

My first experience with AFGE was a rewarding one. I worked for the Department of Defense as an aircraft mechanic, performing operational modifications on B-52's. My supervisor summoned me into our break-room, and handed me my annual appraisal rating. Having received many appraisals, I believed this one was not going to be any different than those in the past. When I first glanced at my rating I realized that this rating was not like those I had received in the past. This one was terrible! As I continued to review my rating, I quickly realized I was being set up to be terminated. Anyone that knows appraisal ratings, particularly the critical elements, knows that these elements are the most important ones to be concerned with. I had failed two critical elements. Naturally, my supervisor had no objective reasons for my rating except that I was not on the aircraft enough, and if I wanted to stay employed, I would have to be able to work on the aircraft more. Wow, what a stark realization. I had never been fired from any job. Now, it seemed, I would be terminated for not being able to perform my critical job functions.

As we continued to exchange opinions, I specifically asked him for reasons he had rated me this way. His response, "you are away from the aircraft too much". I reminded him that I had to be away from the aircraft due to the fact that I was a shop steward for the B-52 section. My time away from the aircraft was legitimate, and approved by him. He could only nod his head with understanding, but he would not change the rating.

Quite honestly, I considered withdrawing my stewardship from the local. I had a family to support, they relied upon me, and so I felt my option was to resign. Luckily, I did not grow up a quitter. My parents believed in dedication and determination, just the traits that delivered me through this whole ordeal. I went to my directorate steward later that day, showed him my appraisal, and he just laughed. I thought to myself, "yea, you can laugh all you want, especially since it does not affect you". He and I continued to talk, and when I left the union hall, I felt relieved. Not because our talk resulted in some far-reaching conclusion, but he had explained the law that protected union stewards from this type of reprisal. The local filed an Unfair Labor Practice for protected activity, and within a few weeks an investigator contacted me concerning the charge. It became very apparent that the agency violated the law that protected those that wanted to become union stewards. After the investigator completed his investigation, he told me he would get back with me on this charge. Within weeks, I was called into my second-level supervisor's office. He told me he had been ordered to re-evaluate my appraisal rating and was not very happy at being told to do so. After a short exchange of words, my appraisal rating was raised to a level that exceeded my expectations.

My career in AFGE continued. As I gained more experience and confidence, I wanted to do more to represent our bargaining unit. I rose through the different levels of stewardship. At each level, my knowledge and confidence expanded. With every case, I felt a sense of accomplishment. I was able to help my coworkers protect their rights and in some instances, save their jobs! What a feeling of satisfaction.

My career with AFGE was solidified. I wanted to do more, to help those that needed help, and with that understanding I applied for the position of National Representative for AFGE. I felt that I had the knowledge and experience to get the job. I had worked hard for my bargaining unit, long hours, many

weekends, and endured ridicule. Yes, ridicule from some of my coworkers. But as anyone that has been in our business knows, this is just part of the process. Like it or not, there are those that will resent you from being away from work, many not knowing that you are protecting their rights. I remember receiving that call from the National Vice President of District Nine. He asked me several questions, from my personal life to my experience with AFGE. After several minutes and many more questions, he asked, "why do you want to be a National Representative for AFGE?" My response, too many to be presented in this text, was complex yet simple...I wanted to help people. With that, he hired me! What a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment. I had realized one of my goals, to be a representative of AFGE.

I continued to learn more and more. AFGE enabled me to gain more knowledge. With every passing week I learned more. I remember representing my locals and getting to know the officers and the local stewards. To my surprise, many, if not all of them had the same concerns for their coworkers. They wanted to help! This is what we all have in common; we have a special understanding within all of us. We want to help, we want things to be fair, and when they're not we want to make it right. This is what we all aspire for, fairness, equality, and respect...

Within three short years, I began to look forward at what I could do to help more. I looked at the elected position, the National Vice President of AFGE, District Nine. After some soul searching I decided to seek the position of NVP. Wow, little did I know what this decision would do to my life. With hard work and a sincere desire to help, my life changed in an instant. I was elected! What a feeling of appreciation. Upon entering my newly elected position, I quickly learned that being a NVP was completely different than being a National Representative. Now, I had many more concerns and responsibilities with many more people relying on me. I naturally had my frustrations, but these were few and not so bad. I soon realized that this is what I had strived for, to help people, to make things right, and help those that need help. What a feeling of total satisfaction!

Well, as I reflect upon my life as a UNION PERSON, and to that day when my supervisor summoned me into that break area to receive my appraisal, little did I realize how this event would so totally change my life. That day when I thought I would lose my job, the thought of doom and gloom so consumed me. That day, my life changed! My life was altered in ways that only those who know our business could understand and appreciate. AFGE, its meaning and reputation is total. We are committed to the ideals of fairness, equality, and justice. We are on watch for those that need us and for those that dare challenge us. We are a family, and we all are one.

Ninth District National Vice President

Michael C. Kelly