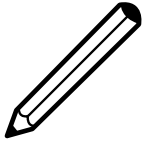




**SECRETS OF A  
SUCCESSFUL ORGANIZER**

**BEATING APATHY**



# EXERCISE: TRACK YOUR VICTORIES

Think about an example where you used collective action to solve a problem in your workplace.

**Issue:** What was the issue your co-workers were concerned about?

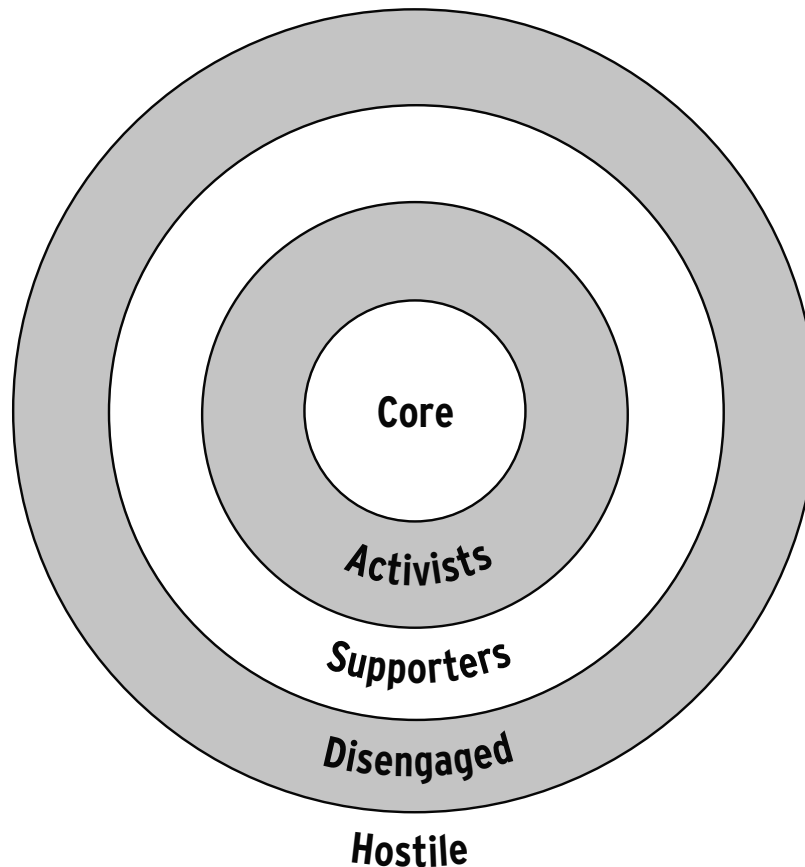
**Action(s):** What action(s) did you take? Who was involved?

**Result:** What happened? Was the problem solved?



# AIM FOR THE BULLSEYE

From the organizer's point of view, think of your fellow members distributed on a dartboard. Your goal is always to move people one step closer to the center of the circle.



- **Core group:** These people are always thinking about organizing and how to get others involved, even on their time off. They might be elected leaders or shop stewards, or not.
- **Activists:** These people can be counted on to help when an issue heats up. They will take responsibility to get the word out and will ask other people to take action, too.
- **Supporters:** These people will wear a button or sign a petition, but don't take responsibility for getting anyone else involved.
- **Disengaged:** These people don't see the union as a factor in their lives, so they don't participate.
- **Hostile:** There are also people outside the circle who aren't just uninvolved—they're hostile to the union. Don't waste your time arguing with the haters. Maybe one day something will open their eyes, but it'll probably be an experience that does it, not a debate.





# HOW THE BOSS KEEPS US DISORGANIZED

What holds people back from confronting the boss about workplace issues? Instead of blaming “apathy,” it’s important to find out the actual reasons. You have to diagnose the problem before you can write the prescription.

This chart shows four common obstacles the boss relies on to keep us from getting organized—and how you can help your co-workers get past them:

The boss relies on...	The organizer...	Co-workers find...
... <b>fear</b> of conflict and retaliation.	...taps into <b>righteous anger</b> about workplace injustices.	...the <b>courage</b> and determination to act.
... <b>hopelessness</b> , the feeling that things can’t change and we have no power.	...helps develop a <b>plan to win</b> , and shares examples of victories elsewhere.	... <b>hope</b> that change is possible and worth fighting for.
... <b>division</b> , pitting workers against each other.	...identifies <b>common ground</b> and builds relationships.	... <b>unity</b> to act together.
... <b>confusion</b> , passing around messages that will alarm or distract us.	... <b>interprets</b> and shares information, fitting it into a bigger picture.	... <b>clarity</b> to see through the boss’s plan.





# A GOOD ORGANIZING ISSUE

- **Is widely felt.** How common is the problem? How many workers face this situation? Many people must feel that this is a real problem and agree with the solution you're pursuing.
- **Is deeply felt.** Is this an issue that people feel strongly enough about to actually do something? It's not enough that many people agree, if none are really hot under the collar.
- **Is winnable.** It's hard to know for sure whether you *will* win, but it's possible to have a good idea whether you *can*. Your group should match your demand to the power you've already got.

To win, you'll need to make it harder for the decision-maker to keep saying no than to say yes. The more pressure you can bring to bear, the more issues will become winnable.

- **Builds the union and builds leaders.** Consider how this fight will build your capacity for future fights. Will the issue attract leaders or groups who haven't been very involved? Will it build solidarity between groups? Will it give you the chance to try an action that's one step beyond what you've done before? Will the solution lay the groundwork for future improvements?

Each fight should build off the last. It often happens that we don't win the concrete gain wanted, but we do come out smarter and better organized—which makes it more likely we can win next time.





# HOW TO BE A GOOD LISTENER

- **Avoid distractions.** Look the other person in the eye, and put your phone away.
- **Slow down.** Our brains process thoughts four times faster than spoken words. It's easy to skip ahead in a conversation, using your assumptions to fill in the gaps and plan your response. Resist this urge. Focus on what is actually being said.
- **Don't interrupt.** Take the time to hear the full story.
- **Keep an open mind.** Don't assume you already know what someone cares about. People will surprise you.
- **Don't fish.** Avoid leading questions like "Don't you agree that..."
- **Practice empathy.** Sometimes people need to let off steam. Don't discourage them. Your immediate task is to hear what they have to say, not to judge.
- **Show that you hear what they're saying.** React, ask follow-up questions, and repeat back what you understood. If you don't understand, ask.
- **Find common ground.** You don't have to agree with every point, but look for areas of agreement, and acknowledge where you differ.
- **Don't feel you need to sell something.** An organizer is not a salesperson. You're genuinely looking to learn the other person's point of view and create something new together.





# AHUY: DEVELOPING A RAP

The acronym "AHUY" is a helpful shorthand for what it takes to move someone to act: **Anger**, **Hope**, **Urgency**, and **You**.

**1. Opening:** Introduce yourself and ask a question to get the other person talking about a workplace issue. *How will you strike up the conversation?*

**2. Anger:** "There is an injustice. We have to fix this." Tap into righteous anger at the injustice and create determination to do something about it. *What questions will you ask to learn how the issue affects this person?*

**3. Hope:** "Change is possible. We can fix this. Here's our plan." Inspire hope by conveying a clear, credible, worthwhile plan and sharing why you feel hopeful. *What are the steps we need to take together?*

**4. Urgency:** "Now is the time. We can't wait any longer." *What will happen if you don't act?*

**5. You:** "You can make a difference. Your participation matters." *Why is this person's support critical? What concrete action are you asking them to take?*



# ANSWERING TOUGH QUESTIONS

On paper and in person, keep the focus on your message. When people come to you riled up over the spin from management, a good way to respond is “Affirm, Answer, Redirect.”

## Affirm:

Let them know you’re listening, you understand, and their feelings are valid. Your co-workers may be scared or upset by what they’ve heard. Don’t get mad at them. It’s management’s fault, not theirs.

*I hear you, I don't want our boss to retaliate against me either!*

## Answer:

Give a truthful, concise answer to the question. Don’t be evasive. If there’s a grain of truth to management’s message, say that up front.

*Yes, its true our boss might be mad when we show and tell him he's treating employees unfairly. That's why we're all going to his office together with a petition signed by everyone in the building, so he wont be able to single anyone out.*

If you don’t know the answer, don’t guess. Tell them you’ll find out and get back to them. Make sure you follow through, to maintain trust.

## Redirect:

But once you’ve answered the question, don’t get bogged down in too much back-and-forth about it. Instead, be ready with a question that brings the conversation back to your message and points out what management is trying to distract them from.

*You told me earlier that management is always picking favorites and punishing some of us without rhyme or reason. If we don't stand up to them, when will it end?*

Remind your co-workers of the issues that inspired them to organize in the first place. Ask whether that’s changed. Steer the conversation back to the plan to win, and the next steps.







# INOCULATE YOUR CO-WORKERS AGAINST THE BOSS'S TACTICS

Whenever you take action at work, you can expect management to fight back. Inoculation is the part of the organizing conversation where you prepare your co-workers so they're not caught off guard.

## 1. Ask questions about how the boss will react.

*Do you think the boss wants us to organize? Why not?*

*When he finds out we are organizing, how do you think he'll react?*

*What do you think he might do to try and stop us?*

## 2. Discuss *how* the boss will fight.

- If you're preparing for a strike, expect the boss to hire extra security and threaten you with permanent replacements.
- If you're organizing your workplace for the first time, expect captive-audience meetings about union fines and fees. The week before the vote, your boss will beg you to give him a second chance.
- If you're planning a union sticker day, expect to be told you're not allowed to wear the sticker. In fact, any time you confront the boss with a new tactic for the first time, you will hear, "You can't do that."

## 3. Inform your co-workers what their rights are, and how to react when they're denied.

*Federal labor law protects our right to wear a union button at work.*

*If a manager tells you to take off the button, write down the date, the time, and who witnessed it, and let your steward know.*



#### 4. Discuss *why* the boss will fight.

This step is most important. Help your co-workers understand that every workplace fight is about power.

*We're not simply building power—we're taking power from our manager.*

*Any time we challenge the boss's control, we can expect resistance.*

#### 5. Recommit.

Ask your co-worker whether any of this has changed her mind:

*Are you still serious about solving this issue by coming with us to deliver the petition?*

#### If yes:

*Great! We're meeting in the cafeteria on Thursday at 1:45.*

Your co-worker has strengthened her resolve by making this commitment out loud to you—and to herself. Later you can remind her of this conversation.

#### If no:

*What's holding you back?*

It's OK if your co-worker expresses some doubts now. She's getting real with you. This gives you the chance to ask more about her concerns, address her fears, and remind her about the issue she cares about. If she doesn't take action, is that problem going to solve itself?

