



June 27, 2008

This week, The Sun announced a voluntary separation plan, otherwise known as a buyout, for all employees. This news was not unexpected, but it still saddened many of us.

One of the saddest things is that we will have to say goodbye to 100 Sun friends, most of them in the newsroom and call center, because the company says that our revenue is in steep decline. We know that another factor is the enormous debt that the Tribune Company took on when Sam Zell purchased the media chain.

Management has made it clear that if these staff cuts can't be achieved through buyouts, there will be layoffs. However, they have not told us, beyond the vague departments of "Newsroom" and "Classified Call Center," which classifications would be impacted. We also don't have an exact number of members within classification categories - reporter, copy editor, photographer, etc. - who might be impacted within these departments.

Yesterday, Guild leadership met with company representatives to bargain over the terms of the buyout. Our goal is to try to get a buyout package that does the most good for you and your family.

The company has offered:

For everyone but commission sales reps: One week of base pay for every completed six months of service, plus 3% of the buyout cash to offset taxes. This deal also includes full health benefits for that same time period. There is a minimum of six weeks pay and a maximum of 52 weeks pay.

For commission sales reps: The weekly amount used in the incentive benefit calculation will be the rep's average weekly commissions earned from July 1, 2007 to June 28, 2008.

The company wants to have those who take the buyouts off the payroll and gone from the premises by Aug. 1. They want you to make a decision about whether you want to take a buyout by July 11. And they don't want to give you the opportunity to change your mind.

We're pushing for something MUCH better.

We propose:

Everyone gets 45 days to decide if they want to take the buyout. In fact, we believe this is a matter of law. We believe the company has a legal obligation to give you this time to carefully consider this option. Everyone should also have 7 days to rescind their buyout application should they change their mind.

We are trying to increase the minimums and maximums for the buyout. Meaning that we'd like to have everyone get at least 12 weeks of base pay, regardless of length of service, and at the most 78 weeks of base pay. We think this is fair.

During meetings Thursday, management representatives told us that they would give employees three weeks to consider the buyout if we gave up one week of layoff notice. That means that instead of the four weeks notice guaranteed by our contract, you would only have three weeks notice that you were going to be laid off. We think this is outrageous. And we won't pit colleagues against colleagues.

We are willing to work this out with The Sun. But management has threatened to go directly to layoffs if we don't accept their terms.

Next steps:

We are encouraging EVERYONE to send emails to Tim Ryan to ask him why these buyouts have to be completed by Aug. 1. We believe that the date is totally arbitrary and we demand more time for you to weigh your options. Please ask him to reconsider the timeline.

Merit employees - those not in the union - will be receiving their buyout packages today. Don't be freaked out. We're still fighting.

In the meantime, please come to us with your ideas, your concerns and anything else that is on your mind. We know this is a very difficult and stressful time.

We have a blog to which we will be posting information. The website is newssoftthesun.blogspot.com. Please check it often for updates and feel free to add your thoughts.

Did we cover everything? We hope so. There's a lot going on. So if you feel like we missed something, call or email us.

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Stay tuned for mobilizing efforts that will be coming SOON!

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