

"What it means to be a Union Member"
**As seen through the eyes of a recalled Daimler / UAW
employee**

To: Scott and Matt
From: Rick Sweeten

Hi Guys. I've put off writing this way too long. For that I apologize. It has become more apparent that talk is too limited to say what needs to be said. In writing this I intend to address both of you and my brothers and sisters on both sides of the isle. Thank you greatly for what you do.

To my brothers and sisters I write this off the top of my head, not to bore you with statistics, and from the heart because I truly care. Guys, I'm going to ramble. I'm going to write of history past, present, and future. I'm going to write about the company, our local 5286 and unions in general. For me I appreciate and benefit from all. For that I say "Thank you!"

Our ancestors, grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles and fellow countrymen lived a harder life than we live today and many fought hard to make the change. Change has come at a price for many and huge benefits for all. Hold them in our hearts for they held us in theirs. In 1929 in this very county some dared to stand and speak. It was a time of hardship and just speaking support for them could cost you a much needed job. My mother was born in 1912, the year the great Titanic sank. She was 17 at the time. Upon speaking and showing support for Loray it almost cost her job. This cause was real for them and remains real for us today.

We take for granted much of what they longed for and dreamed of. They had plenty of time to daydream, as the mind can daydream as hard and long as the body can work. It was a time of twelve hour workdays and low pay that many spent at the company store.

Time and a half pay was but a pipe dream. Double time, don't even think about it! Long twelve hour, 6 day work weeks would be followed by short three day work weeks making it hard to live and even harder to save.

Getting to the point where we are today has been a continued fight and labor unions have been a large voice to promote change in our country. Serious changes started to come about during the difficult 1930's. 1935 saw the passage of the National Labor Relations Act and Social Security was passed that very same year. From that point things have continued to change and improve.

The next step was the winning of an eight hour work day, 40 hour work week and time and a half pay. Since 1999 this has included double time pay for over eight hours worked on the seventh day of the work week. Many things that affect us directly have come to pass since. Employment security laws have led to notice of lay-offs in many cases and the right to draw unemployment compensation. Social security has evolved to include Medicare, disability,

Medicaid and prescription insurance as well.

Unions, likewise, have been instrumental in the great changes in workplace safety. Toxic materials are now listed and many removed. Brushers remove smoke from our air as we work. On the job injuries are now compensated in the workplace. Myself, I thank labor unions for their vital role in these as my life has been affected greatly.

In our plant these days I often hear talk about the union contract. Many say these words as if it is all the union. In reality our agreement is between Daimler Gastonia and Local 5286. It belongs to all employees at our plant, management, union members, and right to work workers as well, being that North Carolina is a right to work state. Many things have been agreed upon which affect me greatly. Thanks to the company and union agreement I have a job again.

“Thank you!”

I hear the statements asking what does the union do for me. Again it is the agreement between Daimler Gastonia and Local 5286 that do things for us. As for me it is great to be back working. Guys, I have been married for 28 years. It has been the thrill ride of my life. Despite the fact that my wife and I have endured ten layoffs and three plant closings over the years our glass remains half full. Our lives remain good. Daimler has been the one and only company that fairly recalled me and my brothers and sisters back to work.

My wife remains laid-off as jobs are few and far between in this bad economy. Wix laid her off after 36 years service, the only full time company she had ever worked for. Many of her fellow workers were laid-off likewise not to be replaced or to be replaced by “temps”. Wix management could pick and choose. We were laid off fairly and are in the process of being fairly recalled. Thanks to our company and Local 5286 being in agreement. Again “Thank you!” Without agreement I would not be writing this letter. Who would have gone? Who would have stayed? Be thankful that you can look around and wonder.

It's good to have good, cheap affordable insurance again. Over the years I've had it all. I call it the good, the bad, and the ugly. Speaking of ugly, I got off of Cobra when I was recalled. I think the reason they called it Cobra is because you feel like you got snake bit. It cost my wife and me over \$350.00 a month and the government was paying 65% of the cost. My one name brand subscription cost \$80.00 and had to be filled once a month. You believe it! I pay my fair share and smile. I always paid more everywhere else and usually got less.

When I look at my pay check I also see my 401K which has a 2/3 match for 6% of my pay. That's unheard of most places now. That mounts up quickly. I also see time and half pay I get after 8 hours, double time I get after 10 hours. I don't have to wait till the end of a 40 hours week to get time and a half or wait till my over eight hours gets in on the seventh day to get a little double time pay.

How bout Christmas time? I got paid. I didn't get told to go sign up for my waiting week. How bout sick time? Hourly workers getting sick pay. That used to be a pipe dream for me. How bout vacation? I have gotten 48 hours back already. I get three weeks in September.

Some of you guys have six weeks. What's up with that? A manufacturing worker getting 6 weeks vacation. My Mom didn't get that during the whole 58 years she worked. Imagine!! How bout pay? Yea, how bout pay! I looked at my check and I made \$33,000 in less than six months. Imagine! Little Johnny, somebody said he made over \$100,000. Imagine that! I love rumors.

There's more. Look around. The plant looks great. Sure ain't the drab place I saw when I got recalled in 2004 from Mount Holly. Our agreement made that happen too. Got the lucky dog twice. We have brushers cleaning the air, new paint, new fans, new equipment, and air conditioning that most of the time will freeze your butt off. Most places I worked at couldn't even spell air conditioning.

We talk about all this and more at the union meetings. We talk about changes, some problems, most minor, or brothers and sisters like me coming back to work. Thirty six more this month. That's great! The company has committed to spend millions in the agreement for new jobs. Have you guys noticed? I'm pro-Daimler and pro Local 5286 we have a good agreement, new jobs.

Do you guys like TOS. It gets better all the time. I've read The Toyota Way and the field guide. It helped me to understand TOS better. Our quality is great and our product flow is also. That's important to our work, our hard work. Now, I'm rambling. I told you I would.

Guys I hear your complaints and feel your pain. Some of you guys need to set that half empty glass on top of your truck and let it blow in the wind. Bring your half full glass like I do. I was at the meeting when the agreement was passed. What a crowd! We got a good agreement. We may could have gotten a better agreement from Local 5286 and Daimler Gastonia if ya'll had shown up during the meetings leading up to the vote and let those concerns be heard. Where were you? Out of the dozen or so that showed up to the meetings leading up to the agreement Bruce and I couldn't vote. We were laid off. Imagine.

It's our agreement. It's our voices that drive it. It's our solidarity that determines how great our agreement is. I don't care if you are in the union or out it's still our agreement.

I ask this of you. If you haven't signed a card, isn't it time? If you have gotten out isn't it time to come home. I'm asking you to join your brothers and sisters once again.

Brothers and sisters where were you? Where are you? Is taking the time to attend 3 or 4 meetings a year to much time to keep you informed, keep us stronger? Make a stronger company, a stronger union and a brighter future? Guys take out the old family Bible and remember those that stood for us. When you are alone looking at the man in the mirror, so to speak, be true to yourself. Kiss the babies in your life while the lay sleeping and pledge to make their life better.

Hold up a finger in solidarity when you see me and when you see each other. You guys that know me know I don't care which side of the isle you are on or which finger it is; as long as

it's raised in friendship.

Again I ask you to come home! Hope to see you at a meeting!
Thank all of you again.

In Solidarity
Rick Sweeten