

# The Rap

## General Overview

### Goals:

- To teach organizers the importance of developing a consistent conversation outline that covers all the points and topics we need to cover when talking to employees.
- To use the instruction of the “Rap” to lay out for organizers SEIU’s standards and principles used in campaigns.

A 1:1 conversation should not be a random conversation, but rather a structured and thoughtful discussion. The three main goals of the conversation are to 1) provide information about the union and the campaign 2) convey the campaign message 3) move the employee to support the union (sign membership card) and if the employee is an identified leader--be active on the campaign.

The conversations we have with employees can be very different depending on the industry, type of campaign and the stage of the campaign. The “rap” that we are teaching today is the basic rap that is used at the beginning of a campaign. It is the most complete rap we use and most other conversations are a derivative of this core rap.

There are several “steps” to the conversation and we will go through each of them.

**I Introduction** - the introduction should be short, clear and to the point.

We need to make sure we:

- a) get the right person
- b) identify yourself
- c) identify why you are there (urgency to conversation)

**II Get The Story** - get their personal story - finding their issues and agitating around them. By agitation we mean that we must get the employees to recognize their problems at work and become angry about them. Good questions to ask:

- How long have you worked here?
- Tell me about your job?
- Do you feel the environment allows you to do it well?
- What is like to work here?

- Once you have an issue—challenge the employee: what happens if you don't have a contract?
- What rights do you have if the boss doesn't like you?
- Do you see the difference between working for the state vs private (bank, GE, downsized companies)

### III Tie the Union to the Issues

Once you know the employee's issues, it's essential to connect the union (having a union, what is the union difference) to solving their problems. Educate them on how they can make changes with a union, how other employees have made changes with the union, how a union works, how the only way they can have a real voice in the workplace is with a union. This is a simple way to agitate employees without sounding dogmatic or rigid.

Some simple ways to frame the union difference:

We've experienced recently that State employees are in frontlines of being constantly attacked by politicians & corporations by going after your pension, benefits and wage cuts. They are making decisions on our livelihoods.

With a union you have a say - the state must give you a say in the decision-making process—your contract!

The union difference - Without a union the state makes all the decisions on healthcare, pension, and wages - with a union you have protection, collective power, political power, and a voice in making those decisions—your contract!

By not having a stronger Union, we risk not having the ability to bargain for better wages/benefits and protection, if we are stronger; we have the power/leverage to influence the bargaining table.

You have one of two choices 1) No union - your boss can fire you at will, no grievance procedure, no protection from discrimination, no protection from deeper wage cuts..... 2) or stay with your union where you have protection and guarantees--- your contract.

It is important that employees understand the union difference in a clear simple way. It is the difference between having **no** ability to make changes in the workplace and that of **having a say** in workplace issues.

This concept must be tied to examples of

- 1) How they can use this ability to address their workplace issues and
- 2) How unionized employees have been able to make changes in their workplace.

Or:

By not having a stronger Union, we risk not having the ability to bargain for better wages/benefits and protection. If we are stronger, we have the power/leverage to influence the bargaining table.

### **V Explain the campaign - EDUCATION**

The most important elements in explaining the campaign are:

- 1) clear, simple plan to win
- 2) importance of a public campaign
- 3) importance of employee participation

The State will put up a fight to prevent employees from making improvements in your contract, this is why we must do certain things to win the campaign.

The only way to win is to:

- 1) Make sure a solid majority of the employees support the union-sign up for membership
- 2) Have a committee of employees who will work for and stand up for the union

We should explain that we must have a solid majority and active committee to be prepared for what the employer may do or say to prevent employees from taking action and standing with their bargaining team.

**VI Inoculate**

We should be prepared to talk about the most common things Anti-employees or management may say to convince employees to not become members. These are dues, futility and other specific concerns. We can ask employees what their biggest concerns about the union are.

**VII Get Information**

We should try to get as much workplace information as possible. This would include such things as who he/she works with, floor, work area, lists of employees in the unit/division, phone numbers , department information, cliques, and most importantly who the natural leaders are.

**VIII Make Assignments**

We should make specific, doable assignments for each employee. It can be as simple as referring who else we should talk to or as difficult as setting up a meeting with other employees. We should not be afraid of asking employees to do as much as possible. They should understand from the first conversation that they will have to work to make the union work.

**IV Follow-up**

We should follow up on employees' assignments within 48 hours. We should be very specific on where and when we will follow up with them.

# The Union Rap (Sample)

## I. Opening/Introduction

- Introduction should be short, clear and to the point
- Make sure the person has a few uninterrupted minutes to talk
- Make sure you are in a comfortable place that will help the conversation flow

## II. Identify issues/agitate

Find out about the employee's issues by asking questions. We want to know their story. The second part of this section is to agitate—we must get employees to recognize their problems at work and become angry about them in order to move past the “futility of the union” (union value)

### **Some good questions:**

- How long have you worked here?
- Tell me about your job?
- Do you feel the environment allows you to do it well?
- What is like to work here?
- Once you have an issue—challenge the employee: what happens if you don't have a contract?
- What rights do you have if the boss doesn't like you?
- Do you see the difference between working for the state vs. private (bank, GE, downsized companies)

## III. Educate

- Once you know the issues, it is essential to tie the union to solving those problems.
- Talk about strength in numbers and building power through uniting with co-workers.
- Explain how other employees have made changes with a union and how a union works—the only way they can have job security, a real voice, guarantees in benefits & wages, and protection in the workplace is with a union.

- **Frame the union difference:**

(1) *By not having a stronger Union, we risk not having the ability to bargain for better wages/benefits and protection, If we are stronger, we have the power/leverage to influence the bargaining table.*

(2) *Without the union you have no protection & guarantees. With a union, you have a voice in making those decisions—you have a contract*

- Most important role of a union: to have a say in workplace issues.
- Give an example of how you have been involved with the union and a recent victory.

#### IV. **Call the Question**

- ***“In this environment, we need to be stronger than ever to protect our benefits and fight for a better/fair contract; the first step is to make sure we’re all full members of the union. I show that you’re not a member. Will you sign the membership form right now?” (6 second silence) (SAMPLE)***
- You must ask the question to know for sure where they stand!
- If answer is NO, then go back to the issues and explain that there is no way for employees to address these issues without a union or if everyone is a non-member. If the employee clearly does not support the union, the conversation would end here. Don’t rule employees out forever. Keep the door open.
- If the employee is unsure, continue with the rap after going back to the issues.
- If YES, have employees sign membership card. Be sure to get the card right then! (Don’t leave it with them...)

#### V. **Inoculate**

Address the reasons why people might not want to become members, not support the bargaining team, not support Local 1000. Stress the importance of strength in numbers.

#### VI. **Follow-up**

Never leave the conversation without giving an assignment (ex. Get org charts or phone lists, take 2-3 membership cards to sign up co-workers to be members, ID leaders in their worksite—who do people trust & respect in your unit/division—can you set up an appointment for me to meet with him/her, attend a union meeting, escort for a walkthrough

Arrange a time for follow-up when you’ll talk to them again and ensure they completed the assignment.