

How We Won the Fight to Defeat the Versus Tracking Badge

In the late winter of 2016, long before contract negotiations, the Hospital asked to make a presentation at our monthly meeting (MGC) about a way to improve safety at the Hospital. We agreed to listen, as improving safety is always one of our biggest goals. At the meeting the Hospital gave a presentation about a new badge that comes equipped with a help button allowing Hospital Security to immediately find staff and respond quickly to a situation. The concept sounded interesting at first but as we started asking follow up questions, our concerns began to rise.

Our questions:

- 1) How did the Hospital know where the employee was when they hit the badge?
- 2) Would that location tracker be active at all times, even when the help button wasn't activated?
- 3) Would tracking data be kept and stored by the Hospital?
- 4) Would the tracking data be active inside employee break rooms and when the employee went to the restroom?
- 5) How accurate was the tracking data was and whether it could identify how long an employee was in a break room or restroom and where in that room they were located?

Their answers:

- 1) The badge contained a GPS-like location tracker, in order to adequately and efficiently locate the employee.
- 2) Yes, the location tracker would remain active at all times, regardless of whether or not the button had been activated.
- 3) Yes, tracking data would be kept and stored by the Hospital for use.
- 4) Yes, the tracking data would be active while employees were in the break room or restroom.
- 5) Yes, the tracking data would keep log of how long an employee was in the break room, restroom or anywhere else.

We also asked questions about the actual proven safety value of the badge. The Hospital presented data from a single small hospital in the Northeast that had seen a dramatic decline in safety instances after implementing the badges. It was obvious to us that it was an intentionally selected example. We asked if we could be provided data from all Hospitals that implemented this system and we received an evasive promise to get us more data, however less than we were asking for. We thanked the Hospital for its presentation but given our concerns over employee privacy and the lack of proven effectiveness of the system we weren't interested in pursuing it further. After the meeting

we also sent a formal written notice to the Hospital that, if they intended to push forward with the badges over our objection, we were demanding they submit the issue to bargaining with us (as required by the National Labor Relations Act).

By the summer of 2017 we had not heard anything more about the badge system, however we anticipated it being brought forward again during negotiations. True enough, the Hospital proposed to implement the system. This time, we were armed with counterarguments at the ready. We questioned whether the Hospital legally could track an employee in a restroom under existing privacy laws; we questioned the Hospital about whether it would use the tracking data to develop new performance standards for employees such as how often they should round between patient rooms; we questioned whether the Hospital would use the data to discipline employees for taking breaks for too long; we also questioned whether it would be used to monitor employees who were holding a meeting in the break room or gathering place to discuss their working conditions. We pointed to our safety proposals for a faster security response and a visitor identification and management system as being tangible proven safety improvements. The Hospital struggled to answer our questions and address our privacy concerns and after several rounds of exchanging proposals, they withdrew their proposal. We fought hard, asked tough questions and made our opposition clear; that is how we kept ourselves from having our every movement in the workplace tracked.

Our biggest push to the Hospital in this article was having a PROACTIVE approach to safety measures as opposed to a REACTIONARY measure. We saw the badges as continuing along the same lines of “reactionary” that we’ve always followed. With the increase in safety incidents occurring nationwide and in some cases, our own backyard, we insisted that we take a more “proactive” approach in regards to our safety by implementing a Visitor Management and Identification System. With your tenacious team at the helm and some added table slaps from a fiery redhead, we succeeded in winning language to Article 26, stating that a Visitor Management and Identification System will be implemented by the end of 2018!