



A Member's Guide to Seniority



Understanding Seniority

02

Seniority is one of the most important foundations of any unionized workplace. It brings fairness, transparency, and consistency to decisions that affect members every day including scheduling and vacation selection to job postings, transfers, and layoffs. When everyone understands how seniority works and why it matters, our workplace becomes more equitable and predictable for all.

This guide was created to help members gain a clear understanding of what seniority is, how it protects workers, and how it is applied within our collective agreement. Seniority can sometimes feel complicated, especially in a workplace like ours that has grown rapidly, integrated multiple workgroups, and seen significant hiring after the pandemic. Many of the questions members ask today are connected to this fast growth and the employment decisions the company made long before unionization.

The goal of this guide is to give every member the knowledge and context they need to understand how seniority works and why it remains one of the strongest protections in our union. Whether you are new to the bargaining unit or have been here for years, this guide will help clarify the system, reduce confusion, and support fairness across all classifications.



Have a question about seniority? Contact the unit chair at your base.

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What is Seniority?

03

Seniority is the length of time someone has spent in a bargaining unit and is one of the most fundamental principles in unionized workplaces. It represents fairness, protection, and transparency in how opportunities and decisions are made.

Seniority guarantees that all members are treated equally under clear, consistent rules and decisions are made based on consistency, not favouritism, politics or personal connections. Seniority acknowledges the value of long-term commitment and experience.

Members who have dedicated years of service, build institutional knowledge, mentor newer members, and contribute stability to the workplace. The seniority system respects that contribution by giving those workers priority when decisions must be made.

Seniority is designed to:

- ✓ Recognize time spent in a bargaining unit and loyalty to the unionized workforce.
- ✓ Ensure fairness and consistency across all roles in the bargaining unit.
- ✓ Prevent favouritism or selective credit in roles.
- ✓ Strengthen solidarity by treating all members as part of one collective group.

Local 531 CBA Seniority Language Articles



Seniority is integrated into nearly every part of our Collective Agreement and plays a key role in many aspects of members' employment. Below is a list of articles we encourage all members to review to build a stronger understanding of how seniority is applied.

Article 9

Shift Bidding, Schedule Changes, Shift Extensions, Voluntary Time Off

Article 12

Leave of Absence

Article 13

Filling of Position Vacancies and Filling of Status Changes Without a Vacancy

Article 15

Vacation

Article 20

Layoff and Recall

Article 21

Industrial Disputes and Off-Duty Status

Article 11

Seniority

Seniority is established from the Employee's most recent date of hire into a position covered by the collective agreement. Seniority is affected by, but not limited to, the following:

If a member accepts an Airports Management Term position, they retain but don't accrue seniority for up to 24 months.



If a member accepts any other term position in the company, they retain AND accrue seniority for up to 24 months.

If a member transfers to a permanent position outside of the bargaining unit they only retain seniority for up to 6 months.

If a member takes an unpaid personal leave of absence, their seniority is only accrued for 90 days and then retained thereafter.

Most Recent Hire Date

Why is it important?



When our CBA came into effect in September 2022, seniority was recognized for anyone already working in a position that became part of the bargaining unit . For example, Becky had worked as a Baggage Services Agent for five years before unionization in 2022; all five of those years counted toward her union seniority even though we were not unionized during those years.

The same principle applies to newer groups joining the union. For instance, Joe has worked as a Ramp Service Agent for two years prior to the Ramp Service Agents joining the union on March 1, 2025, so those two years will be recognized for his seniority.

Similarly if Simon, a Ramp Service Lead, had previously worked as a Ramp Service Agent for one year before March 1, 2025, that year would also count toward his seniority. This could mean Simon may have more seniority than some current Ramp Service Leads.

However, if Heather, a current Customer Service Agent had previously worked at the Call Centre for 10 years prior to joining Airports, her seniority would only be calculated by the time spent in Airports because the Call Centre is not in our bargaining unit.

Pre & Post Pandemic

How it affected seniority

Onyx Purchases WestJet - December 2019

When Onex became WestJet's new owner in December 2019, it marked a major shift in the company's history. In the Onex sale package, it was clearly stated that after one year of ownership, any workgroups not protected by a union would no longer have job security guarantees. What this meant was without a union, job protection could be removed after that first year.

Covid - March 2020

Three months later, in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought air travel to standstill almost overnight. Onex was able to accelerate that one-year timeline, blaming the dramatic downturn in travel to eliminate jobs.

Onyx Ownership of WestJet

In April 2020, there was no collective agreement in place to challenge or negotiate terminations under Onex's cost-cutting plan. The Airports Employee Association (AEA) reached an agreement with the company under the Canada Labour Code, Part III – Division IX: Group Termination of Employment, which outlines notice, severance, and reporting requirements but does not provide job protection or recall rights.

Separation Packages - April 2020

As part of this agreement, employees who signed separation documents accepted a one-year restriction on reapplying to WestJet. Under WestJet's rehire policy, returning after 12 months resets retirement service, vacation, benefits, base pay, and profit share, effectively reducing costs for Onex. This restriction means any former TACs, GSAs, CSAs, or others who accepted voluntary separation during COVID couldn't carry previous time toward bargaining unit seniority. The union cannot retroactively change this, as we were not the bargaining unit at the time, and it would be unfair to members with uninterrupted service.

Post Covid Hiring Begins - Summer 2021

After COVID restrictions eased, WestJet began rehiring rapidly to meet post-pandemic travel demand. Around this time, Unifor was certified to represent certain Airport employees in YVR and YYC, with bargaining commencing in October 2021 with 531 members. Union seniority is based on continuous employment within the bargaining unit. COVID-related terminations created legal breaks in service that cannot be retroactively credited by the union or an arbitrator.

Bargaining 2021–2022

Priorities in Bargaining

Fixing Broken Systems

One of the key priorities identified during bargaining in 2021 was to improve how members transitioned from the Guest Services Band to the Airport Operations Band. The previous system allowed for favouritism and bias in hiring practices, which suppressed wages, limited career development, and restricted growth opportunities. If this system had continued after unionization, it would have perpetuated a subjective hiring process and overly restrictive company-imposed eligibility for AO Band roles.

Seniority & Wages

Under the old system, wages for employees in the Guest Services Band were capped after seven years which severely impacted workers' ability to take on a position within the AO Band. For example, a senior agent holding a dedicated CSA position who wanted to move into a dedicated Guest Service Lead role would see only a small increase (typically around \$1 per hour) because their wage would simply slide to the closest rate on the AO Band scale. In contrast, a junior CSA with lower starting wages could see an increase of over \$5 per hour by moving into the same position.

Disincentives for Experienced Employees

This created a disincentive for experienced agents to take on higher-responsibility roles, since the financial benefit was minimal compared to the requirements of the position. Meanwhile, it provided a significant advantage to less senior employees, effectively suppressing wages and limiting career advancement for longer-serving staff.

However, it's important to note that schedule bidding operated the same way it does today. When seniority was introduced pre-pandemic, it was never dependent on how long someone had been in a specific position. Seniority has always followed the person, not the position.

Today

Currently, only 373 of our 1712 (as of October 8, 2025) members who were hired between 1998 and 2019 remain. This means that our membership has grown by 1339 members since 2020.

2020

Only 1 member hired in 2020 remains in our bargaining unit.

2021

131 of our members were hired.

2022

335 of our members were hired. 128 of them were hired after September 1 - the effective date of our CBA.

2023

236 of our members were hired.

2024

360 of our members were hired.

2025

246 of our members were hired.

Rapid growth in a bargaining unit can create tension around seniority, and our union is a clear example of this. Since unionizing, Local 531 has grown from 531 members to an additional 1,339 since 2020. When growth is rapid, seniority can become a source of frustration.

The recent integration of Ramp Service Agents and Ramp Service Coordinators caused minor disruptions in seniority lists, which is a natural result of growth and integration. As hiring slows, seniority will stabilize just like in like in our Vancouver base, where no new members have been hired since January 2025. While turnover will continue, large-scale changes like workgroup integration are unlikely unless new non-unionized positions join the bargaining unit.

Q Can a dedicated CSA with more seniority than me, from another base, be awarded an RSL position at my base ahead of me?

A In most cases, no. Being CSA-qualified alone would not allow that member to be awarded an RSL position, either in their own base or another.

The only scenario where this could occur is if:

- A dedicated CSA applies for and is awarded an RSL-R position in their home base;
- A posting for an RSL position is made in another base and no successful applicants are found at that base; and
- That CSA, now holding an RSL-R position, applies for the vacancy in the other base and is awarded it only because there were no qualified internal applicants.

However, this situation is highly unlikely. A dedicated CSA does not have ramp or lead experience, and roles outside the Guest Services Classification are filled through a combination of testing/interview and seniority.

Q I worked for WestJet from 2011 until I was terminated in April 2020 due to COVID. In May 2021, I returned to the company. Why doesn't my previous time with the company count toward my seniority?

A The union did not have any control over what the company did prior to unionization. Language in our Collective Agreement cannot be applied retroactively to events or employment relationships that occurred prior to the union existing. Under the current Collective Agreement, an employee's seniority is only continuous if their employment has not been broken for more than seven consecutive calendar days.

This rule applies equally to all employees, regardless of the reason for the break in service whether due to layoff, resignation, or other circumstances outlined in the Collective Agreement.

Q How is my seniority calculated?

A Seniority is calculated the same way for all union members. It is based on the member's most recent date of hire into a position in the bargaining unit, which becomes your baseline for seniority.

There are multiple ways your seniority can be impacted, which has been outlined above under Article 11-Seniority.

Q What happens to my seniority if I change positions or status within the bargaining unit?

A Your seniority stays with you while you remain in the bargaining unit, regardless of which position or status you hold. In unionized environments, seniority belongs to the person, not the position. Once you've established your seniority date within the bargaining unit, that time stays with you, regardless of which role you perform or whether you are full-time, part-time or casual. This is because seniority recognizes your overall service and commitment to the bargaining unit, not just the time spent in one specific position

- Jennifer is a Ramp Services Agent (RSA) with 3 years of seniority and successfully moves into a dedicated Baggage Service Agent (BSA) position. She keeps her existing seniority, though her ranking within the BSA group may be higher or lower depending on her most recent hire date in the bargaining unit.
- If Jennifer were to move to a different bargaining unit, such as a Flight Attendant, she would start a new seniority date based on when she joined that new unit.
- Joe has been a Ramp Services Agent (RSA) for 3 years and moves into a CSA position. His 3 years of seniority moves with him, which could result being placed ahead of CSAs with less bargaining unit seniority.

Q Does a Leave of Absence affect my seniority?

A A member's seniority is impacted, depending on the type of leave.

- Unpaid Personal Leave of Absence – accrue seniority for 90 days, retain for the length of the leave.
- Sick Leave – retain and accrue for the length of the leave
- Maternity / Paternity Leave – retain and accrue for the length of the leave
- Bereavement Leave – retain and accrue for the length of the leave
- Military Leave – retain and accrue according in alignment with the the Canada Labour Code
- Jury Duty – retain and accrue for the length of the leave

Q If I leave the company, how long do I have to come back to the bargaining unit to maintain my seniority?

A Under Article 11 – Seniority, specifically 11-2.04 it states that a member can apply for reinstatement of previous continuous seniority as long as the seniority was accrued in a position covered by our agreement and the employment has not been broken for more than 7 days.

Q I want my previous service with the company, prior to my COVID termination to be counted towards my seniority. How do I grieve this?

A The grievance process is reserved for disputes between the union and the company, not between the members and the union as a whole. Changes to union structure, policies and rules occurs through local by-laws, national constitution and Collective Bargaining.

The seniority language in the CBA is clear, and it is applied the same way to all of our members. There wasn't a collective agreement in place when the COVID terminations occurred, so there is no violation of the CBA. The terminations that occurred during Covid, fell under the AEA, the company and the Canada Labour Code, not the current union.

Q Why do some members have a higher seniority than me, even though they took the same role after me?

A Seniority follows the person, not the position. For example:

Joe worked as a Ramp Service Agent for two years prior to the Ramp Service Agents joining the union on March 1, 2025. Because the union recognizes everyone's seniority in a position covered by the Collective Agreement, even though Joe wasn't not in the union or paying union dues, those two years will be recognized as his seniority.

Similarly, if Simon, a Ramp Service Lead, had previously worked as a Ramp Service Agent for one year before March 1, 2025, that year would also count toward his seniority in the Ramp Service Agent classification. This could mean Simon may have more seniority than some current Ramp Service Leads, depending on individual circumstances.

Seniority is a fundamental principle of union representation and a cornerstone of fairness in our workplace.

While some members may feel it disadvantages them individually at times, its purpose is to protect the greater good and ensure equitable treatment for the union as a whole.

The way seniority is applied today is grounded in our collective agreement and long-standing union practices.

By respecting and understanding seniority, we strengthen the fairness, stability, and solidarity that benefit all members.

