

Audio Script: Organizing 300 – Campaign Planning

Welcome to Organizing 300

This course should take you about 30 minutes to complete.

This is an elective course in the Organizing track.

The prerequisite for taking this course is Organizing 100.

This course takes you through a scenario that is designed to give you some practice identifying and working with a workplace situation that could become an organizing issue.

The sections in this course are:

- The Floor Mat Scenario
- Identify the Action
- Plan the Action, and
- Debrief the Action

Section 1: The Floor Mat Scenario

At the State Compensation Insurance Fund there is a group of 40 program technicians who work in the claims processing center. It's a busy department with a high volume of mail and it's a fast-paced environment.

The manager, Mr. Oscar Overwhelmed, is a nice guy, but is distracted by many responsibilities. The department has recently relocated to a new building which has added to an already stressful environment. The Program Technicians stand for over four hours a day, sorting mail at a long table on a concrete floor.

Many of the technicians have complained of back aches, leg cramps and sore feet because of the concrete floor. It has also caused many of the technicians to use sick days because of these issues.

A couple of the employees have complained to their manager, Mr. Overwhelmed, and have asked him to purchase an ergonomic rubber mat for them to stand on while sorting the mail. The rubber mat would solve the back, leg and foot issues.

Diane, the job steward in the department, has sent Mr. Overwhelmed numerous emails about the issue but he does not respond. Mr. Overwhelmed acts sympathetic and, since he is the person who orders the supplies for the department, he will need to place the order for the mats. Every Monday morning they look to see if the mats were delivered only to face disappointment when there are no mats and they are looking at another day of standing on the cold, hard concrete.

Section 2: Identify the Action

The issue that we need to solve is to get Mr. Overwhelmed to purchase the rubber mats. This will alleviate pain, reduce sick days and improve the work environment.

To set our goals for this action, we need to answer the following questions:

Can we identify the person that can resolve the issue? Yes, Mr. Overwhelmed makes all purchases and will need to buy the mats.

Can we identify who is being impacted? Yes - all employees at this worksite are impacted by this issue.

And, do we know who can help us resolve the issue? Yes - our allies for this issue are all of the employees at the site, any stewards who work with these employees and the staff at the Union Resource Center, or URC.

The employees need to choose a good first action that will bring them closer to obtaining the mats. The steward and a few of the other employees get together to discuss a plan. They come up with several possibilities...

They first consider desk tents, but they won't work because these employees don't have desks. It's a good approach, but it only works when there are desks.

One of the co-workers suggests a rally - but a rally isn't really appropriate because this group is just too small.

A sticker campaign seems like it might be a good place to start. 'Stickering-up' is a good way to test members: it's visible, it demonstrates solidarity and there is low risk involved for the employees.

A petition is also considered. The group decides that it might be a good Plan B for their second step. It is another easy action, but it is a bit more militant. It is still easy to do, so most employees might participate. The participants can be individually identified, so it carries a somewhat larger risk than using the stickers.

When there is a problem at a worksite there might be many people who complain, but then those same people may be hesitant to take collective action. It is important to involve members at a low level because if the members don't own the action they won't own the results.

The lowest level action in this situation is for the employees to wear stickers. It's a good start and allows an opportunity to test the commitment and willingness of the co-workers.

Section 3: Plan the Action

Before moving ahead with any action, they take the time to plan thoroughly:

Diane, the job steward, and her Union Organizer met with the most vocal group in the department.

These are the people Diane knows have already complained to Mr. Overwhelmed, and they are not afraid of confrontation. She sits down with them and goes over the checklist that the organizer gave her for organizing actions.

Diane now has a committee of eight program techs in her department. There are a total of 40 people in the department. This keeps the ownership of this action with the employees.

This committee next brainstorms ideas on just what action they should take. They decide on the sticker action. They choose a slogan, *“Our dogs are barking, thanks to Mr. Overwhelmed.”*

The group then reconsiders - they are less likely to get their ergonomic mats by directly identifying Mr. Overwhelmed. So, they rethink their slogan to make it less personal. They decide on, *“Is our health and safety too much to ask for?”*

They also decide that a good goal for participation in the action is to aim for 80% of the department to wear a sticker - that is a total of 32 people wearing stickers on the target date.

The committee plans to have the action next week on Wednesday. That is when the majority of the members in the department wear their union t-shirts.

The members of the committee each agree to talk to five people and get commitments to wear the sticker on Wednesday. That covers all 40 employees.

The committee agrees to meet again on Friday at lunch to discuss the results that they each have obtained. At that Friday meeting the committee members report who agreed to wear the stickers and who did not. They are very close to their target of 80% - they have 30 people who have agreed to wear stickers.

They will have their next meeting on Tuesday, the day before the action, to pick up their stickers from Diane and distribute them to their assigned groups.

It's Wednesday, the day of the event, and only 20 of the 40 employees wear their stickers. This action was not successful and on Monday, after the first action of stickering-up, the department still has not received the ergonomic mats they need.

Section 4: Debrief the Action

The day after the action the committee gets together to review their goals for the action. Since it was not successful, they need to think about how to get more members and co-workers involved next time. They decide that it is still a good goal to organize for, and start to think about a more confrontational action for their next step.

There are two possibilities that they consider - first is a march on the boss...it's a more militant action, more difficult to organize and pull off and members have to be more confrontational for it to be successful.

The petition - their original Plan B - is the action they choose. Given the low participation with the sticker action, it is just one step up in the escalation of actions for this issue, and it is still relatively safe for members who are concerned about being too visible.

The committee, the steward and the organizer meet to discuss escalating the matter by having another action. They were ready to try something else - they were tired of their co-workers being in pain. Also, it was unreasonable of Mr. Overwhelmed to ignore their concerns and health issues.

The committee's discussion centered around the sticker action. One issue they discussed at the debriefing was that many employees were out sick on the day of the sticker action and others didn't see the point in wearing the sticker.

After brainstorming through several possible ideas, the committee decided that a petition was the next step in this matter. This was their choice because signing a petition is fairly simple.

At the beginning of the debriefing meeting, each of the committee members talked about their assignments from the sticker campaign and discussed each person they contacted. They then outlined the outcome for several employees - who wore the sticker, who did not and why, and who was absent for that day.

Here is what one group leader listed about her assigned co-workers. Out of the five people in her group,

- Tracey and Terry wore the sticker all day
- Dylan was absent
- Lee wore the sticker, but took it off as soon as Mr. Overwhelmed showed up
- Chris is anti-union and says we are lucky to have jobs and so what if our legs hurt

The new plan for the second step escalation is to circulate a petition demanding that Mr. Overwhelmed respect the staff's health and safety by purchasing ergonomic mats for them to stand on. Their goal is for 80% of the staff to sign the petition and to assemble a delegation of their co-workers to deliver the petition to Mr. Overwhelmed.

They are giving themselves one week to gather signatures and to deliver the petition. Since most people do not want to be the first one to sign a petition, the committee has agreed to sign the first several lines themselves and give their co-workers a sense that everyone is signing it and then circulate the petition around the worksite.

[Summary]

Just as in our example, most supervisors will not resolve issues with just one action. We must always think about an escalating series of actions that put increasing pressure on the supervisor. We need to make sure we have planned for the next steps in each situation, not for just one action.

Start out with a small action and escalate to a larger one. In our example, the stickers were a small action, the petition is a bit larger, and the march on the boss will be a much larger action.

Review

One reason for the first organizing action of an issue to be small is:

- a) To test the participation of members*
- b) To see if you have the budget
- c) It is a union rule

The answer is A - start with a small action to check out the commitment level and willingness of your members to participate in any action.

The committee changed from their original slogan, *"Our dogs are barking, thanks*

to Mr. Overwhelmed,” to a less personal one, “Is our health and safety too much to ask for?” Why was this change made?

- a) They really like Mr. Overwhelmed and don’t want to hurt his feelings
- b) The union won’t let them use a person’s name in a slogan
- c) *The goal of the action is to get floor mats, not to insult the supervisor*

The answer is C - this action was not aimed at making the supervisor look bad or making him angry. The action goal was to get floor mats and relief for the employees.

Most supervisors will realize the problem and fix it after one action happens in their department.

- a) True
- b) *False*

The answer is False - most supervisors will not resolve issues with just one action. We need to think about an escalating series of actions to put increasing pressure on the supervisor. Make sure we have planned not just for one action, but for the next steps in each situation.

End of Course

This completes Organizing 300.

Your next step is to take and pass the Final Exam to finish this course.

This is an elective course. If you would like to earn the Certificate of Completion in the Organizing track, you will need to take the required courses: Organizing 100, 110, 120, and 200.