

SHEET METAL | AIR | RAIL | TRANSPORTATION



INTERNAL ORGANIZING AND SOLIDARITY COMMITTEES

Why Organize Internally?

Internal organizing is the key to strength and success for local unions in several important areas:

- Membership building
- Contract bargaining
- Grievances and workplace problems
- Lobbying and politics

People join unions because they care about the issues the union is fighting for. If workers see a benefit in belonging to a union they are much more apt to become a member. **The union must be seen as the driving force for democracy, social justice and economic progress in both the workplace and the community, and as the vehicle to make those changes happen.**

One of the most obvious reasons to organize internally is **contract bargaining**. An internal organizing campaign can create bargaining strength by presenting the employer with a unified workforce across the bargaining table. Simply put, the strength of the membership translates into strength at the table. An employer may discount a union whose membership is only 35%. Imagine that same employer facing a bargaining committee whose local membership has become 98% or 100%. Conducting an internal organizing campaign before negotiations begin can raise the threat of workplace actions while it prepares the membership of the local union for executing those actions if needed.

A second reason for organizing internally is to provide help in **settling grievances or workplace problems**. Whether a problem is covered under your contract or not, internal organizing can often speed a solution and make the solution stick. Organizing around an issue is also a key way to get non-members to join. When members mobilize around an issue, if they wear stickers or sign a group letter to publicize a safety issue, non-members see the union in action. Asking non-members to help solve a current problem can also be an effective way to ask them to join the union. Getting current members involved in the work action gives them a chance to be directly involved and see again that their actions matter. Those members who have a good experience organizing around an issue may also be willing to take part in other union activities, including volunteer organizing.

The third reason for an internal organizing campaign is the organizing and mobilization of members for purposes of **lobbying or political activity**. Locals will often need volunteers to phone bank during elections or to hand out leaflets to help defeat or pass a bill that will hurt or help working families. When the organizing committee asks members who might not have been active to volunteer their time for a specific task, it strengthens the union. Members learn new skills and may be willing to get more involved. Asking new members to contribute to a project can solidify their commitment to the union, introduce them to other members, and encourage them to volunteer again.

Grassroots Activism

The role of a union leader is not simply to provide services to people. Our role is to lead and motivate people to action. **Involving members in developing and implementing solutions to their problems builds union power.**

There are a number of advantages to involving the membership in the affairs of the local union. A local union with a large percentage of its members actively involved and behind their leadership is much **more effective**. Employers are more likely to bargain fairly if they know the membership is involved and knowledgeable.

The second advantage is that it gives members **real power as a group**, by letting them share in decision and victories. It is one thing to read in the local union newsletter that the union won an arbitration case, got a health and safety problem resolved, or delivered a decent contract. It is quite another to know that by being an active member who attended a rally or participated in a bargaining session, you affected the outcome.

Third, it **educates members** about the nature of disputes between the union and the employer. Sometimes when the union loses a battle with the employer the members blame the union. If the members are active participants in the struggle, they will have a better understanding of what has occurred.

Last, and perhaps the most important aspect of involving the membership, is that it allows the local union **to take on and solve more problems**. As more people get involved in the union, we have more people available to help and we can be even more active.

Organizing internally builds the union. As we get stronger, we will get better collective bargaining agreements. We'll be able to shape legislation around our social and economic agenda and become a real force to be reckoned with the ever-changing global economy. Whether it is to sign up new members in an open shop or increase participation among current members, organizing internally is vital to the health of the local.

Internal Organizing Activity Checklist for Locals

These questions are intended to suggest some of the activities you local might carry on in its internal organizing activities. Your committee is urged to review them and to use them as a reminder. When the answer to the majority of these questions is "yes", your local's organizing program will be on its way to success. The list is by no means final. Add to it as you see fit. The more activity, the greater will be your success, provided you have properly organized that activity.

	Yes	No
1. Does your local have a non-member list or card file?	___	___
2. Has your local enlisted the stewards in organizing work?	___	___
3. Have stewards been briefed on the local organizing situation?	___	___
4. Have they been given training on how to sign-up non-members?	___	___
5. Does your local have enough literature for an organizing campaign?	___	___
6. Does your local contact the new employee immediately upon his/her coming to work?	___	___
7. Do the stewards contact the non-members regularly on the job?	___	___
8. Is each steward equipped with literature and dues deduction cards?	___	___
9. Does your local have regular stewards' meetings to discuss and plan organizing activity?	___	___
10. Has your local ever tried house calls to sign non-members?	___	___
11. Has your local arranged social affairs and invited the non-members?	___	___
12. Has your local analyzed your non-member situation and determined where you should concentrate your efforts?	___	___
13. Has your local tried to build teams of active members for use in recruiting the non-members?	___	___

	Yes	No
14. Has your local checked to see whether any stewards need help?	___	___
15. Is organizing on the agenda of every executive committee or officer meeting?	___	___
16. Have your stewards received training?	___	___
17. Does your president/chief steward consult with stewards on their problems?	___	___
18. Has your local ever tried to get non-members together to talk about issues at the workplace and what the union is doing about those issues?	___	___
19. Has your local tried getting its members in the departments together at lunch or after hours to see what they can do to help with the recruiting of non-members?	___	___
20. Does your local make the best use of its union bulletin boards to inform and mobilize the membership?	___	___
21. Does your local recognize and publicize the successful efforts of local activists in recruiting new members?	___	___

Getting Organized to Organize

Forming An Organizing Committee

The primary function of an organizing committee in an open shop setting is membership recruitment. This committee could also be used for outreach to members during future mobilization drives. In other shops, an organizing committee could be formed in preparation for contract negotiations, to publicize a key issue or to get more members involved in our many struggles.

Your organizing committee should consist of member from each work area. Ideally, it should reflect the workforce in terms of age, race, sex, job classification and work unit. Many times you may have to start with a committee that is less than ideal in numbers and scope. Your first and most important goal should be to expand the membership of the committee so that it accurately reflects the workforce.

Locate and personally encourage members who appear to have some leadership qualities to join the committee. Many leadership skills can be taught or more fully

developed. Pass on the skills you have to others. You are only a leader if you pass on your knowledge and experience.

One way to strengthen your local is to Develop and recruit leaders. Leadership can come from many different areas in the local. Sometimes members not usually considered “activists” could be key organizers.

Some Leadership Qualities			
Committed	Confident	Has followers	Organized
Respected	Has integrity	Articulate	Honest
Humble	Able to listen	Courageous	
	Has a vision to communicate		

Committee Training

Any effective internal organizing effort needs a strong training component. Providing the organizers with background on the local union and the International will equip them to explain to people our past accomplishments and struggles. A clear understanding of the economics of the industry and the employer’s situation will also enable the committee to answer questions and explain issues.

You may need to know:

- What has been the bargaining history with the employer?
- What gains have been made? You may want to know the history of wage increase or improvements in the health care plan.
- What was it like before the union and after? You may want to know about forced overtime or the pension plan.
- How have the membership and the leadership change over the past years?

Another part of the preparation for the internal organizing is to gather information on the employer. You may need to know:

- Is the company part of a larger corporation? How does it fit in the corporate structure? What is the management's history?
- To what extent is the employer unionized in other locations?
- What is the employer's relationship with other unions like?
- What type of resistance can we expect to the internal organizing drive?

You should also investigate aspects of the community in which you are located.

- To what extent are other workers organized in our community?
- Who are the local politicians who might sympathize with the union?
- What other potential community groups can we consider as our allies? Are there senior citizens, civil rights groups, religious groups, the local central body, or other support groups we could call upon?
- Are there members who are members in community groups that we consider allies? An individual who is a member of both the union and a community group may know the best way to ask for support-and get it.

After the information is gathered, the next step is to plan your training agenda.

Earlier in this manual, we presented in detail the importance of setting realistic and achievable goals. We also reviewed the significance of setting timetables, assigning tasks and accountability. All of this material needs to be included in your training program. It is also important to develop and fine-tune the committee members' communication or "people skills"

We all talk to our co-workers on a regular basis. We converse about the Super Bowl or what we did last weekend, but often people feel uncomfortable asking someone to join a group or participate in an activity. This is why it's critical that we include in this agenda a portion of time to train our organizers on how to talk about the union to their co-workers.

Sample Training Agenda

- History of the International and Local Union
- Current state of employer and employee issues
- "One-On-One" Organizing techniques
- Goals of the Campaign
- Assignments and Accountability

Developing a Plan

To be effective the committee needs to have a clear plan that all the committee supports.

To determine particular issues that could best mobilize the members or launch a new member campaign, the committee could create and distribute an issues survey or use other methods.

Checklist for Organizing Around Issues

1. Identifying and generating interest in your issue

A. Ways to identify issues:

- Written survey to members and non-members
- One-on-one meetings
- Workplace meetings during lunch or break to solicit issues
- Home visits

B. Steward / officer discussion sessions:

- Discuss problems in particular departments; job classifications; work groups, etc.
- Identify areas where union support is weak
- Have stewards survey workers on their attitudes toward the union
- Have stewards survey workers on ways they could contribute to the local

C. Special meetings for people affected by particular issues:

- Invite people **personally** to attend the meeting (in addition to leaflet or phone call)
- Develop plan of action at this meeting
- Follow up with reports to the people who attend the meeting, or those who wanted to attend.

2. Direct action to involve the membership

A. Signing and delivering petitions and letters

- To management
- To state agencies, OSHA, etc.

B. Wear buttons, T-shirts, cap

- Pick slogan that portrays issue in a way that would gain public support
- Demonstrations before or after work
- Lunchtime meetings or rallies
- Picnic, social events, etc. to involve the families
- Have members develop and design posters, banners and leaflets

3. Community outreach

A. Develop slogan that appeals to the public from the outset

B. Political contacts

- Form legislative contact committee
- Committee to meet with legislators
- Ask members to telephone or write legislators

C. Clergy contacts

- Ask members to contact their clergy
- Have members/supporters sign pain advertisement
- Invite reporters to events
- Form media outreach committee to get to know reporters and do editorial board visits

D. Local Media contacts

- Ask members/supporters to write letters to editor
- Have members/supporters sign paid advertisement
- Invite reporters to events
- Form media outreach committee to get to know reporters and do editorial board visits

E. Other labor, community groups

- Send delegation of members to local central body meeting, meetings of other local unions
- Solicit letters of support from other labor and community groups
- Send members to meetings of senior, women's, and civil rights, etc. groups, to explain issues.

4. Keeping members informed

A. Publicize all victories in newsletters, leaflets, bulletin boards

B. Phone tree for last minute messages and announcements

C. Give recognition to activists

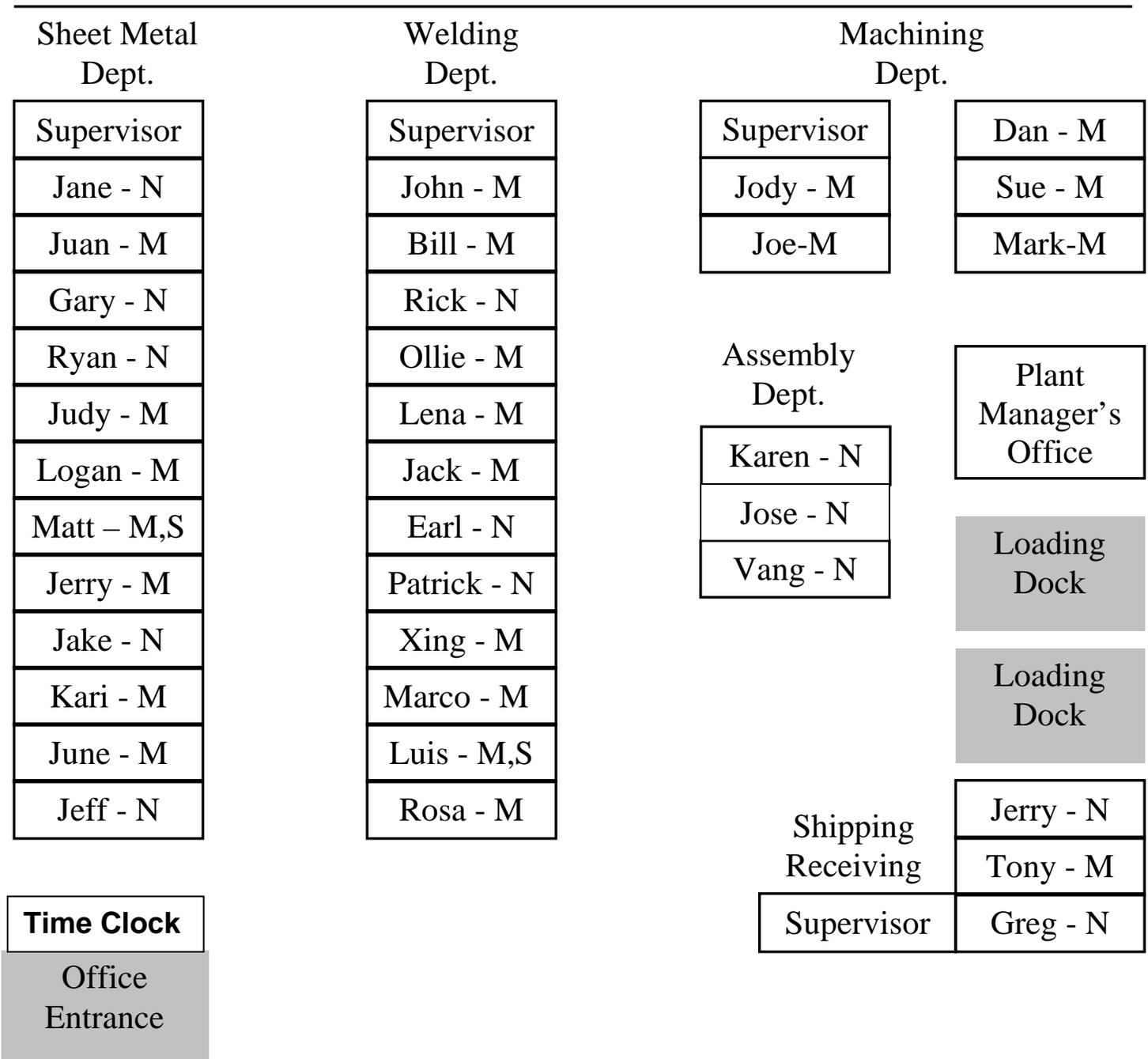
- Awards dinners
- Certificates of appreciation (to individuals who brought refreshments, made posters, etc.)
- Plaques
- Articles in union newsletters

Mapping Your Work Place

As you prepare to kick-off your internal organizing drive, there is a certain amount of preparation that needs to be done. One important bank of information you need is information on the workforce: names of the members and non-members, where they work, how they feel about the union and who are the leaders.

One useful technique is to draw a diagram of your workplace (see the “Sample Workplace Place Map” on the next page). In the diagram, slot each employee by name and indicate whether the individual is a member or non-member. You should also note if the individual is a union officer, steward or activist. The diagram will tell you where you need to recruit new activists. It will also give you an idea of which union members might be enlisted to talk with their co-workers about joining. If your workplace is very large, ask each steward to assist in diagramming his or her own work area.

XYZ Company
M=Member; N=Non-Member; S=Steward



One-On-One Effectiveness

Often people find it intimidating to ask someone to join the union. But over the years our members have found that one-on-one contact is the best method of raising workers' awareness on issues that result in a call for action. One-on-one contact is the fundamental way to build and strengthen the union. Below you will find some suggestions on how to do this more effectively.

- **Listen** – This is the most important skill to develop. Everybody has a tendency to lecture people or deliver a canned pitch. Show them you and the union care what they think.
- **Introduce yourself** – Give your name and establish why you're talking to the person. Be up front that you are there to talk about the union or an issue.
- **Ask Questions** - The worker should talk 75%; the organizer talks 25%. Instead of lecturing, you have to learn to draw people out by asking open-ended questions. Get specific examples from the worker about what affects them. "What parts of your job do you think could be improved?" "What do you like best about your job?"
- **Watch body language** – Make eye contact and don't fidget. Also be aware of the worker's body language and take your cues from them.
- **Don't make assumptions** – Often the issues you think are important are not the issues your co-workers care about. Keep an open mind so you can be responsive to the person's concerns.
- **Repeat back what you hear** - Check back to see if you heard it right. "So, what I hear you saying is that the health care plan needs some improvement?"
- **Don't interrupt** - When you interrupt, you don't get to hear a person's real concerns. Be quiet while they speak. Don't complete their sentences.
- **Don't argue** – If somebody makes negative comments to try to find common ground. As much as possible, agree that the person has a valid point. Don't make the other person feel defensive. If you do, they'll never change their mind. One effective technique to deal with negative comments is the "Feel-Felt-Found" method. When someone makes a negative comment attempt to turn it around. For example: "I understand how you **Feel** – I **Felt** the same way at one time- then I **Found** out it really works." It's amazing how these three simple words can change someone's opinion on a given subject.

- **Don't evade the tough questions** – If you don't know the answer, don't try to fake it. People respect honesty. If you don't know the answer, admit it and tell them you'll get back to them.
- **Thank them for their time** – Even if they were not supportive, be polite. You may be the first or only union member they've met and you want to leave a good impression. Maybe next time they're approached, they'll be more open to the idea of becoming a member. If they are hostile your attitude may lessen some of their fire.

There is no substitute for effective one-on-one contact. With training and practice any activist can learn to communicate effectively. A good way for the committee to practice one-on-one communication skills is through role-playing conversations. The committee should make a list of the questions or responses a co-worker might give them. Together they can brainstorm about how to answer them. Then they can role-play and critique the responses as a group. You will find on the next-two pages a list of possible questions and answers. It can be referred to as a "what if" list.

Typical Objections and Responses

Objection

"Why should I join the union when I'll get exactly the same wages and benefits without joining?"

Possible Answers

"We could all receive more pay and benefits if everyone joined the union. With a strong membership we can negotiate from a position of power. Then the employer would take us more seriously."

"You and your co-workers are the union. Your participation will make the union more effective."

"I'm sure you want to do your share and not have the rest of the workers pay your share."

Objection

"I can't afford to join. I've got a family to support and my check isn't big enough."

Possible Answers

"We all have financial problems. That's why we need stronger union, to get more substantial raises and better benefits."

“You can’t afford not to belong. It doesn’t cost – it pays, in terms of better wages, benefits, and job security.”

“If you break it down, it will only cost a little more than a cup of coffee a day to belong to the union.”

“The dues pay for the cost of arbitration, research, legal and technical assistance, education, and publications. Every organization needs money to run.”

Objection

“I don’t believe in unions. They are already too strong and they’re ruining this country.”

Possible Answers

“A union is nothing more than a group of people working together for dignity, respect and a voice on the job.”

“By saying unions are too powerful, you’re saying we employees earn too much and have too much of a voice. Do you think that is true?”

Objection

“I don’t need a union. The employer is fair. What has the union gotten for us that we wouldn’t have gotten anyway?”

Possible Answers

“This is a good place to work now, but the union has a lot to do with it. Before we won the union election, we had no health insurance, no personal days, and no holiday pay. We got those in our first contract. But we need to improve our wages. That’s why we need everyone to come together for the next contract negotiations. You can help.”

Objection

“I’m only going to be working here a short while.”

Possible Answers

“I said that too, but I’m still here. So are a lot of other people. But while you’re here, you’re getting the same pay and benefits as the rest of us. I’m sure you’d like to do your part to help pay for the cost of these benefits.”

“While you’re here, we want you to be one of us. We want you to fit in with the group and be an equal. You’ll enjoy it more and we’ll enjoy having you.”

Objection

“I can’t afford to strike, and I don’t believe in strikes.”

Possible Answers

“Strikes are very rare. This union settles 99% of its contracts without a strike.”

“Only members of the union can decide whether to strike. If you’re not a member, you won’t have a say.”

How to Make One-On-One Contacts

The purpose of the one-on-one contact is to talk to our fellow workers about the benefits of union membership. How by speaking as one we can improve our wages and working conditions and bring respect and dignity to the workplace.

Another purpose of the one-on-one contact is to talk to our fellow workers about an issue, discuss how the issue affects us as fellow workers, how we can organize and build solidarity around it.

Materials

- **Applications and Dues Check off**
- **Welcome Packet** – Union Privilege, contract, health insurance and pension information, SMART Constitution, local union information; phone number, address, meetings, events, officers, training, etc., union paraphernalia; pens, calendar, etc.
- **Leaflets and Other Written Materials** – you will need sufficient written materials (and stickers or buttons if they are used) for the number of people you are being asked to contact. A “Fact Sheet” on the issue. Prepare beforehand some responses to reactions you may receive (“What If’s”).

Be Yourself

- Most likely, you know best the people you will be contacting.
- Develop an approach that you feel comfortable with. Prepare your case for union membership beforehand.
- Use the kind of language you use every day.
- Know how the issue might affect this or other workers. Always ask the worker how the issue affects them.

Be Frank

- No one expects you to be an expert.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, don't try to bluff.
- Offer to get back to the person with an answer.

Make the Contact at the Right Time

- You can speak with employees / members during lunch breaks, coffee breaks, before or after work or any other convenient non-working time.
- You can do so in areas like the lunchroom, parking lot, and locker room or break area.

How to Use Leaflets and Petitions

- When using written material, bring it out at the end of the visit. Otherwise the conversation may stop.
- Briefly introduce the leaflet or petition and explain why the issue is important, ask them how the issue affects them if you have not yet done so, and discuss how the member's involvement will affect the issue.
- Present the information, including the alternative(s).
- Ask the member for a response. Let them know you will follow their response. Talk **with** the member – not at them.

Handling A Favorable Response

- If the person you are contacting appears interested, get a commitment. Ask them to sign an application and dues check off if not a member. If a petition is being used ask them to sign it. Give them a sticker/button if one is being used and ask them to wear it.
- Once you get a commitment invite them to the next union meeting or event. Ask them if they know other workers who would be interested. Ask them if they would talk to them.
- Thank them for their interest and involvement.
- Report back to the committee who signed and any assignments you gave.

- Create a reminder system for yourself (and the committee) to contact the worker again in a week.

Handling A Hostile Response

- If the person being contacted is not interested, ask them why.
- Stress the benefits of collective action.
- If still not interested, thank them for their time and back off. Don't argue.
- Report back to the committee why this member was not interested. Others may have experienced similar responses.

Keep In Touch With Your Organizer, Business Representative or Committee Chair

- Contact him or her if you have any questions or problems.
- Return your applications or petitions as soon as possible after the contact.
- Fill out an Organizing Committee Report Form for each contact.
- Discuss with the committee both positive and negative responses. Brainstorm about ways to improve.

A well-trained committee, which has a good grasp of the issues, clear-cut achievable goals, a timetable, and effective one-on-one communication will be equipped to accomplish their goal.

Union Visibility

While it is important to boost membership through a good membership drive, there are a number of things the union should do on a regular basis to sustain membership over the years. Unless a member has a grievance, he or she may not have any contact with the union. Most people don't come to regular membership meetings. Even though the local's leadership may be doing a great job, many workers will not know about it.

One solution is to create greater visibility for the union in the workplace. The union should have a presence that people can identify with, that goes beyond the adversarial relationship with the boss.

As described below, there are several ways to increase our union's visibility in the workplace.

New Employee Union Orientation

The most successful local unions in all settings have one thing in common: new member orientation. Whenever a worker is newly hired, there should be an automatic procedure for approaching that person and welcoming him or her to the union. There must be a new member kit with orientation materials. A member, whether it's a steward, organizing committee person or new employee committee member, should sit down with the individual and explain the history of the union, the contract, and invite the new employee to join the union.

Members Only Benefits

The fact that non-members receive the same pay and benefits as members is a persistent problem in open shop situations. It is useful to be able to offer our members special benefits that are not available to free riders. The national AFL-CIO's Union Plus Benefit Program has negotiated several benefits such as a low-cost credit card, cell phone discounts, legal services, a travel program, life insurance and others. To get these programs, contact SMART.

In addition, many local unions have negotiated discounts with local merchants, which are available to union members. Many locals offer education reimbursement available only to union members.

Visibility through Union Paraphernalia

In order to increase visibility in the workplace, many local unions produce mugs, t-shirts, hats, bumper stickers and other items that create a sense of identity and pride in the union. Try to have these items designed creatively and colorfully. Make certain that the items are of union-made materials so that the local maintains credibility.

Some of these items can be given to members as rewards for service to the local. Asking members to create a new T-shirt design around a particular issue could also serve as a way to allow members with those skills to become more active. Creating a committee to design and create the local's annual calendar will make the union more visible and get more people involved.

Newsletters and Bulletin Boards

The union newsletter and bulletin boards should be lively, interesting, and fun. Take the opportunity to spotlight personalities. Everyone likes to see their name or their friend's name in the paper. Write about people, their hobbies, birthdays and accomplishments. It's important that the local union publicize its successes. If we don't bow our own horn, nobody's going to blow it for us.

Bulletin boards are a great way to communicate with the members. To keep people interested, it's important to change the information you post often. Bulletin boards could also be a volunteer opportunity for members who might not be able to make a contribution elsewhere.

The key to an effective newsletter or leaflet is to keep it simple, clear, and readable. It's important not to be too wordy or to use jargon that members would not understand. Photos of the organizing committee or other volunteers can be included to recognize their achievements.

People should see the union as something more than just a vehicle for fighting with the employer. Always keep in mind, the union is the members themselves, in all of their many facets.

Community Outreach

Many of our members participate in charitable events, but may not attend local union meetings or rallies. When the local members create or co-sponsor an event, they foster friendships among the members, create good will in the community and make the union more visible.

Different types of activities a local union can sponsor include health fairs, food banks, arts and crafts fairs, walk-a-thons, toy drives and other fundraisers for worthy causes.

It is a good idea to survey your members to find out what community problems they are already involved in. Then contact those individuals in your local who can form the link to community organizations.

It's important to remember that to build the union we need to be visible. Then union needs to be seen as providing a positive contribution to the workplace and the community. **The union is one of the last bastions of social consciousness. We just don't do a very good job of advertising it.**

Follow-Up

- Give specific assignments and stress accountability.
- Tailor the assignments to people's interests, skills, and available time. If you ask someone to do too much or to do something they are not good at, in all likelihood that person will drop out.
- Keep written records of assignments.
- Allow time to critique the project. Discuss what works, what doesn't work, what we can do better. If a committee member is discouraged, another member can

help. “You know, when Sharon asked me about the dues structure, I explained it like this. She signed up the next day.”

- Appreciate each other’s successes. Encourage each other to go back and talk to that fence sitter one more time.
- Keep meetings short and lively. Have them at a convenient time and place. Create a welcoming atmosphere.
- Give recognition for people’s work. Put their name and picture in the local newsletter, make announcements of their achievements at a general meeting, or give certificates at a union event.

Conclusion

A strong local union has the ability to create activities that involve the whole membership in its daily work. Experience has shown that when people understand the issues and feel that they have an important role to play, they will respond and rise to the occasion.

If SMART is to thrive and grow, it will be because we have mobilized and activated the talents and enthusiasm of our members. To do this requires methodical planning and hard work. We hope that this provides some useful ideas to assist you in accomplishing the important task of organizing and mobilizing our membership.