice your concerns about your future, whether that’s retirement, health care, working conditions, or even the amount of dues you pay. Try asking your employer or staffing company if you can have input on those very things.

Of course how could anyone disagree with the thought of “Right to Work?” You absolutely have the right to work with no pensions, no health insurance, or set working conditions. You have the right to have any benefits or compensation changed or taken away at any given moment by an employer. You have the right to take the worst possible deal available.

On the flip side, you also have the right to work with a contract, and clearly defined wages, benefits, and conditions. The choice is yours.

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8946 L STREET
OMAHA, NE 68127
(402)331-8147

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bjohnson@jibew22.org

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Remember, They Can't Do It Without You!

POOR INSTALLATIONS

Here is an example of not even trying. This photo was taken at a brand new hotel in Omaha where the electrician made up the difference of a short pipe going to a recessed ceiling fixture with a sleeve of flex and no connectors. It's amazing that anyone who calls themselves an electrician would leave an install like this. Shame!

I wonder how the customer felt when this was brought to their attention. Do you suppose that contractor will ever be called back to do the maintenance on that building?

The bitterness of poor quality construction will remain long after the sweetness of low price has been forgotten.

