

Worksite Lunchtime Union Meetings

SkillBrief

1. Know the purpose and structure of your meeting. Create a realistic agenda.

Lunch time meetings are chaotic. Members come late and leave early. Be sure to have a short realistic agenda in writing to hand out. For a 30 minute meeting plan for 20 minutes of 'good contact time' with members. If your agenda or rap is too long, highlight the main points and cut where needed. Remember, you will be back for more meetings, so don't try to cram too much into one lunch period. Your message needs to be clear and to the point.

2. Get to the meeting early to set up.

With such a short and potentially chaotic meeting time, it is imperative that you have everything in place - food, agendas, handouts, flip chart, etc., *before* the first member arrives.

3. If you have a partner - a worksite leader, steward or another staff person - plan for facilitation at the front and the back of the room.

One facilitator stands at the front of the room making the presentation and running the meeting. The other facilitator should make sure everyone signs in, gets the handouts, and then stands at the back of the room - ready to jump into action. For example, a new member wants to help with the union's next campaign, but can't stay until the end of the meeting. The facilitator at the back of the room can walk out with her/him to get the new activist's name and contact information. Or, you have someone who is mad at the union or worse yet, wants to drop their membership. They walk away from the meeting mad and disheartened about the meeting. The facilitator at the back can meet with individuals outside of the room to answer questions and listen to problems. This way it is less likely that meeting time will be dominated with individual issues or problem members.

4. Know the issues you expect to come up.

Check miscellaneous notes from calls, grievance meetings, or labor/management meetings. Take some time to think about what happened at the last union meeting. Be ready to answer the questions that start with, *"whatever happened with the.....?"* Make sure you get needed answers before the meeting. When you tell members you will get back to them - don't forget to do so ASAP.

Union member want to see their union doing something. As our grievances processes have become more legalistic and carried out away from the worksite it has been increasingly easier for members to say, *"Why do I pay dues? I don't see the union doing anything."*

5. Try not to be center stage all of the time. Help local officers and stewards run the meeting.

Whenever possible, think like a mentor, not a do-er. If the local officers and stewards are respected in their area, the message will be more meaningful coming from them rather than union staff. With someone new to meeting facilitation, start them off easy, with a small part. Help them focus and watch body language. Gradually increase their role until the member leader is running the meeting and you are there only for support and to answer questions.

6. To combat apathy be upbeat and enthusiastic about the union.

Enthusiasm is catching and the only way to combat members who say, *"We've tried that before. Nothing can be done. Management is just too powerful."* Remember, we are not born apathetic. Members have real reasons for acting like they don't care - fear, bad representation in the past, an authoritarian boss, etc. You have to believe that change can happen and communicate that feeling to members.

7. Learn how to handle difficult people.

This takes practice. The two necessary skills are listening and asking the right questions. Learn when you can 'fix' the situation and when nothing you say will make a difference. If there is nothing you can do - the member is going to hold on to his/her anger no matter what you or anyone else says - ask, *"Do most of you agree with Chris? Let's hear from someone who has another point of view."* Often the disgruntled member is way outside of the mainstream and has no following. Or, members will feel sorry that you are under attack by Chris and take your side. Explain that you are at the meeting to hear from everyone, not just one individual.

8. Never let a new volunteer leave the room without getting contact information.

Sometimes this is hard if you don't have a helper or someone stationed at the back of the room to get names and other information. However, new recruits are golden. Make every effort to get their name and then always make an appointment to speak with them individually at a later date, or better yet that same day.