

BUILDING THE LOCAL UNION



*"In unity there
is strength."*

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

The Ohio Postal Workers Union (OPWU) and the APWU National Postal Press Association (PPA) share a concern that apathy is beginning to erode the effectiveness of our union. For example, less than one-third of the membership participated in the last contract ratification vote and less than half our members voted in the previous national elections. Throughout the union, locals are having trouble getting members to attend meetings, become stewards, or even support the decisions made by officers. If this trend were to continue, there is little doubt many locals would be in serious trouble.

Little, if any attention has been given on how to reverse this situation. This manual is the first step towards correcting the most serious problems of apathy and member disillusionment. It is a step by step approach to educate our locals on how to generate membership interest, recruit union volunteers, sign up new members, communicate with all who belong, and how to revitalize meetings of the union.

It is our hope that local and state organizations will be able to use this training to reverse the tide of apathy and generate new interest not only in serving the union, but understanding just what the APWU stands for—and what role every member should play in order to keep us successful & unified.

Both organizations are proud to have been part of this collective effort and we stand ready to assist any local or state organization that desires to be a part of this kind of education.

In solidarity,

Terry Grant

Terry Grant, President
Ohio Postal Workers Union

Tony Carobine

Tony Carobine, President
APWU National Postal Press Association

Building the Local Union

A Preview

What do postal employees most understand about the union? More than likely it is this statement: *"When someone gets into trouble you file a grievance."* While representation, which includes the negotiation process is a vital part of our responsibilities; it has not proven to be the most effective way to involve the greatest percentage of our members.

If the old adage is true that a minority of the membership files a majority of the grievances, how do we best serve the interests of those who don't feel the union has much to offer?

To become a truly effective organization, it is necessary to have the involvement and commitment of the membership. To increase the members' desire to become active in their organization, we must develop ideas and activities to stimulate their interests. We need to transform the union into an organization that offers something for everyone.

Having an active and supportive membership should be the goal of every union. To realize that goal we should develop answers to the following questions:

Is it important to educate current members (and prospective members) about the purpose of unions?

What do you perceive to be the main function of the union?

Do you think involving more members will have a positive or negative affect?

How can we retain current members and attract nonmembers?

Would increased communication between members and officers stimulate more interest?

This conference will explore these questions and provide you with the foundation that you will need to build a stronger and more vibrant local union.

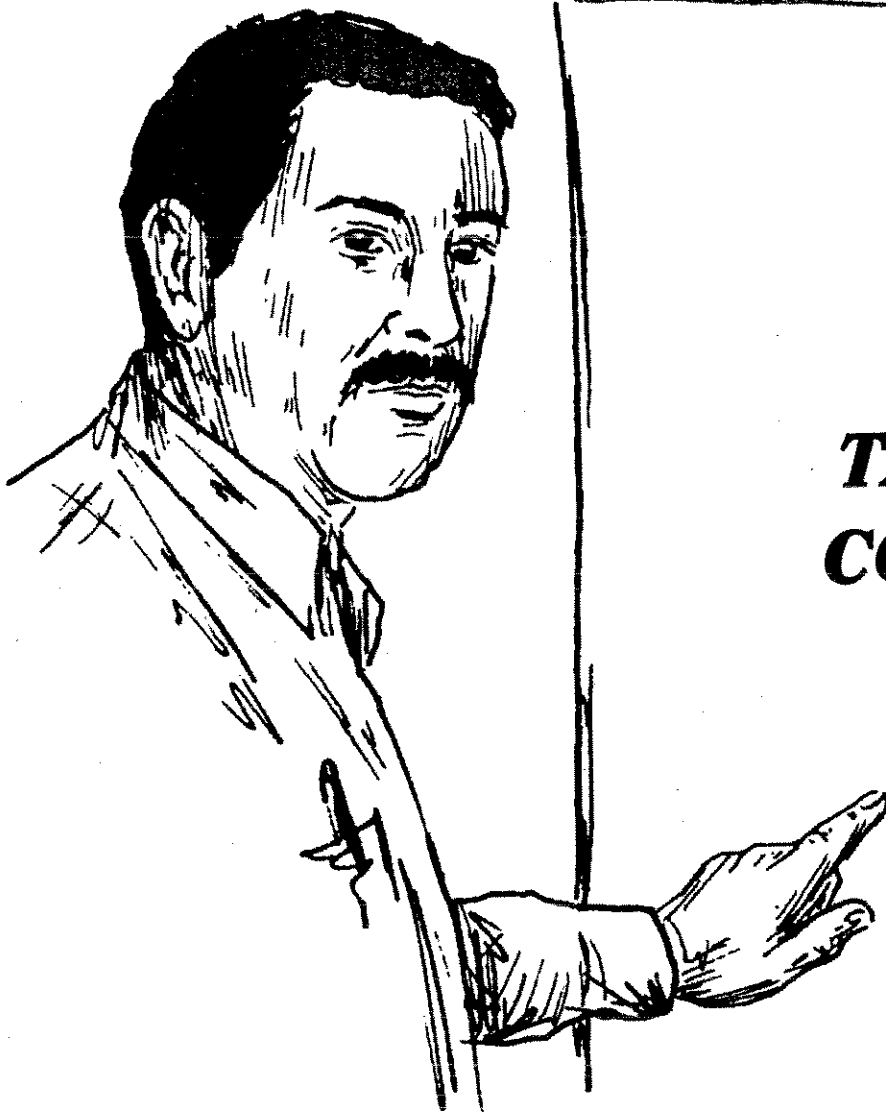


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INTRODUCTION

A tree is only as strong as its roots. Likewise, the labor movement's strength and vigor depend on the commitment and loyalty of members at the local union level. An educated, committed, proud and supportive local union membership is the necessary foundation for contract gains, political and legislative victories, organizing, public relations, and coalition building in local communities.

Studies show many local unions have memberships that:

- **are ethnically and culturally diverse,**
- **live in geographically widespread areas,**
- **are made up of single-parent families or families in which both parents work outside the home,**
- **have a wide range of choices for how to spend whatever free time they manage to find,**
- **have no family history of unionism,**
- **came of age in the "me" generation.**

The task of building a strong, unified union in the workplace has become and will continue to be a considerable challenge. The environments in which members live and work, the demands on their time, the ways in which they get their information have all changed, requiring adaptations in the local union's behavior as well.

This manual will feature a limited number of examples from APWU locals that have been successful in finding ways to build participation, to strengthen communications, and to adapt to the challenges of today's workplace.

Also included is "how to do it" information on planning, new member orientations, local union publications, membership meetings, and other communication tools.

Although many things in the postal service will change, the need for a strong union will remain constant. That strength, as always, depends on the roots. The past, of which we are justly proud, is prologue to the work that will be done together to protect the future for all postal workers.



WHY DO PEOPLE JOIN ORGANIZATIONS, ANYWAY?

For many locals, getting people to join the union may not be a major problem. However, there's "joining" the union, paying the dues, then there's really **joining** the union – identifying with it, feeling loyal to it, taking responsibility for helping it grow.

Although many members join the union, they don't really **join** the union. As a matter of fact, some do the opposite – they become a huge, dead weight on the union by griping and criticizing and undercutting the union. What can we do to win the anti-union union members over? What can we do to improve the prospects of having people actually **join** our local unions?

One way to start is by looking at the reasons why people join any organization – whether it's the union, the Y.M.C.A., A.A.R.P. or a particular church. In each case, they join because they get something they want – a sense of greater meaning in their lives, the companionship of sociable people, or a reduced interest rate on a credit card. The organization provides something which the individual considers valuable. Reasons for joining generally fall into one or two of the following five categories.

1. They believe in the organization's goals.

They're true believers. The organization stands for values they agree with and think are important. They're committed for the long haul, not just for the short term payoff.

2. They are attracted to individuals in the organization.

The leaders or the more visible members of the group are charismatic, attractive people that seem to draw new members to the organization.

3. The organization provides services or benefits.

People join the "Y" because they like to use the pool. People join the automobile club because they want the services. People join A.A.R.P. because they like the discounts.

4. They enjoy socializing with other members.

Although the organization supposedly exists to fulfill some greater purpose, the real reason it keeps going is because it gives people the opportunity to go out to dinner together once a month.

5. The organization satisfies "secondary" goals.

The organization may give members the opportunity to develop leadership skills or to use other talents. Or, simply belonging to the organization may give the member status or recognition.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR UNIONS?

Unions are able to offer members the opportunity to join for any and all of the five reasons listed above. The labor movement stands for certain values and beliefs – the dignity of work, the protection of workers' rights, the importance of a democratic voice in the workplace. Members who understand and appreciate their goals are "true believers" and often the most active and supportive in the local. In addition, unions do provide special services and benefits. We give members the opportunity to socialize with one another. And we provide secondary benefits – the opportunity to use leadership skills or accomplish other personal goals. The more we're aware of the full range of ways people are attracted to organizations, and the more opportunities that are offered in each of those categories, the more successful the local's internal organizing efforts will be.

But why bother with social events or outside activities? Isn't the local's job just to handle grievances?

Members' sense of responsibility towards the organization and towards each other is based in part on a feeling of community or family – a sense of having a lot in common and caring about one another. A social event can strengthen that sense of community. A "community services" type project, although unrelated to collective bargaining or grievances, can educate members and the community alike on fundamental values of the labor movement. Many different types of activities can contribute towards strengthening the local if they're used as opportunities for education and "community" building.



Examples of local union programs that fall into three of the five basic categories:

"SERVICES OR BENEFITS"

Our union is legally obligated to provide negotiation and grievance services to bargaining unit employees, regardless of whether or not they are union members. However, other services, such as scholarship programs, retirement counseling, OWCP guidance, Accident Benefit Association membership and others may be made available only to union members. Local unions can arrange for other members only benefits such as discounts on different types of entertainment, reduced rate credit cards, or other services, which are of interest to union members. Or, unions can find ways to help members meet basic personal needs.

The Ohio Postal Workers Union has developed the King-Valliere Scholarship Program, which in six years has awarded 49 scholarships worth \$24,500 to students who are children of OPWU members. This program was established to honor the memory of two of our union's most dedicated members Willie King and Ted Valliere. The success of this program has encouraged several locals in the state to establish their own scholarships.

"SOCIAL EVENTS"

It's important to remember that different people are motivated to participate by different things. If all members do not attend a social event, that doesn't mean it's a failure. It means the local found a way to build the sense of community of the members who came, the ones who are interested in social events.

Several locals in Ohio sponsor family day picnics with quite significant turnouts. In Columbus, the picnic held at Wyandot Lake Park regularly attracts over 1,000 participants. In Cincinnati, about 2,000 people attend the annual picnic at Coney Island.

In 2000, the OPWU Retirees Association is sponsoring a golf tournament to raise money for COPA. Adult and children's holiday parties, bowling tournaments, card parties, and steward appreciation dinners are some examples of other social events held by locals in Ohio.

"DEVELOP SKILLS OR SATISFY OTHER GOALS"

The union can offer members the chance to express their concerns and interests in a number of different areas. Offering members ways to be active in the life of the union encourages membership participation. In some locals, there may be no roles for those members who don't enjoy conflict in one way or another. The choices are either become a steward or run for union office. Some unions have found ways to offer a wider range of roles.

Each holiday season the Cleveland Area Local is involved in a food basket program that provides several hundred needy families with the essential ingredients for a special holiday dinner.

Other locals are involved in such causes as "America's Walk for Diabetes," Muscular Dystrophy Association telethon, clothing drives, and other community service type programs. This type of activity is often referred to as a "Key Member" program. Members who participate are known as "Key Members." They are encouraged to use the offices of the union to develop these activities of the local union.



LOCAL UNION LEADERSHIP

There are two parts to the job of local union leader. The first involves the day-to-day tasks that come with the job – overseeing the grievance procedure, perhaps negotiating contracts, planning membership meetings, doing the administrative work for the union. The second set of responsibilities – though not formally written down anywhere – are equally important and often neglected. These are the things that are done to maintain and strengthen the organization.

Job Description of Local Leader

“Task” Activities

- Handling grievances
- Negotiating Contracts
- Lobbying
- Planning Membership Meetings

“Union-Building” Activities

- Keeping Members Informed
- Educating New Members
- Recruiting Volunteers
- Developing Opportunities for Member Participation

A leader can negotiate the best contract in the world, make sure the members’ grievances are handled properly, run the local like a well-oiled machine, and still end up with a weak organization if members aren’t aware of what the union does and feel no particular loyalty or willingness to work for the union. Education and communication are key to building a strong organization.

“Task” activities and “union-building” activities shouldn’t be thought of as separate from one another. Tasks, like negotiating, can be used to build a stronger union. For example, the local union leader may be the best spokesperson at the bargaining table, but may decide to let another member speak to a particular issue because developing confidence and responsibility among secondary leadership is important for the long term health of the union. Strengthening the organization can be part of every choice the leader makes.

WHAT'S THE BEST LEADERSHIP STYLE?

The answer is . . . "it depends." There are two extreme types of leadership style. In the first, the leader controls everything . . . makes all the decisions . . . has all the power. This style, we'll call "directive" because the leader directs everything. There's not much for anyone else to do except show up.

The second style is the exact opposite of the first. The leader may be the one who starts the ball rolling, but decisions are made by the group. The leader spreads his or her power around . . . gives committees the opportunity to develop and control their own agendas . . . listens to the members and follows their wishes. This style, we'll call "participative" because everyone participates in directing the organization.

Most leaders fall somewhere between the two extremes. It's important to understand there is no "one right style" for every organization and every situation. There are good things associated with the "participative" style and there are problems with it. There are advantages to the "directive" style and there are drawbacks. What's important is knowing the costs and benefits that are likely to result from one style or the other.

Directive Leadership

- Description:** – One leader makes the decisions, sets the agenda, runs the local.
- Benefits:**
- Decisions are made quickly.
 - If the person in charge is also the most competent person in the organization, then directive leadership may be the most efficient way to run the organization.
 - The leader may have ideas that aren't particularly popular, but are in the best interests of the organization.
- Costs:**
- People don't feel part of organization.
 - Limited understanding of and support for leader's goals.
 - Political factions may develop.
 - Members have no role, become apathetic.

Participative Leadership

- Description:** – Members make decisions, play an active part in running the local.
- Benefits:**
- Members feel responsible for success of plans which they participate in developing.
 - Members understand what the union does, how it works because they're part of it.
 - Members more interested in projects over which they have some control.
- Costs:**
- Democratic process can be very slow.
 - Decision may not be the best or most efficient.
 - Goals are limited by members' expertise, imagination, skills.

As you can see – there is no "right" or "wrong" style, there are simple styles that are better or worse depending on the goal. If the goal is to make people feel more a part of the union, then a participative style

might be advisable which means trying to find ways to delegate responsibility, to get more people involved in decision-making, to ask the members' opinions before actions are taken. A participative style will increase member involvement, but requires both patience and work.

Some leaders end up as "directive" by default — because no one's around to help make decisions, no one wants the responsibility of a more active role in the union. If that's the case, don't give up. Through patience, perseverance, and hard work it is possible to turn that situation around.



THE ROLE OF THE STEWARD

The steward structure is the backbone of the local. Research on why members do or don't feel loyal towards the union indicates the skill and availability of stewards have a strong effect on member attitudes.

The traditional role of the steward has been to handle grievances. However, the good steward serves as much more than just the members' advocate in the grievance procedure.

The effect of steward behavior on member attitudes was the subject of a research study that compared "high participation" locals – locals with an active, involved membership – with "low participation" locals – locals whose members were generally apathetic. The stewards in the "high participation" locals did four things that seemed to make a difference in members' attitudes.

- *They handled grievances efficiently.*
- *They told the members what was going on in the local instead of scolding them for not coming to meetings.*
- *They asked the members for their opinions about union issues.*
- *They related to members in a friendly, personal way.*

In other words – steady, consistent, personal two-way communication made the difference in whether or not people felt they were part of the union.

STEWARD TRAINING

The education of stewards is an investment in the local's future – whether the union is following the traditional model of having the stewards primarily handle grievances, or adopting the alternative model of

steward as organizer, or blending the two which is probably most likely. To handle grievances, stewards need to know the contract and how to communicate effectively.

Whatever the role of the steward in your union, education is essential, as is the opportunity for stewards to get together and compare problems and solutions, and regular ways to reward and recognize the contributions of stewards.



LOCAL UNION COMMITTEES

Most local unions have some standing committees that are mandated by their constitution. These might include committees on finance, safety and health, political action, family issues, civil rights, or education. In addition to the standing committees, special or temporary committees might be set up to carry out a particular task (plan a party, run a charity fund drive) or around an immediate, short term issue. Committees, like coalitions, can be formed and dissolved as the need arises. The clear advantages of committee structures are that tasks can be divided up so they aren't so difficult to do, and that more union members have the opportunity to become involved in activities.

Some principles for effective committees:

1. Committees need a **Chairperson**, serving either on a permanent or rotating basis, and a **Secretary** to take notes, again either permanent or rotating.
2. Each individual on the committee should be given responsibility for a specific task. Tailor assignments to people's interests, skills and time.
3. If possible, set a regular date and time for committee meetings.
4. Keep meetings short and well-organized.
5. Give recognition for achievements.

COMMITTEES ON POLITICS AND LEGISLATION

Many members are unfortunately unaware of the fundamental connection between labor's strength and

political action at every level of the union. Political education, voter registration and "get out the vote" activities are therefore an important part of the day-to-day work as well as the "union building" work of the local. For example, some locals hold voter registration drives which raise the percentage of members who register to vote.

A voter registration drive requires only a few simple steps, depending on the size of the local:

- Get a list of unregistered members and those whose registration status is unknown from the APWU Legislative Department.
- Divide up the list among volunteers.
- Get voter registration forms from the local election board, secretary of state, on-line, etc.
- Arm the volunteers with forms, list, pens and set them loose.

There can be a secondary benefit to the drive. If the members see how seriously the officers take voter registration and politics in general, perhaps they'll become more involved in the issues themselves.

A more detailed outline of various registration procedures is available from the APWU or your state AFL-CIO.



PLANNING FOR LOCAL UNIONS

Why bother planning? Most locals are busy enough just keeping up with what comes through the door. Why plan extra things? Who has time? Who has enough people?

The answer to "why bother planning?" is a simple one. Planning is the only way local unions and executive boards can get control over who they are and what they do. If an organization doesn't plan its own agenda, if there isn't a clear idea of what the goals are and how to achieve them, then the organization spends all its time reacting.

A second advantage of planning is that if the local sets achievable, short-term goals that matter to members, it's easier to get them involved in helping with the activity. If they understand how what they're doing fits into the whole plan . . . if there are timetables, so you're not asking them for an indefinite, endless commitment . . . and if you actually get results, members will be more willing to become active.

Finally, when you plan, you're demonstrating to members that the local is a vital, active organization that can really accomplish things.

One easy format to follow for planning:

Step One: Set Long Term Objectives.

Picture your local three years from now. How would you like it to be different than it is today?

The executive board and local officers (and as many other people as might be appropriate), begin by drawing up a list of long-term objectives for the union. They could be things like "improving the local's image in the community," "signing up 100% of potential members," "settling all grievances at first step." What would leaders like to achieve?

Narrow it down to no more than five or six long term objectives. These are not the immediate goals. These are the areas in which the local should begin work.

Step Two: Translate the long-term objectives into short-term goals which are specific, measurable, and achievable.

For example:

- If a long term objective is "to improve the local's image," the goal might be "to receive positive press coverage for two activities within the next three months."
- If the long term objective is "to increase participation," the goal might be "to recruit 10 more people to serve on union committees."
- If the long term objective is "to sign up more members," the goal might be "to sign up 30 new members within the next month."

In other words, the difference between an objective and a goal is that an objective is a kind of long-term, idealistic vision of what should be accomplished; a goal is the short term step that needs to be taken to get there.

Again, with the executive board and whoever else is included, try to come up with a number of achievable, measurable short-term goals that would lead towards accomplishing the long-term objectives.

Step Three: Set priorities.

This is the point when the choice is made as to which goal to work on first. Some of the criteria used in making your choice:

- What are the unions' resources in terms of money, people and time? Are any of the plans impossible or particularly difficult given current resources?
- What's most important to the union? Which of the goals are most urgent? Which of the goals will do the most good?
- Which of the goals are most likely to succeed. **Begin with a victory, if possible.** Choose the goal that seems easiest to achieve, especially if you're just starting out in the process.

Step Four: Develop an ACTION PLAN.

An **ACTION PLAN** is the road map for achieving each goal. This is the key step between planning and doing. The components of an **ACTION PLAN** are:

1. **WHAT** – List all the different things that need to be done, step by step.
2. **WHEN** – Develop a timetable with specific dates for achieving each task. You may want to draw up a planning calendar to keep track of the dates.
3. **WHO** – Assign someone to be responsible for getting each particular task done on time, and keep a record for accountability.

Other considerations may be:

WHERE — What's the most advantageous location for meetings or events.

HOW — Are there other available resources (e.g., coalition allies, materials from other sources, activists elsewhere in the community) that might be helpful?

Step Five: Meet regularly to review progress.

Schedule regular meetings for accountability. Is everyone doing what they're supposed to be doing? Who needs help? How are things going?

Step Six: Evaluate success or failure. Set new goals.

At the end of the allotted time, everyone should get back together and evaluate whether or not the plan was successful. If it wasn't, what was the problem? Was the goal too ambitious? Or was the plan not detailed enough?

Go back to the beginning and look at some of the other goals. Which of them should be attempted now?

In every organization, in every area of life, the ability to plan is the first prerequisite for success. It's possible to accomplish things without planning, but the process is chaotic and uncontrolled and no fun. By setting goals, the membership gets a sense of activity and forward motion . . . a sense of control and strength. The union develops an offense as well as a defense.

REMEMBER . . .

BE REALISTIC. Set reasonable timetables. Start with something that's doable.

The following is an example of goal setting and getting more people involved in the union:

A local's leadership first brainstormed twenty objectives they'd like to accomplish, then rank-ordered those objectives to determine which were most important. They picked six areas to work on immediately, including political action, communications, new member orientations, education, and others. Long-term and short-term goals were set for those six objectives. Committees were then formed to work on achieving the goals. Members of the executive board were assigned to each committee and given the task of recruiting additional volunteers. Two and a half years later, most of the goals have been met and several exceeded.

SAMPLE ACTION PLAN

Goal: Sign up 50 new members

Task	Deadline	Person Responsible
1. Get list of non-members	April 20	Carmen & Jack
2. Target 100 non-members to contact by June 1st	April 22	Committee
3. Design leaflet to give to non-members	April 28	Lydia, Frank, and Louise
4. Recruit 10-15 volunteers to make contacts	April 29	Executive Board
5. Print Leaflet	May 5	Lydia, Frank & Louise
6. Hold training session for volunteers and give assignments	May 10	John in charge
7. Begin campaign	May 12	
8. Hold meeting to check on progress	May 19	John in charge
9. Hold thank you party for volunteers	May 29	Elise + committee

Goal:

[illegible]



RECRUITING UNION VOLUNTEERS

Nobody has enough time anymore. Gone are the days when families sat down, all at the same time, and enjoyed a relaxing evening meal, then spent the evening watching TV together. Nowadays, everything happens on the fly. Between the demands of work and family, the average member may feel stretched to the limit and not eager to add another thing to his or her schedule.

On the other hand, there appears to be a high amount of volunteerism in general in the United States. Research indicates that as many as one out of every two adult Americans work as volunteers in not-for-profit organizations. With so many organizations and causes that need help, how do volunteers choose where to donate their limited time? Unions can learn from other organizations which have studied this question. Some of the factors that seem to influence that decision:

- **The goals and mission of the organization must be clear and relevant.**

Volunteers must believe in the purpose and mission of the organization. The organization must clearly and frequently communicate that mission to its volunteers.

- **The organization must have successes from time to time.**

Volunteers must feel they are contributing their time and talent to an organization that will make a difference.

- **The organization must be well managed.** People must be assured their time and resources are being used effectively and efficiently. The organization must have clearly defined roles, responsibilities and communication channels.

- **The organization should offer the opportunity for individual empowerment.** Many of us work in organizations that are so large, our individual voice doesn't seem to make a difference. We may want to volunteer for an organization where we can help in decision

making. (Don't force people to be part of decision-making if they don't want to be, however. Many members, after exhausting days at work, only want to stuff envelopes, they don't want to be responsible for heavy decisions.)

- **The organization must demand accountability.** Expectations for each volunteer should be clearly communicated and volunteers should be held accountable. At the same time, appropriate recognition should be given when expectations are met.

- **The organization should provide training where necessary.**

People can't work effectively without the proper tools and training.

Those are the characteristics of organizations that attract volunteers. Why does the individual choose to volunteer to begin with? What does the individual get from volunteering? Some of the factors that commonly motivate individuals are:

- **Achievement** — Doing something you can take pride in, making a worthwhile contribution.

- **Acquisition** — Money or other tangible rewards.

- **Affiliation** — Being with other people, feeling accepted by the group.

- **Creativity** — The opportunity to use talents in new and useful ways.

- **Power** — The ability to influence people and events, to control resources.

- **Recognition** — Receiving praise or attention from others.

- **Service** — Desire to help others.

Different people are motivated by different combinations of these factors. What motivates one won't be the same as what motivates another. For people motivated by achievement or service, it's important to tell them why what they're doing is important. People who are motivated by power might be put in charge of one part of the project. People who are motivated by creativity should be given an interesting problem to solve. Because it's difficult to try to figure out what motivates each individual, it might be wise to write up job descriptions for each of the tasks that need to be done and let people choose what seems most interesting to them. Examples of the kind of "job descriptions" you might consider are included under the **New Member Orientation** section of this manual.

In general, there are a few things to remember in recruiting . . .

1. **Ask members in person.** Talking face to face is far more effective than any other form of communication.

2. **Ask them to do a job that has a definite beginning and end.** *This is perhaps the most important rule.* Don't require too much from members. If they know the job is small and won't require a lot of time and effort, they might consider helping.

3. **Give members a range of jobs from which to choose.** Again, see the "Help Wanted" section of the New Member Orientation Materials.

4. Ask members to do things they do well. Volunteers are more willing to do things they know they can handle.

5. Tell each person how his/her job fits in with the rest. Volunteers want to understand how the whole project is going to work and how their part will contribute.

6. Encourage questions if members don't understand something.

7. Keep volunteers accountable. Check back to see if and how the member is doing with the assignment. This sends the message that the work is important and helps to catch mistakes early.

8. Explain how the project will help make the union stronger. Be enthusiastic about the importance of the work. People want to know they'll make a difference.

Before beginning recruiting, try to imagine the "yeah . . . but" responses members will come up with . . . the reasons why they might say no. Try to prepare a few standard responses for the predictable "yeah . . . buts." Keep a light touch and a pleasant manner for recruiting. Guilt is a powerful motivator and you can no doubt round up a number of people by making them feel guilty about not helping out with the local. But if they're sullen and resentful and angry about being trapped into volunteering, their attitude will rub off on others, the experience won't be much fun for anyone, and they'll probably never volunteer again.

HOW DO WE KEEP PEOPLE MOTIVATED OVER TIME?

Three things that volunteers need in order to stay motivated:

INCLUSION — A sense of being part of what's going on, of being included in the group, of not being an outsider.

CONTROL — Ability to control the pace of work; to have some influence in decision-making, at least over their own task.

APPRECIATION — Some recognition for their efforts and activities.

In order to foster a sense of inclusion, make sure everyone knows what's going on . . . ask for members' ideas and opinions . . . have meetings of the entire committee. It may take a bit longer to get the job done, but members will feel more a part of the group and may be more willing to volunteer again.

Allow volunteers some control over how they do their work. Give them a task and let them work out how they want to do it. Supervise through helpful attention, but don't look over people's shoulders all the time, insisting they do things one particular way.

Volunteers need to get some reward for volunteering . . . some token of appreciation and thanks. Ways to express appreciation might include:

- personal thank you notes
- public recognition at meetings
- mention and photo in the newsletter
- framed certificate of appreciation

- opportunity to attend training programs or conferences
- plaques

How do things happen in your local? Do the volunteer activities offer members a sense of inclusion in the group? Do they have some control over their activities? Is the organization's appreciation expressed? These things don't just happen automatically.

Time and attention have to be devoted to making them happen. If not, members might volunteer once, but won't keep coming back.

A final, common-sense recommendation for making sure members are willing to keep volunteering is to try to have fun in the course of doing the activity. The opportunity for fun is a strong motivator and reward for many people. Even if the job is serious, there's no reason not to have a good time doing it.

Several years ago, the Canton Area Local had a problem with getting their monthly newspaper published and mailed to their members prior to the regularly scheduled union meeting. The local president went to a group of members on the midnight shift and asked if they would be willing to go to the union hall the week before the meeting to help with preparing the paper for mailing. The reward for their assistance would be pizza and refreshments after the paper was completed. At first, only one or two members would show up. Gradually the numbers increased until this group became known as the "Canton Paper Crew." Now up to ten members each month visit the union office and help with the paper. At every union meeting the local president thanks these members by name and in each issue of the paper the crew is listed and thanked for their efforts. This activity has brought members together, solved a problem of the local and created an atmosphere of camaraderie.



COMMUNICATION IN THE LOCAL

There's usually plenty of participation and interest in the local around contract or election time, but what can we do on a day-to-day basis that might shape members' attitudes towards the union? There are a number of factors that influence members' loyalty to the union and their willingness to participate. Some, like the quality of the labor-management relationship or the effectiveness of the grievance procedure, depend partly on management's attitude. But, three factors which have been shown to be important in shaping members' attitudes are pretty much within the union's control. They are:

- (1) the skill and availability of stewards;**
- (2) the amount of information the member has about the contract and**
- (3) "positive personal contacts with the union during the first year of employment."**

Because of that third factor, a new member orientation program is an important part of any local's communication program. Other activities, such as on-site meetings, local union committees, and local union publications also increase members' sense of connection with the organization.

MEETING THE NEW MEMBER

Members' attitudes about the union are formed during their first year of employment. Once those attitudes have been formed, they are difficult to change. If new members go six months without ever meeting their stewards (*at the same time that dues are being subtracted from their checks*), it's likely they will develop a less-than-positive attitude about the organization.

Research shows that members who had "positive personal contacts" with the union — being personally invited to attend a union meeting, having the steward introduce himself or herself and explain some part of the

contract — had a stronger sense of loyalty and commitment to the union. To the new member, the union may seem like a private club where everybody's known each other for years, which can be pretty intimidating. It's easier for new members to become interested in the local if someone personally invites them into the group.

When someone first starts a new job he or she is likely to feel a little lost and disoriented. They'll never forget the first person who tries to make them feel comfortable. If that person is someone from the union, those good feelings will transfer to the union as well.

In order to make sure that new members know who the union officers are, some locals take pictures of all the officers and stewards and put them up on the union bulletin board.



NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION

One of the best ways to ensure "positive personal contact" with the new member is to set up a systematic new member orientation program. There are basically three ways to do a new member orientation . . .

- use the time for the union in management's new employee orientation session,
- invite the new members to a meeting of the union,
- do the orientation one-on-one. The steward or another member talks to the new employee at the workplace or at lunch.

Giving people handouts and other written materials that describe how the union works is much better than doing nothing . . . but is not nearly as good as face-to-face contact.

Remember when you started at the post office? Remember all the paper work you got from management and the union – pamphlets explaining benefits, rules and regulations, etc. How much of that stuff did you actually read? No matter how good the written materials are, they don't do the job unless people bother to read them. Introducing the new member to the union is too important a task to be left to chance.

If the local decides to do a group orientation, there are some decisions that need to be made . . .

Who Should Do the Orientation?

We tend to trust and believe in people whom we perceive as like ourselves. We want to join organizations made up of people with whom we feel comfortable. The local leadership should be part of the orientation process, but a real effort should be made to match up representatives of the union with the group being

oriented. If most of the new members are young, then young people from the local should be part of explaining what the union does. If the group is largely women, then women should be standing up at the front. If many of the new members are minority, then minority members should be involved in the orientation.

What Should Be Covered?

At the end of this section is a sample format for a one-hour new member orientation program. Information about the contract provisions likely to be of most interest to new members – wages, vacations, etc. – should be included, as well as the differences between a union and nonunion workplace so that the new people – many of whom may never have worked in a union workplace – become familiar with their rights.

What's Most Important to Young Workers?

Short term disposable income, (in other words, money), continues to be the primary issue for most of today's young workers. The financial advantages of working in a union environment should therefore be of obvious interest to them.

A study prepared by the Wilson Center for Public Research elaborated another key theme that should be stressed in talking with younger workers –

“Young workers tend to have a very exaggerated view of workplace protections provided by law. This myth should be debunked. Specifically, young workers and particularly those who have not yet entered the workforce, strongly believe that employers must:

- a) have “just cause” for discharge*
- b) provide paid holidays and vacations*
- c) layoff on the basis of seniority*
- d) pay overtime on a daily rather than weekly basis*
- e) provide the same benefits to all employees*

In other words, they often assume that protections only afforded under a union contract are appropriate and already guaranteed by law. A message like, “Did you know that your employer doesn't have to ____.” is important to include with this group.

A Caution –

Don't assume that new members see management as “the enemy.” They just started the job; they haven't had the opportunity to get mad at anyone yet. An overly hostile or cynical attitude towards management may well backfire against the union. Ideally, the local could hold a second, follow-up orientation meeting, maybe a year after the new employees start, when they have had enough experience to really apply the information to their work situation.

What if Group Orientations Aren't Feasible?

If the local doesn't get that many new members at one time, or if there's no way to get them all together in one place – it may be advisable to train stewards to do brief one-on-one orientations at lunch or at break.

Stewards are cautioned to remember that what they talk about is not as important as the attitude they are showing: they should demonstrate by their attitude that the new worker is accepted and welcomed and the union cares about what happens to him or her.

What's the New Workforce Going to be Like?

The current workforce is considerably more diverse than it was 10 or 15 years ago. Projections indicate that diversity will continue to grow. Sixty-four percent of new workers between the years 1985-2000 were women. Twenty-two percent of new workers were immigrants. Twenty percent were American-born minorities. There are cultural differences that make it increasingly difficult to blend this disparate group into a community.

Union activities which include programs and discussions that allow members to get to know each other personally – sharing their concerns about their families, talking about their preferred recreational activities – may encourage people to see past surface differences to the basic things they have in common. Once people start talking about their hopes for their children, or how much they enjoy getting away and spending time fishing, their differences seem to melt away. Recruiting stewards and other union representatives from the various groups will also help with cultural and language difficulties.

NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION SAMPLE OUTLINE

1. Introduce yourself, explain purpose of meeting (2 minutes)

"For some of you, this may be the first time you've ever been in a union. You may have some questions about what we do and who we are. For the next hour or so, we're going to explain what we do, what your role is in the union, and give you the opportunity to ask whatever questions you might have."

2. Icebreaker – group introductions (10 minutes)

Go around the room, ask each person to introduce themselves – Tell whether or not they've ever been in a union before. If so, where? – Tell us something about themselves, like what they do for recreation . . . if they have any hobbies.

3. Differences between union and nonunion (15 minutes)

"Okay, a lot of you have never been in a union before. We'll start by explaining the differences between union and nonunion jobs." Go over the handouts - ***Differences between Union and Nonunion Workplace and the "At-Will Agreement"***. If you prefer, you can ask them what they think the differences are . . . or try to get a discussion going on what they think their rights are in a nonunion workplace.

4. Question and Answer – 10 minutes

"Does anybody have any questions?"

It's unlikely there'll be many questions. You may want to take this opportunity to counter any negative impressions they may have about unions.

5. Negotiations (10 minutes)

Pass out a copy of the contract. Go over one or two of the provisions. Explain briefly how the negotiations process works.

6. Grievances (10 minutes)

Explain how the grievance procedure works – if they are disciplined unfairly or if the contract is violated, they should contact their steward. The steward will try to fix the problem. If he or she can't, it'll move up the steps. Briefly explain the steps.

Tell them that not everything is a grievance. Some things are merely problems that can't be addressed under the grievance procedure. The local will do its best to help solve them anyway.

7. What Unions Stand For (5 minutes)

Go over the handout – *What Unions Stand For* – or explain it in your own words.

8. Structure and Opportunities for Participation (10 minutes)

You are a member of Local _____. Officers are _____ and are elected every _____ years. The local is a member of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU). The APWU is a member of the AFL-CIO which is an organization of unions.

Go over the committees, etc. in the local which they could join. Use something like the *Help Wanted* handout to let them know opportunities for participation.

Keep the orientation as short as possible. Omit anything which you don't feel is important for your members.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN UNION AND NONUNION WORKPLACES

UNION

You have a voice in wages, benefits, working conditions.

Your wages, benefits, etc. are protected by legal contract.

If you're disciplined, management has to follow steps.

If you're disciplined, the union will defend you.

If you do a good job and are in line for a promotion, you'll get it.

You have a voice.

NONUNION

Management gives you what they want to give you.

Management can change wages, benefits, etc. whenever they want.

If you're disciplined, you have no due process rights.

If you're disciplined, you're on your own.

Promotions may depend on whether or not the supervisor likes you.

Management doesn't have to listen to you.

AT-WILL STATUS OF EMPLOYMENT

The employee understands that the nature of the employment relationship is "at will". This means that at the sole discretion of either _____ or the employee, the relationship may be terminated.

Personnel practices, including the right to hire, transfer, suspend or discharge, to relieve employees from duty and to maintain discipline and efficiency of employees, rests exclusively in the sole discretion of the employer. The employer may introduce new administrative methods and job requirements as changing needs indicate.

Nothing in the employee manual operates to change the status of the employee from "at will" to any other status.

All disciplinary provisions in this manual are advisory. _____ expressly reserves the right to terminate any employee at the sole discretion of _____.

Any representations that change the employee status from an at-will employment status must be in writing and signed by the executive director of the organization. Any other purported changes in the at-will nature of the employment arrangement are without any effect. Employee acknowledges and certifies that no oral statements or promises of employment beyond the at-will policy of _____ were made prior to, or relied upon by the employee prior to hire.

I _____, have read and understand the above, and have received a copy of the _____ employee manual.

DATE _____

SIGNATURE _____

WHAT UNIONS STAND FOR

DIGNITY.

The presence of a union means that workers must be treated fairly and with respect. They have the right to be consulted and have a voice in the determination of wages, hours, and working conditions.

POWER.

An individual worker has very little power, almost no way to improve his or her benefits or working conditions. If we stand together, we have enough collective power to make a difference.

PROTECTION.

Without a union, there is no system of law or due process at the workplace. You can be disciplined or discharged with no right to a fair hearing. There is no one to stand up for your rights.

HELP WANTED

STEWARDS — It's not an easy job, but if you're the kind of person who enjoys responsibility, likes to solve problems and help people, and cares about fairness and justice, this is a good job for you. A combination lawyer, police officer, and social worker. Takes time and energy, but is rewarding.

WRITERS, PHOTOGRAPHERS, CARTOONISTS — We need help in putting out the local newsletter. Most of the stories are about workplace issues or what's going on in the local, but if you're interested in other things — outdoor recreation, sports, movies, cooking — and would like to write about them, let us know. Same thing goes for photographs, cartoons, drawings.

PEOPLE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN SAFETY AND HEALTH ISSUES — The local has a Safety and Health Committee that collects information on workplace problems and works with management to correct them. Also, the committee helps to put together contract proposals on safety and health issues.

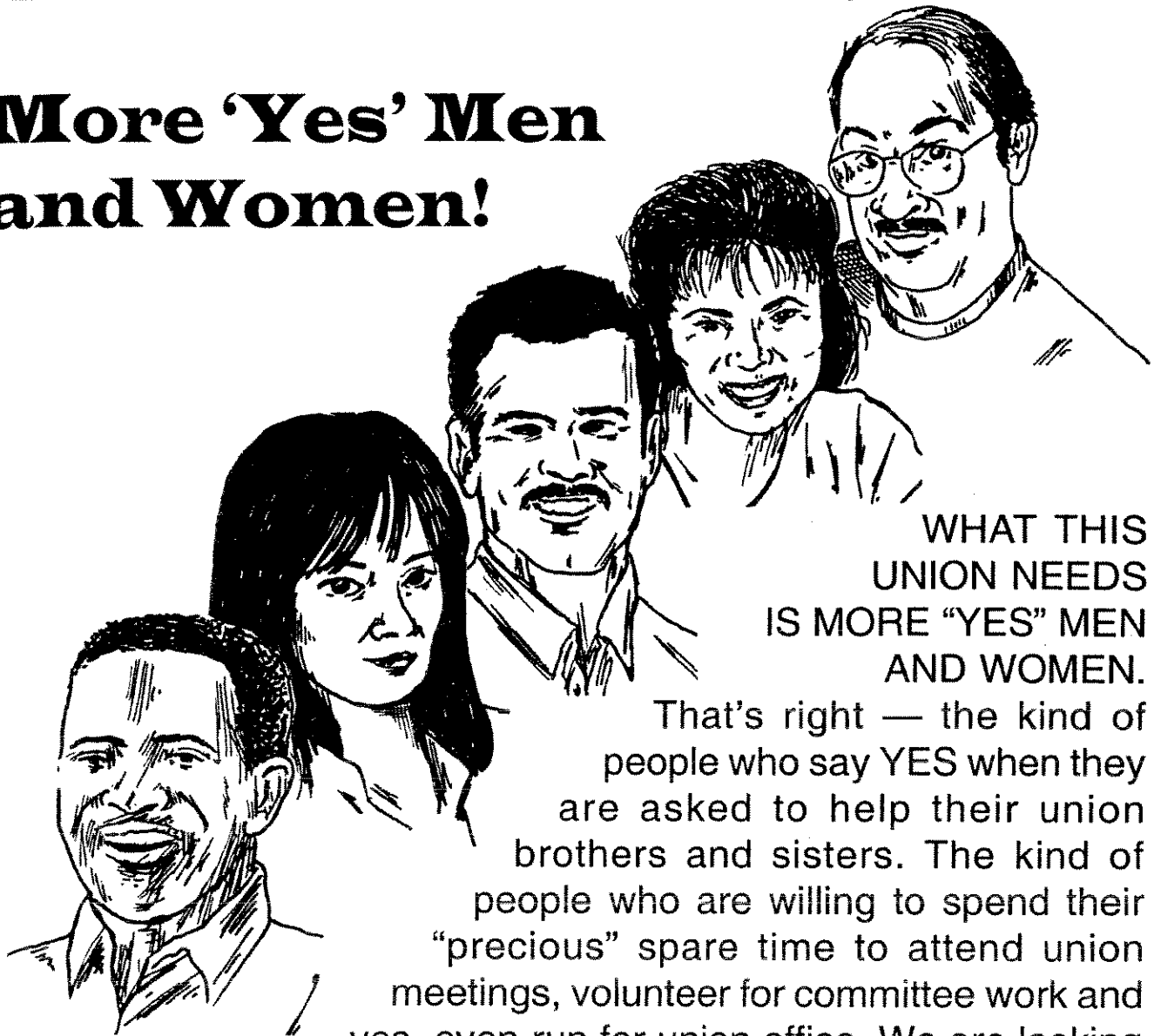
PEOPLE WHO ARE INTERESTED IN POLITICS — We need help in lobbying our legislators, in planning voter registration campaigns, in getting out the vote on Election Day. Political action is an important part of the local's activity.

PEOPLE WHO LIKE TO PLAN SOCIAL EVENTS — The local has a Social Activities Committee which plans events like a summer picnic and holiday party. If you'd like to get involved, or if you have ideas for other types of get-togethers, let us know.

BOWLERS — The local has a bowling team that competes in a winter league.

WANTED:

More 'Yes' Men and Women!



WHAT THIS
UNION NEEDS
IS MORE "YES" MEN
AND WOMEN.

That's right — the kind of people who say YES when they are asked to help their union brothers and sisters. The kind of people who are willing to spend their "precious" spare time to attend union meetings, volunteer for committee work and yes, even run for union office. We are looking for the kind of people who say "yes" when they are asked to serve on the election committee, the picnic committee, or be more active in the work YOUR UNION is doing on behalf of YOU the member.

Even a *small* yes would be appreciated.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, COME TO THE UNION MEETING, OR TALK TO YOUR
LOCAL UNION REPRESENTATIVE





MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Why has the local scheduled a membership meeting? If the only answer is “because we had one last month,” there’s trouble already. Members have too many demands on them and too many choices of ways to spend their time to bother coming to a meeting for no clear reason. In order to get people to attend a meeting, the local needs to plan an agenda that will attract members’ interest and circulate information about what’s going to be on the agenda.

Also, members are unlikely to show up for a meeting just to fill out the crowd or to rubber stamp decisions that have already been made. (*“If I’m not going to participate actively in the content of the meeting . . . if there are no decisions that you need my opinion on, then why would I bother coming?”*) Ideally, the meeting should require action of some sort from the participants, should have some questions that the members need to decide.

PLANNING THE MEETING

Meetings don’t always have to follow the same format. Some suggested formats may include:

- **Presentation** — having a speaker on a specific topic.
- **Workshop** — the members learn a new skill.
- **Problem solving** — present a problem and enlist members’ suggestions on how to solve it.
- **Debate** — Presentation and discussion on opposite sides of an issue.
- **Research** — People bring in information to share and compare on a particular subject.
- **Party** — Celebration of some event or “thank you” for work done.

This format may not fit every issue or be appropriate for every meeting, but it might provide a good break from a routine agenda, as well as offering a greater opportunity for member participation.

DRAWING UP AN AGENDA

Once the topics and the format for the meeting have been decided, prepare and circulate an agenda three-five days in advance of the meeting. If the agenda goes out too early, it may be forgotten or lost. If it's too late, members won't have a chance to think about the topic, or to make logistical arrangements, (like childcare) to allow them to come.

If there is something important to discuss, it may be wise to devote the whole meeting to it, rather than try to crowd too many items onto the agenda. People don't like long meetings. They're tiring and often boring. If members come to one meeting and it's endless, they'll never come back.

Put an ending time on the agenda and stick to it. Many members won't be willing to come to something that's open-ended because they're afraid it'll take up their whole evening. They might, however, be willing to come to a meeting they're sure will take only an hour or an hour and a half.

SETTING UP THE ROOM

This may not be something you think about a lot, but the way the tables and chairs are arranged in a room will affect members' willingness to participate in the discussion. If people are seated in a circle or U-shaped arrangement, they can look at and talk to one another more easily. It's the kind of arrangement that makes participation easier for most people. Also, it makes the meeting seem less formal and more comfortable.

CHILDCARE

It may be that parents welcome the opportunity to come to a meeting in order to get away from their children for a few hours. However, given the increase in single-parent families and other demands on the family, the unavailability of childcare will make it impossible for many members to attend meetings. Perhaps the local could solicit donations of toys and books, and ask someone – maybe a retiree from the local – to watch the children in a separate room for the length of the meeting.

OTHER ARRANGEMENTS

Are there name tags so new people can get to know each other? Will refreshments be available? Are there directions to the meeting room? Pencils and paper for note taking?

THE MEETING ITSELF

Start on time:

Punctuality signals that the officers running the meeting mean business, that the agenda will be followed, that members' time is respected.

Introduce officers and others:

Even if there are only one or two new people there, they should be made to feel comfortable and included; treated with the same respect as the people who show up for every meeting.

Stick to the Agenda:

First, go over the agenda so members will know what's going to be discussed. Once the meeting is started – focus on one topic at a time, don't allow members to jump ahead or to continue talking about something that's already been decided. Don't move onto a new topic until there is some resolution or agreement on what to do about the current topic.

Knowing when and how to move the agenda along is an important talent. Members should be allowed to talk long enough to make sure that all objections and ideas have been aired. But, letting the discussion ramble on indefinitely – particularly when members begin repeating themselves or making speeches – can result in a meeting that seems like endless torture. After all the points appear to have been made, it is appropriate (and desirable) for the leader to summarize the discussion and call for some action.

End the Meeting:

Review the decisions reached and assignments made during the course of the meeting. Set the date for the next meeting. Then end on time. If the agenda isn't finished by the time the meeting is supposed to end, ask the members if they want to add a specific amount of time to the meeting (fifteen minutes . . . half an hour) or if they would prefer the items be held over until the next meeting.



AN AGENDA THAT NEEDS WORK:

LOCAL XXX COPA COMMITTEE

JULY 1

7:00 PM

AGENDA

1. Call to Order, minutes
2. Introductions
3. Reports
4. Old Business
5. New Business
6. Announcements
7. Adjourn

A BETTER WAY:

LOCAL XXX COPA COMMITTEE MEETING
THURSDAY, JULY 1
7:00-8:50 PM

Local XXX Meeting Hall
1234 Union Avenue
Any City State

For more information, contact: Jane Union 555-1234

AGENDA

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 7:00 PM | Opening of the Meeting
Introductions of Committee and Union Officers
Overview of Agenda
Minutes of Last Meeting |
| 7:15-7:45 | Introduction of Congressperson X who will speak on issues of concern to our members |
| 7:45-8:00 | Questions and Answers |
| 8:00-8:30 | Reports:
Voter Registration Subcommittee
-Mike Martin reporting on list of unregistered members
Lobbying Subcommittee
-Marshall Smith reporting on plans for next month's trip to state capitol |
| 8:30-8:45 | Decisions to be made:
-How do we approach the unregistered members?
-What should our top three local legislative issues be for the next year?
-How can we recruit more people to go to the capitol? |
| 8:45 | Date of next meeting and adjourn |

CONFLICT IN MEETINGS

Is it good or bad to have conflicts and disagreements at local union meetings? Well, the answer is it could be good or it could be bad, depending on how they're handled . . . who's creating them . . . and how the group feels about each other. If there's too much conflict and it's continuous, it will be destructive and dangerous to the health of the local. However, if members don't feel they can express disagreement, they'll stop participating. In addition, if there isn't the kind of open atmosphere in which disagreement is tolerated and addressed, it's likely that conflict will go underground, bad feelings will fester and political factions will develop. And finally, if no disagreement is ever expressed, it's possible that some bad decisions will be made in the local.

The term “**groupthink**” is used to describe the process by which everybody goes along with a bad decision because they’re afraid if they point out the flaws in the plan, they won’t be thought of as “part of the team.” Like lemmings to the sea, everyone keeps marching forward – even though individuals in the group have doubts – because the group won’t tolerate disagreement or dissent. The healthiest organizations are those in which disagreement is encouraged in the planning stages – everyone feels their point of view has been heard, and they’ve been part of the decision-making process – but once a decision is reached, the group puts disagreements behind them and works together as a unit.

Costs of Conflict:

- Stressful for organization
- Creates political divisions
- More time is spent on resolving conflict than on doing what the organization’s supposed to be doing

Benefits of Conflict:

- Get information about where problems are
- Avoid “groupthink,” make better decisions
- Closer unity can be established after conflicts are aired
- Members feel they can express themselves freely

CONFLICTS OCCUR BECAUSE:

- People’s ideas are different
- People want different things
- People’s values are different
- People’s status positions are different. *(If you think you’re better than me, I’ll argue with you over anything, regardless of the subject, just to knock you down a peg.)*
- People want attention

These different kinds of conflict may be resolved in different ways. If members just want attention and respect, there may be no need to deal with the stated reason for the conflict, just indicate that you treat the person’s ideas with respect. If members’ values or points of view are really different, certain communication rules should be followed in order to avoid bitter feelings and the formation of personal factions.

COMMUNICATION RULES FOR RESOLVING CONFLICTS:

1) Talk about positions, not personalities.

Insist on an atmosphere of mutual respect. Personal comments and put-downs will only add to the tension that comes with conflict. The primary rule for resolving conflicts is to remove personality from the debate. Talk about the arguments for and against each other’s position – don’t attack each other personally. Talk about the merits of the argument, not the merits of the person making the argument.

“I think there are some problems with that idea . . .” is a criticism that’s a lot easier to take than . . . “That’s a stupid idea . . .” which seems to say the person who put the idea forward is stupid. Once someone is confronted with a personal attack, he or she will continue to fight long past when it might have made sense to give in . . . simply as a matter of face.

2) Look for common ground.

Focus on the points of agreement between the opponents (*there almost always are some . . . for example, both sides want to see the union succeed*) and build on those, so that the individuals disagreeing can see they have something in common. Commonalities can be found by asking people to describe their expectations, fears and concerns, perceptions, goals. If it can be established that opponents' goals are the same, although they disagree about how to achieve them, a complete break can be prevented.

3) Establish an atmosphere of "safety".

Members must know they can express their opinions without fear of personal attack; that if they find they are being attacked by someone, the person who's leading the meeting will take over and cut that behavior off. The leader's responsibility is to control the meeting by keeping the discussion focused on issues and making sure no nasty personal fights are given the chance to develop.

MEMBERSHIP SURVEYS

One way to reach the member. The survey can be used to get ideas for bargaining issues, to find out how the members feel about the union, to get information on safety and health issues, to recruit volunteers, to find out what kind of social activities the members might be interested in, or to get their opinions on a variety of different subjects. In addition to gathering information, the survey has another important purpose. **The simple act of asking questions communicates to members that the union cares about what they think.** That alone is a powerful and important reason to consider doing a survey.

You don't need to be an expert to design a useful survey. Start by thinking about your own experience. When you get surveys or census forms in the mail – sometimes you fill them out immediately, sometimes you throw them away immediately, sometimes you put them in a pile and say to yourself, "I'll do it when I have time" which is usually never. What are the characteristics of the ones you fill out? Some of the following words might describe them . . .

- **Short** – *It shouldn't take a whole evening to fill out.*
- **Easy** – *It's faster to check off an answer that's provided than to have to write a long "essay" answer.*
- **Subject is of interest** – *The more you care about the subject, the more likely you'll take the time to fill it out.*
- **Filling it out will make a difference** – *The answers aren't going to be just thrown away or ignored. Whoever's asking the question really cares about the answer.*

Following are some suggestions on designing a membership survey. Be aware this kind of survey is not "scientific" and no claims can be made that the results are absolutely accurate. It will give a rough idea of membership opinion and will show members the local cares.

First Step – Decide the survey topic and who's going to get it.

A survey might be used to answer questions such as . . .

- How do members view the union? – Do they know much about it? Do they read union

publications and notices on the bulletin board? Do they see the union as helping them personally? Do they know what's in the contract? Do they think the grievance system works? Do they think their dues are well spent?

- How do they feel about their jobs? – This can be especially valuable when your contract is about to expire, helping you to zero in on the most popular issues. What are the biggest gripes? Are members satisfied with pay and benefits? Is the workload too heavy? What new problems are cropping up? What do they think of the employer?

- Where do members stand politically? – Are they registered to vote? What political issues are important? Do they understand the link between politics, their union, their jobs, and the union's strength?

At the same time you determine the topic, you also need to decide who should get the survey. Will it be sent to only union members, or to everyone in the bargaining unit regardless of whether or not they've joined the union?

If your local is too large to send survey questionnaires to everyone, you might want to send the survey to a "sample" of the membership instead. For example, if you have 1,000 members, you might want to choose 100 whose ideas and opinions would be likely to represent those of the larger group.

If you do target a sample group, make sure it represents a reasonable facsimile of the demographic makeup of the membership. (For example, if 50% of your membership is female, then 50% of the sample should be female. If 20% of your membership is minority, then 20% of the sample should be minority . . . etc.

Second Step – Design the survey.

There are two basic types of survey questions – closed and open.

The difference between a closed question and an open question is the same as the difference between a multiple-choice test and an essay exam. Closed questions are questions to which only a limited number of answers are possible. "Is the sky blue – yes or no?" is a closed question. "What does the sky look like?" – which requires more than a "yes or no" answer is an open question. You could end up with lots of different responses to the second question.

Another example:

"Which bargaining issue is most important to you? Check one ___ wages, ___ health care ___ vacation days, ___ pension" is a closed question. The respondent has no choice but to check one of those four answers.

"What bargaining issue is most important to you?" followed by a blank space for response, is an open question. The respondents could put down any number of different responses.

The advantage of a closed question is the answers are easier to tabulate. If an open question is asked to 200 different people, the union might end up with 200 different answers, which would be pretty hard to tabulate. The disadvantage of a closed question is the local would only know which of those four issues – wages, health care, vacation days, or pensions – the respondent cares about most. If the members care about another issue altogether, the local would never find out without giving members the opportunity to put their own responses down.

The advantage of open questions is just the opposite. The local gets a tremendous amount of information from those people who bother to respond. The disadvantage is the answers may be all over the lot and therefore difficult to use. The best compromise is to do a survey of mostly closed questions, with one or two open questions that give members the chance to express their opinions on an issue.

Questions can be designed in a number of different ways . . .

Multiple Choice –

“Where do you get most information about our local?”

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> local publication | <input type="checkbox"/> stewards |
| <input type="checkbox"/> other union members | <input type="checkbox"/> meetings |

Scale –

“How valuable do you find our union meetings?”

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> always valuable | <input type="checkbox"/> rarely valuable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sometimes valuable | <input type="checkbox"/> never valuable |

Rank Order –

“Rank the following job-related concerns in order of importance to you – number 1 should be most important, number 6 is least important.”

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> satisfactory settlement of grievances | <input type="checkbox"/> job security |
| <input type="checkbox"/> health insurance | <input type="checkbox"/> wages |
| <input type="checkbox"/> safety and health | <input type="checkbox"/> discrimination |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ | |

Simple Yes/No –

“Did you vote in the last election for union officers and stewards?”

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> yes | <input type="checkbox"/> no |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|

Other examples of survey questions are included at the end of this section. Remember – keep it short. Only ask the minimum number of questions needed to get the job done.

Two other issues:

Should members sign the survey? Members might be more willing to give honest answers if they think their privacy is protected. On the other hand, it might be useful to know who's thinking what. Usually, the best approach, depending on conditions in the local, is to give people the opportunity to sign the survey if they want to, but not to require it.

Should demographic information be included on the survey? – for example, should respondents indicate their age, sex, etc.? The advantage would be the chance to become more aware of divisions in the local – do most of the women feel one way about an issue, while most of the men feel another way? Do younger members respond differently from older members? Those kind of factional differences might create political and organizational problems the union will want to be aware of and address.

A Final Tip on Design:

Include some statement that explains why the survey is being done and how the information will be used. This may be in the form of a letter from the local. Members may be suspicious about giving out opinions or

information, particularly if this is the first time. An explanation of the purpose of the survey might ease some of those concerns.

Third Step – Distribute the Survey

Before the survey is actually distributed, you may want to “pretest” it. Give it to a small group of people and ask them to fill it out to be sure members will understand the questions the way they’re meant. Have the pretest group report if the survey is easy to fill out, if the questions are clear, and other feedback that might help improve the survey.

After the pretest is done and necessary corrections are made, distribute the survey. The union may want to use the one-on-one structure to do this or the regular steward system or distribute the survey by mail. Make sure there is some easy, central place where completed surveys can be dropped off. You may get the most responses if stewards or officers hand-deliver it and wait while it’s filled out or arrange to come back the next day to pick it up.

Fourth Step – Tabulate and Distribute the Results

It’s a good idea, if possible, to distribute the results of the survey to members. They’ll be more likely to participate in future surveys if they know how this one turned out. It will also show them how their opinion compared with the opinions of others in the local.



SAMPLE MEMBERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How often do you talk to your union steward?

- ☐ at least once a week
- ☐ once every two weeks
- ☐ once a month or less frequently

2. Basically, how would you rate the job the union is doing in representing you?

- ☐ excellent
- ☐ good
- ☐ fair
- ☐ poor
- ☐ not sure

3. Did you vote in the last election for officers?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

4. If you have not attended a membership meeting in the past six months, why not?

- ☐ family needs
- ☐ school

- ____conflicting social events
- ____transportation
- ____childcare
- ____didn't know about them
- ____no interest

5. What is your main source of information about what's going on in the local?

- ____union meetings
- ____union publication
- ____talking with other members
- ____steward

6. When you have needed help from the local, was someone available?

- ____always
- ____usually
- ____occasionally
- ____never
- ____never needed help

SAMPLE BARGAINING QUESTIONNAIRE

Rank order from 1-8 which of the following are most important to you. (1 is the most important, 8 is the least important.)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|
| 1. Increased annual leave | _____ |
| 2. Pay increases | _____ |
| 3. Job security | _____ |
| 4. Increase in health plan benefits | _____ |
| 5. Increase in dental coverage | _____ |
| 6. Increase in sick leave | _____ |
| 7. Increase in number of holidays | _____ |
| 8. Seniority | _____ |



COMPLETE THIS SURVEY AND YOU COULD WIN \$100

One way to improve a union publication and involve the members is to solicit their opinions about the paper. Get them to tell you which articles they like or don't like, what material they find helpful, what they think is useless, and what information they would especially like to see in the paper.

Readership surveys are a useful way of gathering such data and finding out if your publication is meeting the needs of your members. Devising a survey as part of your publication or separately and circulating it at least every other year can keep you in touch with your readership. In addition to a written survey, one-on-one interviews and small group meetings where members offer opinions and suggestions about the publication are extremely beneficial.

There are three ways to distribute a readership survey. Included as an insert in the publication with return instructions; hand delivered with a personal appeal for the member to complete it or mail it and include a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Most people will not take the time to complete a written survey unless they can see the potential for some immediate personal benefits. Therefore, instead of the traditional "We'd Like Your Opinion," or "Your Suggestions are Important to Us," headlines on a survey, why not prompt readers to participate with such headings as: "Complete this Survey and You Could Win a \$100 Savings Bond!" or "Complete this Survey and You Could Win a Dinner for Two!"

Then, enter the names of survey participants in a drawing for the pre-determined prizes. The cost of such a venture is well worth the valuable information that will be obtained.

With the completed surveys in hand, you are on your way to developing a publication that is more responsive to the needs of the membership. Surveys also serve another purpose. They make members realize they are part of the union and their opinions and input are important.



Help us improve your union publication . . .

SAMPLE READERSHIP SURVEY

The local union wants to provide you with a publication that contains news and information in which you are interested. By completing the following questionnaire, you can help us develop a publication that is more responsive to your needs. Thank you for your participation in this survey.

1. Do you read the (name of publication)? ☐ Yes ☐ No; Family members? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. If yes, do you read: ☐ mostly headlines ☐ some articles ☐ all or most articles
3. If you don't read the (name of publication) why not?

4. Which subjects are of interest to you? (Check as many as you like):

<input type="checkbox"/> Grievances	<input type="checkbox"/> Labor/management news
<input type="checkbox"/> Contract interpretations	<input type="checkbox"/> Officer's reports
<input type="checkbox"/> Safety/health	<input type="checkbox"/> Legislation
<input type="checkbox"/> Arbitration cases	<input type="checkbox"/> Member profiles

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting minutes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economic news | <input type="checkbox"/> Labor history |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Benefits of union membership | <input type="checkbox"/> Retirement information |
| <input type="checkbox"/> News about labor struggles | <input type="checkbox"/> Member opinion columns |

5. Other subjects I would like to see in the paper:

6. Check the statements below that you agree with about your publication:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too few pages | <input type="checkbox"/> Too many pages |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attractive and easy to read | <input type="checkbox"/> Type is hard to read |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Would be more attractive if there were more photographs | <input type="checkbox"/> I would like shorter articles |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I would like longer, more in-depth articles | <input type="checkbox"/> Takes too long to read |

7. What do you feel should be the main purpose of this publication? (Check as many statements as you agree with):

- ☐ Should have articles and information like consumer news and other helpful tips for members to use at home
- ☐ Should only discuss the activities of this organization
- ☐ Should cover the activities of many unions, not just the union that publishes it
- ☐ Should educate union members about labor issues and policies
- ☐ Should primarily contain views and reports from union leaders
- ☐ Should include the comments and opinions of members
- ☐ Should report on important political, legislative and business decisions that could affect working people in general
- ☐ Should include feature articles about members
- ☐ Should include articles about social and economic issues

8. What do you like about our union publication?

9. What don't you like about our union publication?

10. Other comments:



LOCAL UNION PUBLICATIONS

In a perfect world . . . 100% of the membership would turn out for every monthly membership meeting. In a slightly less perfect world . . . there would be enough stewards and volunteers to make one-on-one contact with every member on a monthly basis. In the real world, most locals would have trouble making either of those events occur.

Instead of complaining about the fact that most members don't attend meetings, we need to spend time finding ways to reach those who don't. One excellent way is through a local union publication. Producing a local union paper is probably less expensive than you think, gives people in the local an opportunity to use their creative talents, and can be a very effective way of keeping in touch with members.

Following are some reasons why locals need to establish and maintain a union publication for their members:

- A considerable amount of work the union does is "not visible." If members aren't told what the union does, what's been achieved because of the union, or kept abreast of current issues, how can they be expected to get involved or be supportive.

- Most members don't attend union meetings. Therefore, in order to reach all members another form of communication must be used, namely the union publication. Absent a continuous form of communication with the membership, they will likely assume the union is doing nothing! Will members continue to pay dues or be loyal to an organization that appears to do nothing?

- Union activists are aware of the importance of the union. However, it must be remembered that most members don't have the same attachment, especially new members who probably weren't exposed to unions before being hired at the post office. Educating and organizing is an ongoing endeavor. Therefore, it's necessary to continually explain the purpose of the union and the valuable service it provides.

- Studies have shown that in order for a message to become unforgettable, it must be repeated at least eight

times! To successfully create and maintain membership participation and thus build a stronger union, communicating with all members on a regular basis must be a priority. Anything less and the desired results will not be achieved.

- The workroom floor is a breeding ground for rumors that generally work to undermine the great efforts put forth by union officers to represent the membership. Rumors are especially detrimental in locals that don't communicate with their members. Without any official source of information, rumors tend to become "fact" and work to tear down the union. Keeping the membership informed can stop damaging rumors and create more solidarity among the membership.

- Communicating with members via a union publication (and if possible, additional forms of communication such as a web site, bulletin boards, periodic bulletins for late breaking news) is critically important. It helps shape organizational vision and promotes the feeling that "we are all in this together." With the appropriate content, a publication educates, provides motivation, and gives the local identity. This is especially meaningful since the membership may otherwise wonder what they're getting in return for paying dues. A union paper can demonstrate that the union has a lot to offer its members.

By not placing the appropriate amount of importance on communication, especially with the many potentially devastating issues continually facing postal workers, the opportunities to defeat these challenges are reduced. While union representatives can single-handedly represent members in the grievance procedure, that's not the case when it comes to derailing privatization schemes, electing politicians who support postal workers, etc. It takes a collective effort.

INCREASING UNION INVOLVEMENT VIA UNION PUBLICATIONS

Careful attention should be given to how information published in a union paper is presented, and most importantly, received. A well-balanced publication should not only inform the members, but also encourage participation in the union, directly and indirectly. In this regard, consider the following questions. Does the paper portray the union as an "institution" or an organization made up of real people? Do members continually ask, "what is **the union** going to do about this problem?"

Presenting information in a way that brings a "human touch" to the paper and including the membership will help overcome the perception that the union is not some hard, cold institution located in a faraway place, but instead an organization made up of real people – members and officers alike. Using this approach is a step towards building more union involvement.

People like to read about people. Themselves first and others second. By striving to bring a human touch to a union publication and including the membership, the paper becomes much more interesting and the union is less likely to be perceived as an institution. The idea is to develop the paper into a forum for an exchange of ideas between all members.

Union publications that employ what is called "member-oriented" labor journalism enjoy the greatest amount of success. By including the rank and file in the publication, by making it "**the member's publication**," two things happen. Readership increases and members are likely to see the union as **their** organization and as a result are more likely to get involved. Readership of member-oriented publications is extremely high (even in the age of the Internet).

A union publication needs to be more than a one-way transmission for meeting minutes, grievance reports,

officer reports, or as a means to "pass down" to members information held by union officials. In the book: *The New Labor Press, Journalism for a Changing Union Movement*; the authors stress the value of a union publication for exchanging information. "... In effective organizations, of course, information is not a commodity that moves along one-way channels. A truly vital union – any truly vital institution – recognizes that the flow of information must be a two-way street. Union members, after all, aren't passive receptacles for information. They're men and women struggling to improve the quality of their lives. These men and women need a forum, a place to exchange their thoughts with others, to learn from others, to test their ideas against others' ideas. Trade unions need to provide this forum by opening wide channels through which information can flow, not just from leader to member, but from member to member, member to leader. Within the labor movement, the trade union publication offers what may be the single best forum for this absolutely essential exchange of information ..."

In regard to publication content, the book offers this observation: "... effective union education and communication means using as much available space as possible to reflect the experiences and voices of the union membership." It also goes on to say "... People respond and get involved when they have an understanding of what's going on and believe they have a reasonable chance to change things ..."

Following are some suggestions for involving the membership and adding a human touch to a union publication.

MEMBERS SPEAK OUT

Devote a column in each issue whereby randomly selected members are asked the same thought-provoking question. Publish their responses (and if possible, a photo of each member). The possibility of developing questions is endless; from union issues to management policies to community to national issues. This makes very interesting reading and brings a human touch to the paper, plus is a step to increasing membership participation in the union. Also, it sends a message to all members that their opinions and input are important.

This may very well prompt other members to write a letter to the editor voicing their opinions in response to this column. Encouraging letters to the editor is another way to involve the membership.

PERSONALITY PROFILES

Many APWU members lead interesting lives and are involved in various activities outside the post office. From volunteer efforts, hobbies, to unique talents, the membership is a fascinating and diverse group of people. Articles of this nature make very interesting reading and recognize members for their achievements.

PRESENTING THE NEWS

Covering union activities and happenings in the post office can also be done in a way that brings a human touch to this important news and demonstrates the union is actually made up of real people.

Following is an example. Let's say a local grievance settlement results in the conversion of several part-time flexible (PTF) employees to full-time status. The number of PTF employees in the local that will be impacted by this settlement will make a great headline and story. To take it a step further, individuals who may have been PTFs for a long time will now be converted to full-time. Interview them and find out how they feel about the opportunity to work regular hours instead of not knowing when and if they would be working on a given day. Or, what about being guaranteed eight hours a day, 40 hours a week? How are their families reacting to the potential change in life-style?

Such an article complete with quotes from some of the affected members brings a human touch to the situation while still reporting the news. And for the reader it says, "Hey, this is more than a settlement on paper. It involves real people that I know personally!"

Another example. Many APWU members are single parents with small children. How do they deal with the issues of childcare, work and parenting? An article featuring a member who successfully deals with these matters would be helpful to others experiencing difficulties.

There are endless possibilities for such articles as the union not only represents members in the post office on a daily basis but there are also many issues both on and off the job that affect the lives of the membership. Reporting on these subjects with a human touch is a great way to involve the members and demonstrate the union cares about the wellbeing of the membership.

IMPORTANCE OF UNION MEMBERSHIP

All members are not aware of the importance of union membership, or realize the benefits enjoyed today were not generously provided by management, but were fought for and won by the union. Articles of this nature can stimulate participation and bring about an increased awareness of the union.

Interviewing long time members about how conditions were at the time they began working for the postal service compared to now is an excellent way to present such information. Also, most of these individuals have very fascinating stories to tell that will make good human interest columns. Such a column demonstrates the importance of the union in the lives of members and again demonstrates the union is made up of real people.

ORGANIZATION INVOLVEMENT

Many locals are involved in community efforts to help the needy in such ways as food drives, "adopt a family," working at telethons, etc. Articles highlighting these efforts bring out the charitable side of the union — people helping people. An added touch to these articles is to interview members who are involved in these events, or even the people that are being helped to get their reactions.

STORY IDEAS

Involve the membership and obtain material for the paper at the same time. How? A standing notice in the publication requesting story ideas. Members may have ideas for articles they would like to see published, or may know another member that could be featured in an upcoming "personality profile". For example, a member's many years of involvement with a local charity.

DEVISING A PLAN

Developing ways to increase membership participation should be a priority of every local. Since most members don't attend union meetings, the primary contact they have with the union is the union publication. Therefore, how a member perceives the union can often be determined by what he or she reads in the paper.

Adding a human touch to the paper and devising ways to include the membership is not an easy task, but something that should be done. The results could be dramatic! In the future, instead of a member asking, "what is the union going to do about this problem?" the question may be, "what are WE going to do about this problem?"

SOME SUGGESTIONS ON CONTENT

1. Local victories:

- a. grievance wins
- b. arbitration wins, backpay awards
- c. issues resolved before going to grievance
- d. legal victories

2. Local Union Activities

- a. notices of meetings — membership, committee, etc. with time, place, speakers or agenda listed
- b. reports from prior meetings
- c. report on contract negotiations, committee selection
- d. stories about picket lines, rallies
- e. central labor council activities, stories about other locals
- f. officer's columns
- g. social activities in local
- h. community involvement

3. Legislative/Political News

- a. national issues that affect local and members
- b. local/state issues that affect members as workers, consumers
- c. news on COPA activities

4. Regular features

- a. health and safety column
- b. member milestones — birthdays, weddings, births, illnesses, etc.
- c. "know your rights" — questions about contract
- d. member or steward of the month
- e. letters to the editor
- f. editorials
- g. personality profiles
- h. opinion column
- i. retiree news
- j. labor history

Current member Orientation & Mobilization

Remember that the title of this class was Employee Orientation, not just new employee orientation. We need to learn how to keep all members informed of union activities and encourage more participation.

Does your local do that?

If not, how about trying some of these ideas:

- Have stewards hold informational meetings on a regular basis in their area of responsibility.
- Post minutes of union meetings on bulletin boards so the membership can see what happened and how their dues are being spent.
- Circulate surveys to gauge member interest or address concerns. (*This might be better done by stewards and officers rather than by a mailing*)
- Publish more “member oriented” information in your local news publications. (ex- member profiles, achievements, etc)
- Put out a call for volunteers.
- Start a member-of-the-month award, highlighting some achievement in your paper or on the union bulletin board.

There are many more possibilities – use your imagination.

