

# REBUILDING POWER IN OPEN-SHOP AMERICA





Labors Local 79

## HOW WE GOT HERE

**Unions are vulnerable to opting out, as members wonder what's in it for them. The good news is that members will stick with a union that's visible and vocal in the workplace.**

It's official: the Supreme Court ruling in *Janus v. AFSCME* means that all 7 million unionized city, county, school district, state, and federal public employees now work in a "right-to-work" environment.

They join 2 million private sector

union members in right-to-work states. It's fair to say we're now living in Open-Shop America.

The consequences will hit us all—driving down standards, draining union coffers, diminishing labor's political and community power, and painting a

big red target on the remaining 5 million private sector union members in states that still allow an agency shop.

### THE THREAT IS REAL

The *Janus* decision is the latest hit in a decades-long onslaught by employers and the 1%, bent on weakening workers' power and drawing wealth upward. This isn't the first blow, or the second.

Union leaders are right to be scared they will lose members. They see the sad state of our unions, with dwindling numbers, few victories, and many members wondering what's in it for them. They see the sad state of members' finances and know that many will quit if they get the chance.

The looming threat of *Janus* has forced many unions to try to reconnect with their own members—but often the approach is too shallow.

## WHAT THE *JANUS* DECISION DOES

Here's a quick refresher on what the ruling means:

Till now, while public sector union contracts couldn't legally require employees to belong to the union that represents them, they could require them to pay a fee, somewhat less than full dues, instead of joining.

These "fee-payer" non-members saved a bit of money and lost the chance to have anything to say about the union. The union was still bound by law to represent them in bargaining, or if they got into trouble.

After *Janus*, non-members will no longer have to pay these "agency fees." That ups the incentive to quit the union. It's predicted to decimate union treasuries, not to mention solidarity.

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Labor Notes is indexed in the Alternative Press Index.  
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tion. Credit is appreciated. ISSN 0275-4452.

What's needed is not a better sales pitch. It's getting back to basics. Prospective members will be won by deeds. Why would you join an organization unless you're convinced it has power?

*A union's power rests on how many workers will act together and how strong an action they will take.*

Even dues-payers represent only potential power. The more important numbers are how many workers have caught the spirit of solidarity, how many will stand together on the job, how many are training their co-workers to see through the boss's agenda, how many will go to the mat for the union because it's *their* organization.

It becomes their organization when "the union" doesn't mean "those people down at the hall" but "you and me acting together every day on the job to defend our rights." It's people collectively keeping supervisors in line, enforcing their right to take breaks, finding ways around over-monitoring, making sure the new hires are welcomed and schooled.

If union members are tackling these questions, people will flock to join—open shop or not.

### IT'S SIMPLE, BUT NOT EASY

What's required to make unions real to their members is no mystery. That doesn't make it easy. Getting back to basics requires breaking old habits, bulking up unused muscles, and a lot of listening. But we'd be fooling ourselves to say there's an easier path.

This pamphlet starts off with a review of where we stand now and a warning of what's coming down the pike. Anti-union maniacs won't stop at the open shop.

Next are exercises to assess the threat level for your own union. Try the "open-shop stress test" to start a conversation in your next steward meeting. Take the quiz.

Then we get down to brass tacks. Here's our prescription for a union that can withstand the worst the employers will dish out. (See box.)

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

There's one more reason not to give up hope in open-shop America: we can't afford to.

Think about the people in your union who have stuck with it. It's usually because the union means something deeper to them than a single issue or a cold cost-benefit analysis. They feel other workers' fights as their own. They feel the struggle in their bones, connected to their deepest-held values. Isn't that true for you?

The world needs legions more people like that. Struggle in the workplace

transforms each of us in a way the bosses can never undo. It teaches us that we have power—and how to use it.

Look at the mess we're in—most jobs suck, the government's being unraveled, part-time is the new normal, bad guys are laughing their way to the bank, and our planet is on the verge of eco-catastrophe. Turning it all around will require millions of righteous people to put their shoulders to the wheel.

Your workplace, and every workplace, is the training ground to build a better world.

## OUR PRESCRIPTION

- 1. BE DEMOCRATIC.** We need to exponentially expand the number of us who have the skills, confidence, and authority to be the union. Leaders should welcome, not begrudge, rank-and-file initiative, and do everything they can to help it happen.
- 2. FIGHT THE BOSS.** People will join a union that they see winning fights that matter. Getting into the right fights, and winning some of them, is just as important to your union's post-*Janus* survival as asking people to sign a membership card.
- 3. TURN UP THE HEAT.** To win big fights takes more than action and passion—it takes a plan, and it takes time. A series of gradually increasing actions, such as a contract campaign, aims maximum pressure at your target... and builds members' confidence and unity along the way.
- 4. ASK PEOPLE TO JOIN.** They won't join if you don't ask. Asking them to become members should become a natural step in your everyday organizing—not a separate project that sucks energy from other campaigns.
- 5. COUNT NOSES.** Create maps and charts to track participation—and know how to recognize a natural leader.
- 6. DON'T GO IT ALONE.** Shrinking unions can't afford to isolate ourselves. But why would we want to? Our interests are the public interests.

You'll read more about each of these six steps in the pages that follow.



# BY THE NUMBERS

**136 MILLION** workers in the U.S.

**14 MILLION** union members

**5 MILLION** private sector union members in agency-shop states



Jim West, jimwestphoto.com

## THE RACIST HISTORY OF RIGHT-TO-WORK

“Right-to-work” laws originated in the 1940s as a strategy to maintain Jim Crow in the South.

The biggest pusher of the idea was Vance Muse—a well-heeled corporate lobbyist, white supremacist, anti-Semite, and professional anti-unionist from Texas who saw the New Deal as a Communist Jewish conspiracy.

According to Muse and his followers, the CIO was sending labor organizers to the rural South to inflame a contented but gullible African-American population and to force white workers to join unions together with Black workers and call them “brother.”

To stop this menace, his group teamed up with employers to push the first right-to-work laws, enacted in 1944 in Arkansas and Florida. (Californians voted no.) Many other states followed.

“In our glorious fight for civil rights, we must guard against being fooled by false slogans such as ‘right to work,’” Martin Luther

King, Jr. said in 1964. “It is a law to rob us of our civil rights and job rights.

“Its purpose is to destroy labor unions and the freedom of collective bargaining by which unions have improved wages and working conditions for everyone...Wherever these laws have been passed, wages are lower, job opportunities are fewer, and there are no civil rights.”

That’s still true. Union organizing has proven the most effective measure out there for lifting wages in general, and for reducing racial inequality. The upsurge of public sector unionism in the 1960s and ‘70s was a particular boon to Black communities, since they were strongly represented in public employment—and Black workers led many of those union fights, often inspired by the civil rights movement.

Today workers of color remain strongly represented in the public sector, and the attacks on public sector unions still have a racist character.

## KNOW YOUR LINGO

In an **open shop**, workers have the option to receive the benefits of a union without being a member or paying a fee. In other words, you can choose to be a **free rider**.

The opposite case is an **agency shop**, where the collective bargaining agreement includes a **union security clause**. That means everyone in the bargaining unit must either be a member and pay dues, or pay a **fair-share fee** (also known as an **agency fee**) to cover the cost of union representation.

So-called **right-to-work laws** make it unlawful for a collective bargaining agreement to contain a union security clause—that is, they outlaw the agency shop. These laws usually affect both the public and private sectors.

The Supreme Court’s 2018 **Janus decision** invalidated the union security clause in all public sector contracts nationwide. It also invalidated any state laws requiring public sector workers to pay agency fees, such as in New York. The effect was immediate; there is no grace period.

Sometimes a state right-to-work law comes as part of a **larger legislative package** attacking public sector unions. For example, Wisconsin’s Act 10 limited public sector unions to bargaining over only one topic, wages, capped at inflation. It also banned dues deductions and mandated annual member votes to recertify the union.

Individual states do not have the authority to make most of these changes in the private sector. Congress could do it.



# THE ANTI-UNION GAME PLAN

**The open-shop offensive is part of a multipronged plan to ‘defund and defang’ the labor movement. Opt-out canvassers may show up on your doorstep next.**

Don't get the idea that Mark Janus, a child support specialist in Illinois, took his case all the way to the Supreme Court by himself. His lawyers are paid for by the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation and the Liberty Justice Center, the legal arm of a right-wing think tank.

These groups get their money from a whole slew of foundations dedicated to bankrolling anti-worker lawsuits and political candidates. One you might have heard of is the Walton Family Foundation (that's the Walmart family).

There's no doubt that the employer class has its act together. Since the Business Roundtable formed in 1972, the think tanks and lobbying groups advancing the employer agenda have

proliferated. These people know how to get their talking points out in the press and their bills introduced in statehouses across the country. It helps that they have so much money to throw around.

Here's one name to learn: the State Policy Network (SPN). It's a web of 66 corporate-financed "free-market think tanks" spread over all 50 states, financed by corporations and billionaires. And it has a nationally coordinated plan to "defund and defang" the labor movement.

This anti-union plan includes four primary tactics, each designed to whittle away union support. They're deadliest together.

Here's what's coming down the pike:

## 1. RIGHT TO WORK

You know this one. They've got most of the low-hanging fruit at this point—the whole public sector, plus the private sector in 27 states (voters in Missouri will decide this fall whether to make it the 28th).

It's unlikely that SPN affiliates and allies will be able to flip the most union-dense states, such as California or New York, anytime soon.

So the union busters are pursuing local right-to-work ordinances, aimed at paving the way for statewide laws. These have been passed by counties in Kentucky (before it went right-to-work statewide), New Mexico, and Illinois. More are likely to follow.

President Trump has pledged to sign

national right-to-work legislation if it gets to his desk.

**How unions are coping:** That's what the rest of this pamphlet is about.

## 2. OPT-OUT CAMPAIGNS

Public employees in some states, such as Washington, have been subjected to a systematic public relations campaign that uses traditional and social media, home mailings, robocalls, and door-to-door canvassing to push them to resign their union membership.

According to internal SPN documents, "well-run opt-out campaigns can cause public-sector unions to experience 5-20 percent declines in membership."

Opt-out campaigns hinge on SPN affiliates' getting lists of personal contact information of government employees. These lists are obtained through open records laws, which vary by state.

Different variables determine whether or not the government will hand over the requested information. Sometimes it comes down to a choice by a particular government employee.

### How unions are coping:

In a few blue states, unions are getting laws passed to exclude government-employee contact information from open records requests.

New Jersey did this, and also limited the period when a government employee can drop union membership to a 10-day period beginning on the anniversary of hire. In many states, the opt-out window is the same for all workers, which makes it easier for SPN affiliates to time an opt-out blitz.

Unions have launched campaigns to inoculate members, alerting them to who the SPN affiliates are, who finances them, and what their goals are. SEIU 32BJ in Pennsylvania has been handing out "Union Household—No Soliciting" window clings for members to post on front doors or windows.

Stewards should make members aware that opt-out campaigns are part of a well-funded pro-business effort to weaken their union and cut their pay.

## 3. RECERTIFICATION CAMPAIGNS

Wisconsin, Iowa, and Florida have all passed laws that force unions to expend time and resources to win representation votes by the workforce at regular intervals. If the union loses, it is decertified.

SPN affiliates call this legislation "Worker Voting Rights." Expect more states to follow.

### How unions are coping:

Wisconsin's 2011 Act 10 was the first law in the country to mandate annual union recertification votes. Many unions folded up shop. But some, such as the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association, use recertification as a union-building exercise.

"We have leadership infrastructure in 137 buildings that can run the vote themselves," said Vice President Amy Mizialko. "We get better at it each year."

After a similar law passed in Iowa, 99 percent of teacher union locals recertified. Teachers created vote trackers in a shared Google Spreadsheet.

"We were constantly communicating with our team and updating the tracker in real time," said history teacher Nick Convington. "It was a great way to bring reps from all 16 buildings together to hit our goal."

## 4. ENDING EXCLUSIVE REPRESENTATION

One more experimental tactic is what SPN calls "Workers' Choice."

This legislation goes a step further than right to work. Workers who opt out of the union could also opt out of the collective bargaining agreement and negotiate their own individual employment contracts with the boss. SPN affiliates tout this as a form of "members-only unionism."

A similar concept appeals to some unionists reluctant to represent freeloaders. New York's public sector unions recently got a law passed absolving

them of the obligation to represent non-members in grievance hearings, though these workers are still covered under the union contract. Florida has a similar law.

But in SPN's version, the purpose is to fragment unions, who will represent an ever smaller subset of workers while the employer dangles incentives to drop out. For example, an employer might initially offer non-union workers a "merit pay" bonus on top of what union members get. But don't expect perks to last once the union is a shell.

### How unions are coping:

To date, no state has passed SPN's model legislation, though it has been introduced in Michigan and Missouri. A variation affecting only teachers was adopted in Tennessee in 2011. Now teachers there have to negotiate a contract jointly among three parties: the employer, the union, and a boss-friendly rival organization.

## MORE DETAILS

Check out the current issue of *In These Times* for a detailed look by Labor Notes' Chris Brooks at the billionaires' 50-state anti-union battle plan



Daniel Mendez Moore

# THE OPEN-SHOP STRESS TEST

Try this exercise in your next union meeting to start a conversation about how members see the union now.

## HOW DO MEMBERS SEE THE UNION?

- 1 Print out these four graphics. (You can download them from our website.) Tape them up in the four corners of the room.

*"Let's look at our own union and see what are our strengths and weaknesses."*

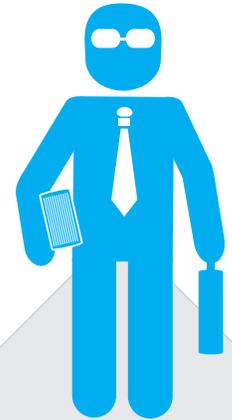
- 2 Ask participants to choose a corner.

*"Get up and move to the corner of the room that you think best represents how the average member sees our union. Not the executive board member, not the steward, but the less-than-active member."*

- 3 Ask to hear some examples from each corner.

*"Why did you choose this corner? How do members experience the union? Why?"*

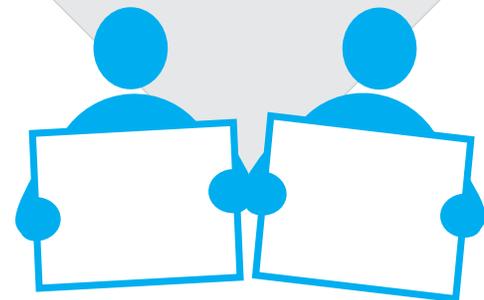
Write the answers on a flipchart.



**REPRESENTATIVE**



**DUES COLLECTOR**



**MOVEMENT**

# WHAT EXPERIENCES DO MEMBERS HAVE WITH THE UNION?

4

Sum up the types of experiences you heard, and organize them into three categories: Negative, Transactional, and Inspirational.

**1. Negative:** The union is the organization that takes money out of my check.  
*"When I called about a grievance, the union never called me back."*

**2. Transactional:** The union is the organization that negotiates our contract and health insurance. We pay dues and sometimes we get back our money's worth.  
*"The union bargained a raise for us."*

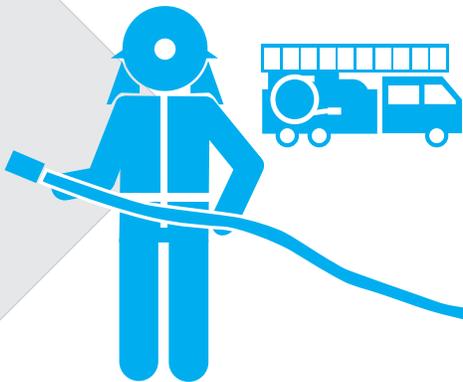
**3. Inspirational:** The union is our organization. My participation matters, and our power is collective—we all have each other's backs.  
*"We went on strike to defend our pension. We won by sticking together."*

5

Sum up what was said. One example:

*"From the feedback in the room, it's clear that many members recognize the good work unions do. But they still often view the union in transactional terms, where they pay dues and get something in exchange."*

# HOW CAN WE START TO TRANSFORM OUR UNION?



**FIREFIGHTER**

6

Ask:

*"Of the three types of experiences, what keeps members involved for the long haul?"*

And:

*"What are some steps we could take to shift toward creating more 'inspirational' examples?"*

(There are ideas throughout the rest of this issue.)

**The fundamental task is to help fellow members see the union as our organization, where our power comes from standing up together. How do we do that? The union has to have a visible presence in the workplace, and has to fight for things members care about.**



# QUIZ: ASSESS YOUR DANGER LEVEL

Take this self-assessment to get a snapshot of how your union's current practices stack up and where you're vulnerable.

Like the stress test, this quiz works best as a conversation-starter. Hand it out in a meeting or steward training. Once everyone has filled it out and tallied up the scores, open the floor for discussion. The idea is to take an honest look at your union's strengths and weaknesses and identify some practical ways to improve. Answer each question honestly, selecting not the answer you *wish* were true but the one that's closest to reality. Rank-and-file members can answer each question as it applies to their own worksites. Union leaders might want to consider an average worksite, or repeat the quiz to evaluate different worksites separately. Then score yourself with the key.

**1. What usually happens when a member approaches a steward with an individual grievance?**

- A. No grievance is filed.
- B. A grievance is filed. The member waits six months to find out whether he won or lost.
- C. A grievance is filed. The member is given regular updates on how the grievance is going.
- D. A grievance is filed. The member works with the steward and attends grievance meetings.

Points: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. What happens when a workplace problem arises that affects many people?**

- A. Members are too afraid or unaware of their rights to file a grievance, much less take collective action.
- B. Members call for help, but the union representative doesn't act.

- C. Members call for help, and the union representative files a grievance.
- D. Members call for help, and the union representative works with them to make an action plan.

Points: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. What is the average member's impression of a union meeting?**

- A. "I have no idea when meetings happen or what they're about. I don't know anyone who goes."
- B. "Meetings are pointless. They read the minutes from last time, and the same five people talk."
- C. "Meetings are good for stewards to attend, but not for regular members like me."
- D. "I've attended useful union meetings on topics I cared about, or to help decide important questions."

Points: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. New hires first learn about the union...**

- A. When they notice money being taken out of their paycheck, or the employer badmouths the union.
- B. When they receive a newsletter in the mail.
- C. When a steward eventually meets with them.
- D. During orientation, when the union meets with all new hires right away.

Points: \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Union stewards are...**

- A. What's a steward?
- B. A small number of people who've had the role forever and are seen as ineffective.
- C. Competent but distant from most members. They can get the job done if you can get their attention.
- D. Numerous and active. They are always making the rounds and seeking out co-workers' concerns.

Points: \_\_\_\_\_

# ADD UP YOUR SCORE

**Key:** A = 0 points, B = 1 point, C = 2 points, D = 3 points  
Total: \_\_\_\_\_

## 0 to 10 points: Red Zone

You're at risk for a big drop in membership. If your union is going to survive, it's urgent to clean house. Look back at each question where you marked A or B; those are immediate areas to improve your union's practices. (D is the goal.) Which one can you start with?

## 11 to 20 points: Yellow Zone

Take heart—you're not starting from scratch, but you do have room for improvement. If you marked any As or Bs, those are danger areas to focus on first. If not, look at the Cs. For each one you can turn into a D, you will fortify your union against a possible employer attack.

## 21 points or more: Green Zone

You're doing well! Still, management never lets up—organizing is an ongoing project. Keep lifting up a vision that inspires members to fight. Anywhere you marked an answer other than D, that's an area where your union could improve.

### 6. When it's time to bargain...

- A. Proposals and progress are kept secret.
- B. We get regular updates on progress, but we play no role.
- C. A few members participate in some contract activities, such as an issue survey.
- D. Members help make the strategy and many participate in a series of actions building to a peak, such as a strike deadline.

Points: \_\_\_\_\_

### 7. After the union's most recent contract was settled, how did the average member feel about it?

- A. "We lost a lot. The employer walked all over us. Our union is useless."
- B. "It's a mixed bag. I wish our union fought harder for us."
- C. "We came out pretty well. I trust our bargainers did their best."
- D. "We got the best contract we could, because we made a smart plan and fought for it together."

Points: \_\_\_\_\_

### 8. If a new steward called the union office for a member list, what would be the response?

- A. "What list?"
- B. "We have a seniority list provided by the company."
- C. "We keep track of who is a member and who is not."
- D. "We keep track of membership status, contact information, and participation in union events."

Points: \_\_\_\_\_

### 9. A member tells a steward that she wants to get more involved. What's the most likely response?

- A. She is ignored or told that there's nothing going on.
- B. She is told to come to the next union meeting in three months.
- C. She is invited to a union social event next Thursday.
- D. She is asked to do something important, like hand out a bargaining survey.

Points: \_\_\_\_\_

### 10. What is the most common pitch union activists make about why everyone should be a union member?

- A. There is no pitch.
- B. "You can get a discount on movie tickets, and the union is your insurance on the job. It costs less than a cup of coffee."
- C. "The union is the reason you have this pay scale and benefits. It's unfair not to pay your share."
- D. "Management knows whether the union is strong or not. We need you to join so we can show our unity and act together."

Points: \_\_\_\_\_

## JUMP-START A WEAK UNION FROM BELOW

What if you're caught in a union that's not doing a good job?

What if your union is mostly invisible, or only reaches out when there's a crisis, or doesn't fight for good contracts, or is too cozy with the boss? Perhaps when some rep comes around asking you to recommit, you and your co-workers are saying, "Really? Why should we?"

You might even be tempted to stop paying dues yourself, as a form of protest. Don't do it. In your heart you know workers need a union to have any shot at building power on the job.

But you also know your union needs dramatic changes. Here are some ideas on how to start making them:

- **Spend time with co-workers you trust and whose values you share.** Ask them: What kind of union would you like to be a part of? Be very practical—for example: "Would you like to hear more from officers about what's happening in bargaining?" Offer examples, but mostly listen.

- **Brainstorm goals collectively, and reach out to others who might be receptive.** Use that to build a network. You might even develop a statement that expresses your "Vision for the Union."

- **Take action.** The best way to show the value of what a union can be is by getting members involved in solving problems in their own worksites. You don't need to wait for permission—just start talking among yourselves about what the problem is, what solutions you'd propose, and how you're going to work together to bring it to the boss.

- **Reflect on your organizing as a group, and brainstorm next steps.** Is it time to run a slate for stewards or for higher offices?

Warning: This bottom-up approach to problem-solving on the job might fly in the face of your union's way of doing things. Some of your co-workers and officers might be dismissive of your efforts, or even hostile. Stay steady, be patient, and keep going.

# BE DEMOCRATIC

## THE ESSENTIALS

- Be transparent with information and decision-making
- Encourage members to take initiative, and support those who do
- Ask people personally to do specific things
- Make meetings interesting and welcoming—but think beyond meetings
- Make sure no group is excluded from union activities

## Organizing in its best sense—helping people work together to achieve what they want—is at the root of union democracy.

Anti-union politicians claim that right-to-work laws free workers from paying a third party. Union activists rightly counter that there is no third party, emphasizing to co-workers that “you are the union.”

But just saying it doesn’t make it so. The uncomfortable reality is that many unions don’t afford rank-and-file members much power over their own organizations. Too few get the chance to help make the union’s plans; instead they are simply asked “Are you in, or are you out?”

This democracy deficit has consequences. When members are treated as an ATM for predetermined priorities, it’s no wonder they feel disconnected—and may opt out.

On the other hand, workers who know that the union is theirs will be glad to stick around and invite others to be part of it. That’s why building a more democratic organization is the best avenue to strengthen the union.

### OFFER A WAY IN

Local officers are often frustrated with low attendance at union meetings and a lack of volunteers for committees—and then they get an earful of complaints about how the union is run. “We’re not keeping anybody out,” these officers say. “We’d love to have more involvement, but all we can do is to open the door.”

It’s true that anyone trying to promote member involvement is up against the “let the experts do it” reflex that we learn in community life as well as in unions. Being a passive member has definite attractions for workers with plenty of other demands on their time, from kids to church to overtime.

But often low participation is because the union seems to have no power, or participation seems to make no difference. What’s the point?

When people see results from involvement, more will want to get involved.

### ENCOURAGE INITIATIVE

The heart of union democracy is that members feel they have the ability, smarts, and permission to take action.

One of the Arizona teachers we met this spring decided to join the union only after she had organized a sickout at her school. To grow, unions need to support bottom-up initiatives when they appear—and foster many more of them.

Officers, staff, and stewards should be careful not to make the union an exclusive club. If members are hot about an issue, it’s the union’s job to help them think through a plan.

When your fellow member starts circulating a homemade leaflet, pulls



Gage Skidmore for Arizona Education Association

## HOW TO GET A MEMBER INVOLVED

- **ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATION.** If you want people to do something, ask them personally! A general call for volunteers in a newsletter or on social media will rarely do the trick. People appreciate being asked, and in a one-on-one conversation you can find out what they want to do.
- **ASK ABOUT THEIR INTERESTS.** What would this person like to see changed at work? Who else might want to work on the same problem?
- **START WHERE THE MEMBER IS AT.** Someone getting involved for the first time will gain confidence by taking on tasks that come easily. Ask what they think they can do. Have some suggestions ready, but be flexible. Can they talk to the co-worker they know best? If this person likes to draw cartoons, can you incorporate that into a union campaign?
- **GIVE POSITIVE FEEDBACK.** When a newly active member does something to help build the union, no matter how minor, make them feel good about it. Let them know that they’re helping build a powerful organization that can fight for all of us. Ask what they think is their next step.
- **KEEP IN TOUCH REGULARLY.** Share progress on union campaigns. Solicit ideas. Ask them to do another task—maybe something slightly bigger than before. You are helping each co-worker to climb a ladder, one rung at a time.

# MAKE MEETINGS WELCOMING AND USEFUL

- **Publicize the topic in advance.** It should be a hot issue, not “old business.”
- **Choose a time that makes it easier to attend.** Ask for ideas to encourage turnout. Before or after a shift? Try mixing it up—some weekend mornings, some weekday evenings.
- **Choose an appealing location.** Would a restaurant be relaxing, or too noisy? Someplace near the workplace? Does someone belong to a faith community or social organization that will welcome a union meeting? Organize carpools.
- **Offer language interpretation.** Translate printed materials too.
- **Be family-friendly.** Arrange childcare. Invite spouses and let them speak.
- **Welcome newcomers.** Designate a greeter. Ask current active members to sit with first-timers.
- **Run the meeting democratically.** Many people find Robert’s Rules clunky and complex. Instead, consider simple rules like these:
- **Make meetings participatory.** Put lengthy reports in writing so they don’t use up too much time. Break into small groups sometimes, so everyone gets to speak. Role-play. Agree on action plans and next steps.
- **Review the agenda when the meeting starts.** Let people add items. Put a time on each point.
- **Timekeeper.** Appoint someone to keep the meeting on track.
- **Firsts before seconds.** Everyone who wants to speak gets a chance before anyone speaks a second time.
- **Stack.** When many people want to speak, get a show of hands and write down a list.
- **Next steps.** Members and leaders should take assignments, and these should be summed up at the end.
- **Have social time afterwards.** Keep the meeting short so people don’t drift out before then.
- **Hold workplace meetings too.** A half-dozen people huddling in the breakroom can accomplish a lot. Some people will never come to an after-hours meeting, but they could still be powerful activists on the job.

together an impromptu meeting in the breakroom, or starts a workplace social media page, that’s a good thing—even if it isn’t done exactly the way you would do it.

Feel free to debate strategy with your fellow workers. But rein in any impulse to be territorial. Welcome the Johnny-come-latelys to your side.

After all, to build a movement that gets more done, we need more of us who feel empowered to act in the name of the union. It can be hard for people to put themselves forward—and even harder if union leaders are going to squelch it and say, “We know best.”

Instead, the union should offer trainings like “how to march on the boss,” ideally at the workplace. When a grievance or action campaign is won, stewards and the union newsletter should trumpet the details and ask who else has the same problem.

## THINK BEYOND MEETINGS

Has a co-worker—let’s call him Bob—ever asked you, “What happened at the union meeting yesterday?” Did you feel like saying, “You shoulda been there?”

But what does Bob’s question say about him? That he’s more interested than all the members who have never asked. Instead of getting mad at Bob for what he doesn’t do, be glad he’s interested—and design a small request that he is ready for.

You can make a deal with Bob: if you find him every month and give him a short report from the union meeting, he will agree to pass along the most

important points to the co-workers he has lunch with.

To bring the union meeting to even more workers, you’ll need to identify and recruit more volunteers like Bob. When you do that, you will have a communication structure: a member-to-member network that can share information about far more than the monthly meeting.

Make the workplace, not the union hall, the main place where union issues are discussed. Often the most honest and imaginative discussions about union strategies happen informally at work—on breaks or at lunch, or waiting for the copier.

## INCLUDE EVERYONE

If the union hall seems to have the culture of a white male comfort zone, suspicion will run high among women, Black workers, Latinos, and other left-out groups. Same goes for a union that ignores the concerns of its lower-tier members, a teachers union that ignores paraprofessionals, and so on.

In the same vein, every member should be able to participate—for instance, read the contract, attend meetings, and vote in elections—regardless of whether he has a disability or what language she speaks.

It might take organizing to push your local to add a wheelchair ramp, translate materials, or provide interpreters, but it’s worth the effort. According to Belinda Thielen of the Food and Commercial Workers, after the meatpacking division began providing Spanish

interpretation, “workers came up and said, ‘I’ve been coming to these meetings for years, and this is the first time that I understood what was being said and what was going on.’”

A crisis like the *Janus* decision can inspire short-term thinking. Remember your long-term vision, of a union that’s strong because everyone is involved.

## TURNING THE BUS

How did Nashville bus drivers raise their union membership from 60 to 80 percent in a year? It took a turnover in leadership. Members booted out officers who wouldn’t even let them see the tentative agreement before they voted on it.

Bus driver Patrick Green ran for union president on a very different platform. He and his slate pledged transparency and member participation in negotiations. They organized town hall-style debates at a local restaurant, where members showed up with their families to eat breakfast and lob questions.

Green and his slate won the election and in the next round of bargaining, achieved strong gains—starting wages went up by \$3 an hour—in a contract that all members got the chance to read before casting their votes.

Officers and stewards use every opportunity to talk with drivers and hear their concerns, including at new-hire orientation, during training, and when they meet to bid for jobs. The membership increase followed from there.

# FIGHT THE BOSS

**You're not asking co-workers to join a social club or an insurance plan. You're asking them to join a fight over issues that matter.**

Why do any of us pay union dues? It's because we feel our union fights for us, and we consider it important to our lives. So one key to surviving an open shop is to do the essentials that unionists should be doing anyway: Win grievances. Fight for a good contract. Report your victories and struggles.

Consider the Jeffboat shipyard. In the years after Indiana went right-to-work, only one person dropped out of the union—in a workforce of 700.

Teamsters Local 89 held onto members' loyalty because it had a deep bench of stewards who actively sought out

workplace problems to fix. On a dangerous job where fatal accidents were on everyone's mind, they made safety a top union issue.

Because the local went on strike when necessary, members had good wages and health insurance—the value of the union contract was self-evident. And stewards were systematic about always asking new hires to join.

## INVOLVE WORKERS IN GRIEVANCES

Grievances are one common way that members see the union fighting—or

## THE ESSENTIALS

- Involve workers in grievances—but go beyond grievances
- Always be on the lookout for good organizing issues
- Confront workplace problems with collective action
- Get creative in your tactics
- Help members discover what it feels like to fight and win

## BASICS OF A PLAN

### 1. WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU WANT?

Identify the solution you're after, and make sure it's one that's winnable.

### 2. WHO HAS THE POWER TO FIX THE PROBLEM?

It's not enough to say "management." Figure out which person in management could say yes to your solution.

### 3. WHICH TACTICS CAN WORK?

Aim your actions to build the pressure on the decision-maker you've identified. Consider how much pressure it will take to win, and where your leverage is.



don't. So when a worker brings up a problem, it's a mistake to say, "Now leave it to me." Instead, the steward should work through every grievance with the affected worker as a teammate.

Postal unions across the country are open-shop. Yet the Boston Postal Workers (APWU) local hovers around 94 percent membership. President Scott Hoffman said this high rate has a lot to do with involving members in every union activity, including grievances.

Win or lose, you want the person to understand the grievance process. "Sometimes you have to explain, 'No, that's not going to work,' and why," he said. "Members don't demand a victory every time. They just want to see that you made the effort."

With every grievance, ask, "Who else is affected?" Look for opportunities to make it a group grievance and have members submit their own statements.

### ACT AS A GROUP

Much more effective than a grievance, though, is shop floor action. People who would never act alone will find courage to act together with others. The more people participate in solving a problem, the more they will develop the skills and confidence to take on other problems, and the union's power will grow.

When three West Virginia grocery workers got unfair write-ups from the same manager, they asked shop steward Auriana Fabricatore what she could do. She turned the tables back on them.

"I think the three of you can do something about it right now," she said, "if you're willing to go upstairs and confront the manager?"

Together they marched into the office and gave the wide-eyed boss a piece of

their minds. He tore up their write-ups on the spot.

The experience was exhilarating, and it warmed up three formerly distant members into union activists. A few weeks later, one came back to the steward with a different problem. But this time, the question was "What can I do about this?"

"A subtle change, but huge," Fabricatore said.

Your goal is to develop a union culture in the workplace—not just at the union hall—where people expect to participate in defending the contract and defending each other.

### GET CREATIVE

Besides being fun and effective, these activities give workers the chance to learn by doing. "In essence they see what the union really is," says Steelworkers Local 675 Secretary-Treasurer Dave Campbell. "The union is them, and it's their concerted, collective activity on the shop floor which gives the union power."

That's how his union maintains 90 percent membership in California oil refineries, where workers get a window of opportunity to drop their membership every time the contract expires.

Members have developed the habit of acting for themselves as a union. Leaders encourage them to bolster a grievance with workplace action.

For instance, a supervisor had forbidden people to wear baseball caps, sunglasses, or Hawaiian shirts in the control room. Workers collected signatures on a petition and presented it to the other supervisor, who crumpled it up and threw it away.

"We organized all four crews to show

## CHOOSE YOUR TACTICS

- Does the action relate to your issue?
- Will it increase the pressure on the decision-maker?
- Is it simple?
- Is it visible?
- Is it timed for effect?
- Is it new and different—or tried and true?
- Are enough people ready to do it?
- How will others react? Will it unify people?
- How will management react? Could it backfire?
- Does it violate the law or the contract? If so, are you prepared for the consequences?
- Will it be fun?

up for work with Hawaiian shirts, sunglasses, and ball caps," Campbell says, "and the union bought the roast pig for a Hawaiian luau lunch. When the superintendent saw all the workers united, he of course asked what the hell was going on—and the supervisor who had caused all this was reassigned."

### LEARN BY DOING

Here's one more story from letter carriers in Portland, Oregon, who manage to keep their membership numbers well above 90 percent.

One time last year, carriers were told they must deliver three "full coverages" in a single day.

A full coverage is an advertisement that goes to every household, along with the mail. Two of the three were magazine-thick. That's a lot of weight to carry around all day.

There was general "panic and angst," said Organizing Chair Willie Groshell. So he encouraged everyone to fill out a safety concern form. Some were nervous, but one by one, people filed up to drop their forms on the manager's desk. About half the carriers on shift that day participated.

And that was all it took. Within minutes the manager agreed to postpone the heaviest item till the next day. Palpable relief and power zipped around the work floor.

"It's moments like that that really do bring people on board, that get people to understand what we can do collectively," Groshell says. "You've got to find those opportunities, and when they're there, you've got to try and take them."

## PICK YOUR BATTLES

Always be on the lookout for problems that can be solved through collective activity. Use these four criteria to evaluate a possible organizing issue:

**Is it widely felt?** Many people must feel that this is a real problem and agree with the solution you're pursuing. The heavy mail assignment is a good example—every letter carrier was affected.

**Is it deeply felt?** It's not enough that many people agree if none feels strongly enough to do anything about it. The grocery workers were so furious over the unfair write-ups that they found the courage to do something they'd never done before—march into the manager's office.

**Is it winnable?** It's hard to know for sure whether you *will* win, but it's possible to get a good idea of whether you *can*. Identify the decision-maker who can give you what you want. How hard do you expect this person to resist, and how much pressure can your group muster?

**Does it build the union and build leaders?** You get the most bang for your buck when you choose an issue that will draw in people who've never been involved before, unite groups that don't usually see eye to eye, or inspire your co-workers to go one step further than they've gone in the past. That way your union gets stronger with every fight.



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# TURN UP THE HEAT

**To scale up and tackle big goals takes time and planning. A good campaign starts small and builds.**

Nothing builds union loyalty more than participating in a fight that wins. And while a single action might win a small victory, the big wins that make the biggest difference in workers' lives will require escalating campaigns.

Your campaign should include a way for everyone to get involved—and for everyone to come up with fun tactics. It starts with low-intensity actions and turns up the heat till the boss cries “Uncle!”

That’s how factory workers who make heavy-truck suspensions in Kendallville, Indiana, managed to phase out the two-tier wage and pension system, bringing everyone up to the top tier.

It took a vigorous contract campaign that showed the company, Hendrickson International, that members were ready to strike. And in its first new contract since Indiana’s right-to-work law had taken effect, the local maintained 99 percent union membership.

It doesn’t have to be a contract campaign. You can plan an escalating series of actions over a single workplace demand, like getting management to clean up a safety hazard, rehire a beloved co-worker, or back off an unfair rule.

But whenever you do have a contract expiring, definitely organize an escalating campaign. It’s the way to flex maximum muscle and win the best deal. It’s also a golden opportunity to strengthen your union—giving your co-workers lots of chances to take active roles, sign up as members, and experience the power of collective action.

## WHY ESCALATE GRADUALLY?

- **TAKE THE HIGH ROAD.** By starting small, you show you are reasonable and credible. You *did* try asking politely.
- **IT BUILDS YOUR GROUP.** If you start off with low-intensity actions, members who have never done anything before will be more likely to participate. As you escalate, make sure not to leave people behind.
- **THERE’S STRENGTH IN NUMBERS.** If you start with risky actions and only a few people participate, the boss might single them out. With a few illegal disciplines, management can teach a lesson: stick your neck out and get burned.
- **EACH ACTION HAS A GREATER IMPACT THAN THE ONE BEFORE.** As your actions get more and more intense, managers begin to understand that you mean business. You also keep them guessing. When supervisors get flustered and make mistakes, the balance of power shifts in your direction.
- **DON’T PLAY YOUR ACES TOO SOON.** If you do your worst first, there’s nowhere for your campaign to go but down. It’s more effective when managers can see there’s a lot more to come—and there’s still time to save themselves a headache by giving in.

## FIND PRESSURE POINTS

Start by identifying the pressure point that will give you maximum leverage.

Every boss has a weak spot. Is there a bottleneck in the work flow, or a potential bottleneck? Will there be big problems if inventory items don’t arrive on time? Does management rely on workers’ willingness to work overtime? Is image in the community crucial? Does the boss hate publicity? Do clients need continuous coverage from 9 to 5?

All those situations create ways to produce a mini-crisis that will make the boss more receptive to your suggestions. What if everyone took their break at the same time? What if all the workers in shipping and receiving were suddenly off their game? What if teachers called in sick on standardized-testing day?

In a contract campaign, often the peak you are building towards is a

# PHASES OF A CAMPAIGN



## HOW TRUCK PLANT WORKERS DID IT

Visualize your escalating tactics by arranging them on a thermometer, with each action “hotter” than the last. Here are the steps the Kendallville truck plant workers took to defeat two-tier, beginning from the bottom:



10. Won a good contract!
9. Set a strike deadline
8. Held their own shift meetings, on the clock
7. Hauled burn barrels in their trucks
6. Conspicuously circulated a strike petition
5. Put signs in their cars and parked in management's spaces
4. Showed up en masse to bargaining
3. Held T-Shirt Tuesdays and sticker days
2. Invited everyone to a bargaining workshop
1. Surveyed members to develop demands

credible threat to strike—but there are exceptions. Library workers in Camden County, New Jersey, last year ran a contract campaign that climaxed not with a strike, but with something else that struck fear into their employer's heart: no one signed up to “volunteer” for the annual book sale.

“Management was pretty shocked,” said Joanne McCarty, a clerk. “We sent a clear message that they can't run this place without us.” At the next mediation session, the county agreed to increase minimum pay from \$8.92 per hour to \$15. And in the course of this campaign, union membership rose from 65 to 93 percent.

### START SLOW

Don't bring out your big guns right away. Start with an easy activity, like answering a survey, signing a petition, or wearing a button.

These mild activities allow you to double-check how widely and deeply felt the issue is, and form a network of activists who can lead their co-workers through the next steps.

If you don't achieve your goal through Step One, try something that's a bit harder and that pushes the boss a bit more. Plan your steps in advance, so you can move smoothly from one to the next and aren't scrambling for new ideas at a crisis point.

Along the way you're likely to use some tried-and-true tactics, like

bargaining surveys, rallies, informational pickets, or weekly T-shirt days to show unity. Other tactics can be unique to your shop—encourage your co-workers to brainstorm creative ideas!

At the Kendallville truck plant, members displayed signs in their car windows. On a certain day a few volunteers occupied the management parking spots, so that managers would have to walk through the whole parking lot and see everyone's signs. And as the strike deadline drew near, workers hauled burn barrels in their trucks to show they were ready to hit the picket line.

### BRING PEOPLE ALONG

You'll find the same escalating pattern if you scratch the surface of just about any successful strike. Gradually increasing the intensity keeps participation high. At an industrial laundry in La Crosse, Wisconsin, the first contract campaign under right to work kicked off with a multilingual potluck meal to discuss demands at a Hmong community center, so that the large number of Hmong workers in the shop would be included from the beginning. Activities grew from there, culminating in a 45-minute walkout—the first in UE Local 1121's history—joined by every worker. And the local retained nearly 100 percent membership.

Even Arizona teachers, who seemingly burst onto the scene this spring with their statewide walkout, had in fact

spent months building up to it, beginning with easier activities like wearing red T-Shirts on Wednesdays and sharing selfies on social media. Collective action builds unity and confidence.

### THE ESSENTIALS

- Dream big
- Never waste a contract fight
- Find the boss's weak spots
- Start with easy tactics
- Bring people along by increasing the intensity gradually

# ASK PEOPLE TO JOIN

The best approach is to integrate the membership ‘ask’ into union routines and workplace campaigns.

Unions should be able to motivate most people at a union workplace to become members and pay dues. After all, workers are under attack on the job—whether it’s a bullying boss, short staffing, or a grab at your pension. Presumably your union is campaigning on the issues your co-workers care about. (If not, flip back a few pages.)

So it’s not hard to make the case for why the union matters, or to find an opportunity to raise the topic. Make this conversation part of every steward’s routine and every activist’s agenda in every workplace campaign.

## TALK ONE ON ONE

It starts with talking to your co-workers one on one. People won’t join if you don’t ask.

You’ll be surprised how many you get. “We did a training on building our

union, and about 18 of us took that information and went and talked to our co-workers about joining,” said Amanda Miller, president of the Kalamazoo teachers union (NEA) in Michigan. “Not only did they all say yes, they did it happily. We just had to ask.”

Many of us shy away from encouraging people to become members. It can feel like selling something or being too pushy. But the union is not a consumer product. Dues are an essential ingredient for a strong union—fuel in the engine.

The other side of the coin is that unions must use members’ dues responsibly. If members grow cynical or mistrustful about where their money is going, they won’t want to pay. The more transparently and democratically your union handles its spending, the less you’ll have this problem.

## THE ESSENTIALS

- Enlist every union activist to help sign up members
- Make sign-up part of your organizing routine, not a separate campaign
- Orient new hires to the union right away
- Don’t just ask people to sign a card—involve them in a movement

Union officers and staff shouldn’t be the only ones asking. Letter Carriers Branch 82 in Portland, Oregon, trains stewards to sign people up. Stewards, in turn, are encouraged to figure out which members are friendly with each non-member and enlist their help.

Indiana teachers formed a membership committee in each big school or cluster of small schools. They divide up the list of non-members, giving assignments to school site representatives (stewards) and activists based on who has a relationship or has something in common with the potential member.

Activists regularly get together to debrief these conversations. When someone has declined to sign, they talk it over: “What was holding this person back? Is it something we can fix?” Most non-members get a second and third attempt, often from someone else with a different relationship or approach.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, teachers agree that you often have to go back multiple times. The answer is “patience,



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# AN ORGANIZING CONVERSATION

Your job is mostly to ask questions. Any organizing conversation—whether you're asking your co-worker to come to a rally or to sign a membership card—should be based on issues.

Don't lay on the guilt or make it about doing you a favor. You want your co-worker to realize:

1. She cares about a problem.
2. There's a decision-maker who has the power to fix this problem.
3. The decision-maker won't fix it until someone pushes them to.
4. If she really wants this problem fixed, she has to join you and others in taking action.

But just telling her all this wouldn't be effective. Instead, ask questions that get her to say it herself. We tend to remember what we said, not what the other person said.

persistence, and not writing them off," Vice President Amy Mizialko said, "not making an enemy of this person, and being very curious and non-judgmental about why this person hadn't joined."

Your conversation should be about a lot more than joining the union. Mizialko tries to follow the 80/20 rule—listen 80 percent of the time, talk 20 percent. When she catches herself talking too much, she stops and asks an open-ended question (not yes/no), such as, "What keeps you going in this job?" or "What do you wish you could change?" She listens to identify areas of common ground she can build on, workplace issues this person cares about, and which co-workers could have influence.

## ORIENT NEW HIRES

Welcome new employees into the union right away. Otherwise the union will continually shrink as members retire or quit.

The upside with new hires—it's a clean slate. Many have never been in a union before, and almost none have been in *your* union. This is your chance to introduce what the union is—where it came from, what it stands for, and what it has won.

Many employers will do their best to sour people on joining. So don't wait. You want contract language that allows a union rep or steward to meet with all new hires on the clock, without the boss

in the room. Try to hold this orientation on day one, advises Communications Workers Local 4900 President Tim Strong in Indiana, who reports a 99 percent success rate signing up new hires.

"When we catch somebody who's been here for a week or a month, it's much more difficult," he said. "They've gotten used to those dues not coming out of their check."

Michigan nurse Heather Roe asks orientees to define what a union is. She doesn't supply the right answer—group discussion always produces a good one. She asks what they expect being in a union will be like, and fields questions like, "Doesn't the union protect lazy workers?" and "What do my dues pay for?"

"Don't just throw a member application at them," she said. "Take some time to listen to them and then build their understanding from a positive place." Typically they all sign up.

If your union doesn't have contract language or an agreement with the employer, be creative. Find out when orientations happen and set up your own lunchtime meetings, or work with stewards to approach new employees one on one.

The goal isn't just to sign them up, but to keep them as active members for the long run. Offer concrete support in learning the ropes of their new job, assign a union mentor, and look for ways to involve them in the union right away.

## CREATE URGENCY

Membership should be a year-round priority—think monthly reports at union meetings. "We try to weave it into the culture," said Willie Groshell of the Letter Carriers. "Everybody knows who the non-members are, and everybody feels empowered to engage them."

That doesn't mean you shouldn't hold sign-up drives. Sometimes it's necessary to create urgency. Teachers and school employees often use the beginning of the school year. A membership drive can create momentum for a challenging campaign, such as a contract fight.

Membership matters at the bargaining table; a show of strength or weakness will make the boss take note. The teacher local in Maconaquah, Indiana, was able to fight off a benefits cut after increasing its membership from 58 to 70 percent.

In Oregon, two postal unions teamed up to knock on non-members' doors in pairs. They found a few people who'd never been asked and were happy to join. Others had reservations, and the home visit allowed a more productive, relaxed conversation away from the boss's ears.

But the end goal wasn't just to get the membership card signed—it was to connect those people into the union and start addressing their workplace concerns.

"We had to let them know this wasn't just a one-time thing," Groshell said. "You have to be honest, you have to follow through on whatever you say you're going to do, and you have to tell people the truth, rather than what you think they want to hear."

## WIN THEM OVER

Winning people over can be a long-term project. In rural Monroe County, Tennessee, teacher activist Sarah Amos reported in 2016 that a teacher who'd been refusing to join for 24 years had finally signed up.

In fact, she became a building rep and union activist—"red hot and one of our most active members," Amos said.

How'd that happen? "She saw us fight for everyone," Amos explained, "for retiring teachers, for new teachers, for students." The union made impressive membership gains that year by mobilizing members and non-members alike to fight off a threatened pay cut and defend grievance rights.

"Sometimes people think that union members are lazy and that we need a contract to protect us," Amos said. "But then she saw us fight, and recognized that lazy people don't fight this hard."

## WHAT INSPIRES PEOPLE TO JOIN THE UNION?

- Seeing the union win fights that matter.
- Experiencing collective action firsthand.
- Trusting that you and your co-workers have each other's backs.
- Being asked to join, by someone you respect.
- Confidence that the union can protect you from the boss's retaliation.

## WHAT DOESN'T INSPIRE PEOPLE?

- A guilt trip.
- A sales pitch.
- Fear-mongering.
- Comparing dues to the price of a latte or a gym membership.
- Perks, such as retail discounts or liability insurance.

# COUNT NOSES

**You'll need a system to track members and potential members, with maps and lists. Get to know the informal leaders in the workplace.**

Here's the baseline: an active union needs to know where all its members and non-members are, and how to contact every represented worker.

But your data should go much deeper than that. The better you know the internal dynamics of your workplace—who talks to who, how does information travel, when are the crunch times each day—the more effective you will be at recruiting members as well as building power on the job.

## MAINTAIN A GOOD LIST

For starters, you need a complete and accurate list. Don't trust management to produce this. The union should maintain its own seniority list, periodically checked against any list management sends over with the dues check.

Keep track of personal emails, cell phone numbers, shift or start time, department or location, and whether each worker is a member or not. Then think about what other information you'd like to keep track of.

Is Rosie a steward? If not, who's assigned to communicate with her? Is she an identified leader in her department? Which union actions has she participated in? Is she hardcore anti-union?

If you don't have a list, start with whatever employee list you can find (be resourceful, be discreet). Enlist stewards to check the information for their own departments.

All this data needs to be stored, whether it's a big Excel sheet or a customized database. Your list will need constant updating—it's only as useful as it is accurate. Stewards should take ongoing responsibility for filling in missing contact info, adding new people and removing outgoing ones, and asking the non-members to join.

One or two leaders should take charge of tracking and coordinating with other stewards to get cards into non-members' hands.

## MAKE A MAP

If you have a lot of non-members, don't panic—and don't assume the best approach is to work your way down an alphabetical list, talking to every non-member. You'll want a more nuanced plan.

For starters, look for patterns in who the non-members are. Are they



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## MAPPING YOUR WORKPLACE

Start with a physical map of the workplace. You want to show where your co-workers are, and where they move throughout the day.

Use sticky dots to show each member and non-member, with colors to indicate supervisors, stewards, union activists, or different jobs.

Making and analyzing the map should be a group activity. Look for patterns and discuss these questions:

- **Work groups.** Who is grouped by job, work area, or shift? Which groups see each other? Which are hard to reach?
- **Social groups.** Who carpools together? Who speaks the same language? Who socializes at lunch? Who's related? Who are all the smokers?

- **Identity.** Look at gender, race, language, and sexual identity. Does the union reach every group? Do stewards reflect the diversity of the workforce?

- **Membership.** Where are union members and stewards clustered? Which groups show the biggest gaps in union involvement?

- **Issues.** How does each group relate to management? What are its biggest problems? Which issues could be addressed through collective action?

These conversations will help you devise a strategy for who to talk to first, and find potential organizing issues. Your map will also show you good places to talk with co-workers, away from the prying eyes of supervisors.

concentrated in a certain department, job, shift, or group where you've never had much union activity?

Your goal isn't just to get membership cards signed, but to build a living union that reaches every part of the workplace. Wherever your union network has a hole, you'll need a strategy to involve that group. You might need to get the right leader on board or plan a campaign on the right issue.

Here's a great tool to help you uncover these gaps and devise these plans: make a map. (See box.)

### ENLIST NATURAL LEADERS

Rather than try to talk to everyone on your lunch or break, think about who you should prioritize because they have influence.

Every workplace has informal leaders who aren't elected or appointed; they just are.

Think about your co-workers, and ask around. Who do they go to for help or advice? Who do they ask when they want the facts? Who do they admire? Certain names usually come up over and over. In one hospital, a certain nurse was known on his floor as "the mayor."

Fundamentally, a leader is someone who has followers. That means there are others who will take an action—sign the petition, wear the sticker, attend the rally, join the strike—when this person asks.

Leaders often correspond to groups. Different leaders might have sway among the younger workers, the moms, the basketball players, the people who work in a certain department, or the night shift.

The people who already have followers are the ones you most want to get involved in the union. They will be the best at recruiting and inspiring others; they will be able to sustain their co-workers' trust in the face of an anti-union campaign.

Go out of your way to get to know them, learn what they care about, and help them develop campaigns that move others into action. Time spent with these leaders will pay dividends.

### 'BIGGEST-WORST' FIRST

For the biggest results, focus first on the area where you have the most non-members.

At the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association, an organizing team of staffers and release-time members chooses six schools each semester. Organizers tailor a plan to raise member numbers at each targeted school based on its particular history and challenges.

The Indiana State Teachers

Association uses a "Go Green" system to motivate worksite leaders. Schools below 50 percent membership are coded red, those above 50 percent are yellow, and those above 70 percent are green. The color scheme helps officers and reps (stewards) prioritize which schools, and even which parts of buildings, need the most help.

Last year the Eastern Howard Education Association, north of Indianapolis, formed a membership committee and divided up the list of non-members. Each person took two or three people to talk to.

Through these conversations, they discovered a unifying issue: a point system that required teachers to meet unrealistic criteria based on attendance and degrees in order to get a raise. So the union bargained a pay scale instead. The campaign of conversations, combined with the issue fight, boosted membership from 56 to 70 percent.

### CHART YOUR PROGRESS

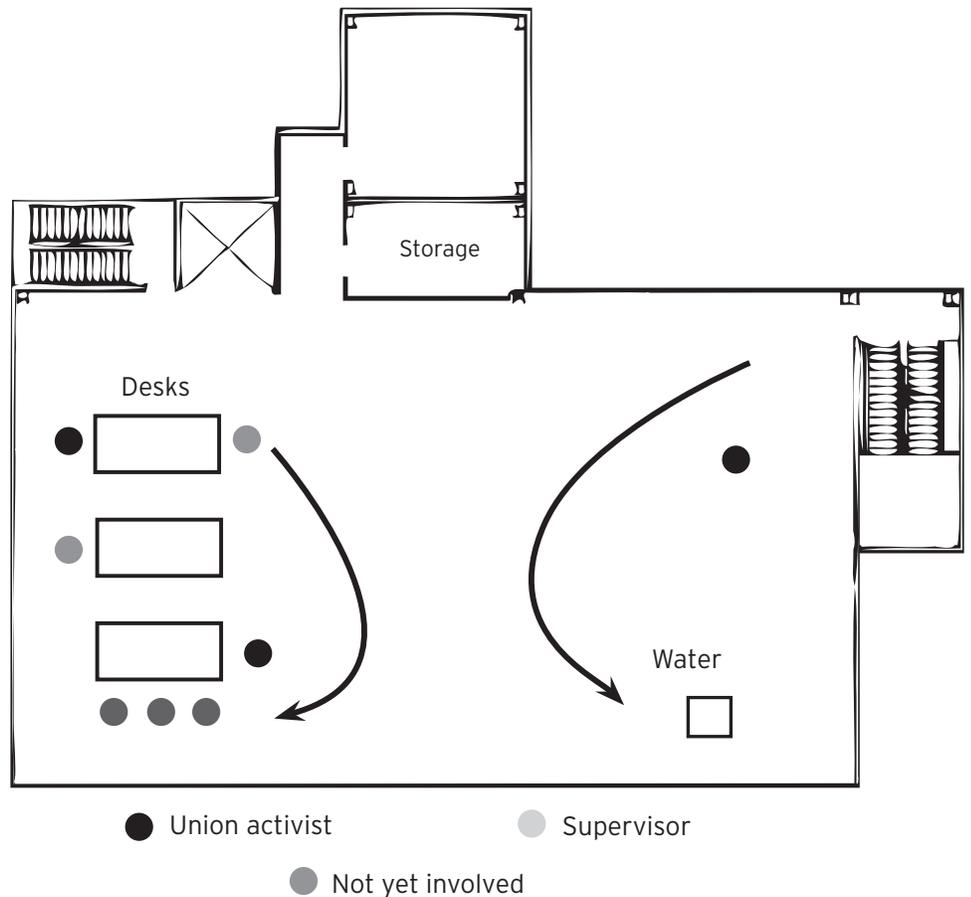
A chart is a good way to track your progress. It's easy to update and allows you to see at a glance which departments are strong on membership and

which are weak. Make a big version to put on the wall and a spreadsheet you can carry with you.

The simplest form of chart is just your list, sorted by work area and shift, and color-coded to show who the members and non-members are and who hasn't been asked yet. Mark each steward or activist who is helping to sign people up, and each identified leader you are hoping to recruit.

### THE ESSENTIALS

- Maintain an accurate list
- Map the workplace to understand groups, relationships, and issues
- Identify natural leaders and recruit them
- Focus on areas where the union is weak
- Fill the gaps by helping leaders build campaigns to solve problems collectively
- Chart your progress



# DON'T GO IT ALONE

## THE ESSENTIALS

- Fight for the public good
- Link up with allies who have interests in common
- Build on the community relationships your members already have
- Stick with your allies for the long haul
- Don't try to substitute community ties for organizing on the job

## To succeed, your organizing has to combine action on the job with a fight for justice in the wider society.

One possible reaction to *Janus* is that unions scale back on movement-building outside the workplace to avoid alienating on-the-fence workers. After all, it's a right-wing talking point—unions spend money on causes that their members may not agree with.

But going it alone isn't an option. To inspire members to stick around we need to win fights that matter. Unions can't win big if we're an isolated minority—especially in the public sector, where we're up against well-financed politicians adept at pitting taxpayers against “greedy” workers. Even co-workers (who are taxpayers, too) can be susceptible to this anti-union rhetoric, and a narrow vision won't inspire them.

To beat billionaire donors we need the power of a united working-class movement.

### FIGHT FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

Like other public sector workers, teachers and their unions have been demonized. So how did teachers in West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Arizona attract an outpouring of public support this spring when they walked out on strikes?

The teachers linked their fight for higher pay to the fight for a good public education for all children. They broke it down: because of low salaries, experienced teachers were moving to higher-paying states or fleeing the profession. Schools were scrambling to find even underqualified replacements.

Also, the same budget cuts that slashed salaries had left students to read from tattered textbooks at broken desks in overcrowded classrooms. Teachers made these points by sharing photos on social media and with news outlets. To make sure their walkouts would not

leave low-income students hungry, they organized food drives and offered meals each day.

An AP poll in the midst of the strike wave found that 78 percent of Americans thought teachers weren't paid enough, and 80 percent of those who'd heard of the strikes supported them.

The strikers' righteous stand, and the resulting wash of public support, inspired teachers across the country to hold their heads up high—and in several states, to follow suit.

### LINK UP WITH ALLIES

Especially in the public sector, often we're fighting for things that go beyond our contract, like better schools or community services. That means we have natural long-term allies. Our employers and government officials often care deeply about their reputations and will respond to public pressure.

Beyond your workplace, who has a stake in the services you provide? Are they organized? How might you reach them and collaborate?

After two passengers died in a horrific stabbing on a train in Portland, Oregon, the transit agency upped police presence. But the union was already working closely on safety with a passenger group to promote a different solution.

Transit workers and passengers are often pitted against each other, especially at the fare box. But when the two groups held joint forums, they discovered they had many concerns in common.

Instead of more police, Transit (ATU) Local 757 and Bus Riders Unite agreed they'd rather revive two job titles that used to exist—Fare Inspector and Rider Advocate—to staff trains and buses with union members equipped to de-escalate conflicts, answer questions, and

## WAYS TO BUILD COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Have members set up one-on-one conversations with community leaders.
- Make a plan on who to contact, who will do it, the timeline, and the ask.
- Ask to talk about the union's contract fight in a community meeting or faith service.
- Participate in coalitions. Ask what support is needed, and bring updates and requests back to the union.
- Mobilize members to attend actions organized by other unions or community groups.

call for help in a crisis. The union also backed BRU's push for a low-income fare option, which will go into effect this summer, helping to alleviate tension between transit workers and riders who can't pay.

“We feel like our fates are intertwined,” said BRU Organizer Orlando Lopez. “It's not just about scratching each other's backs. It's about, ‘Why is it that we're both itching?’”

### DRAW ON MEMBERS' ROOTS

Unions and community groups often approach alliances in top-down style—“Let's have our president and your executive director shake hands.” But your fellow members have profound connections of their own. We're not just workers—we're also neighbors, parents, people of faith, and members of many kinds of organizations.

To map out this web of connections, some unions conduct a survey. Do members and their families belong to churches, mosques, or synagogues? How about local sports leagues, parent-teacher associations, hunting clubs, or immigrant associations? Ask! Then brainstorm how to build stronger relationships between those organizations and the union.

Organizers at SeaTac airport, near Seattle, discovered the depth of workers' faith community almost by accident.

Many of the airport's low-wage workers were observant Muslim immigrants from Somalia. The unions weren't seen as responsive to these workers' concerns until 2011, when Hertz suspended 34 Somali workers for taking a brief break to pray.

Teamsters Local 117 organized a multi-faith pray-in at the Hertz counter. Muslims, Christians, and Jews joined union and community activists, praying while holding signs that read, "Respect me, respect my religion." Union officers and the shop steward went on national news shows. They brought in lawyers.

After the pray-in, community doors began to open. Union activists were invited to speak at family night in the mosques. Imams talked about the union drive in their Friday sermons.

Workers warmed up to organizers at the airport, saying, "I heard you were at the mosque," or "the imam told us about the union." The airport campaign gained momentum—and ultimately these newfound allies worked together to pass the country's first \$15 minimum-wage ordinance, kicking off a national movement.

### BE IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL

Alliances with community groups should be year-round, not rustled up in an emergency, say activists in the Chicago Teachers Union.

Community groups had tried to work with the old CTU leadership "and found they weren't interested," said Katelyn Johnson, director of Action Now, a community organization active on the South and West Sides of the city. "If there was something they needed they would reach out, but after that you didn't hear from them."

Changing that dynamic was one of the first steps for a caucus that emerged to remake the union. Years before they won union leadership and led the groundbreaking 2012 strike, teacher activists got their Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators off the ground by teaming up with neighborhood groups to fight school closures.

The same principle held once the new

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF ALLIANCES

**WEAKEST—"PLEASE COME SUPPORT US!"** Some people will come help, because they like us or because it is "the right thing to do."

**MEDIUM—"YOU HELP US ON THIS AND WE'LL HELP YOU ON THAT!"** Scratch each other's backs: It does help for your ally to know that you will return the favor. It's stronger than a one-way relationship, but people will only go so far just to help you with your issues.

**STRONGEST—"WE'RE IN IT TOGETHER!"** Solidarity: We are both being harmed. Working together and supporting each other is the only way to fix it. "Supporting you helps me win, too."

*(Excerpted from Chicago Teachers Union training materials)*

leaders took office—approach community organizations as equals and build relationships on shared issues; don't just ask for help with predetermined goals. Parent, student, and neighbor groups helped shape CTU's campaign for "The Schools Chicago Students Deserve," which highlighted not only the overall underfunding of Chicago schools but also the "educational apartheid" that was specifically underfunding and shutting down schools in Black and Latino neighborhoods.

By the time the contract campaign peaked in a massive strike, it was no surprise that community members came out in force to deliver home-cooked food, cheer the strikers on, and walk their picket lines.

### IT'S NOT EITHER/OR

One note of caution: you can't substitute community ties for a strong union in the workplace.

It's not helpful to your community allies if you can only offer them weak support, such as the same member or two always attending their events. It won't help you, either. At the bargaining table, all the community alliances in the world won't make up for the basic weakness of a union whose own members aren't active.

If you're stuck in a weak union, don't despair. Find a few like-minded co-workers—even one is enough to get started—and start talking about how you can turn things around.



Labors Local 79

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## SPECIAL ISSUE

# REBUILDING POWER IN OPEN-SHOP AMERICA: A LABOR NOTES GUIDE

The moment you may have been dreading arrived June 27, when the Supreme Court imposed the open shop on the public sector nationwide with its decision in *Janus v. AFSCME District 31*.

Instead of the usual mix of articles, this month we're sending you a special expanded issue of *Labor Notes* devoted to one topic: our survival guide for rebuilding power in open-shop America. (Are you in the private sector and think this won't affect you? Don't get too cozy. See page 4.) Next month we'll be back to our usual format.

*Janus* is a serious blow—but we have good news. As plenty of unions in open-shop states and sectors can testify, it's still possible to win campaigns and maintain high membership rates despite the legal hurdles. We talked to workers in schools, factories, buses, hospitals, oil refineries, grocery stores, post offices, and shipyards. This pamphlet reveals the principles and practical steps behind their successes.

Here's the punchline: the unions that build power in open-shop America will be the ones that fight hard on workplace

issues their members care about, and where large numbers of rank-and-file members take on their own fights.

### SPREAD THE WORD

To order extra copies of this pamphlet for your workplace or union, call 313-842-6262.

### TAKE THE NEXT STEP

This pamphlet condenses the lessons we spell out in much more detail, and with lots of real-life examples, in our popular handbooks *Secrets of a Successful Organizer* and *Democracy Is Power*. Bulk discounts are available.

### TRAIN UP YOUR CREW

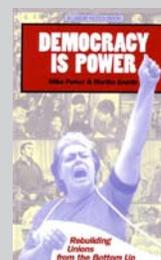
Labor Notes educators can help stewards and activists hone their skills with hands-on trainings like "Organizing in Open-Shop America," "Beating Apathy," and "Turning an Issue into a Campaign." We can help you develop a strategy to revamp member recruitment or get the most out of an upcoming contract campaign. Get in touch with us at [training@labornotes.org](mailto:training@labornotes.org) or call 718-284-4144.

## READ MORE



### Secrets of a Successful Organizer

Many unions have ordered this book in bulk for stewards or staff—it's a step-by-step guide to building power on the job. You'll learn to map your workplace, identify key issues, build campaigns to tackle them, anticipate management's tricks and traps, and inspire your co-workers to stand together despite their fears. \$15.



### Democracy Is Power

Whether you're a union officer ready to turn the ship around or a frustrated rank and filer, look no further for a practical manual on how to rebuild your union from the bottom up. It covers democratic approaches to contracts, grievances, communications, and leaders' relationship with members. \$10.