



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.