

Why Organize?

Mobilizing members to solve work site issues is the best way to build union strength and power in the work place. When we have individual complaints, grievances or problems we should always ask: does this issue affect a whole group? For example, one employee getting disciplined for not completing work assignments may really be a larger issue of understaffing. To solve the larger issues, think of strategies and actions to win our issues as a group. Strategies such as: group grievances, petitions, mass meetings, marches on the boss, etc. This approach takes advantage of the source of the union's strength - its members!

Organizing is not only about solving problems or winning issues, but doing it in a way that builds the organization; in a way that involves the membership and develops leaders.

Scenario One: Organizing is fundamentally how we move power from management to the union.

1. Member comes to the steward with an issue
2. 1:1 conversations: Come to the meeting! Let's organize!
3. Everyone is talking about the union! "Are you going to the meeting? Yes, of course."
4. 80% of the department comes to a meeting. "Let's do a group grievance and a petition and ALL of us hand it to our boss!"
5. Action! When we give the grievance and the petition to the boss he's scared and solves the problem right away!
6. Victory! WE did it, as a union! Our boss won't dare mess with us again!

Scenario Two: Power stays with management.

1. Union: "Here's my grievance, call me so we can set up a meeting"
2. Management: "Ummm, yeah, I'll call you when I get a chance. I need to check my schedule I'm really busy."

On the next page are examples of a "servicing" model of unionism and an "organizing" model of unionism. The left side of the column is the "servicing" model where stewards, union representatives and leadership are only around and solve issues when they arise, like an insurance agent. This creates a weak powerless union - a very individualistic approach. On the right side of the column is an "organizing" model, which builds the kind of power we need to have a strong powerful union at our work sites.

Servicing Model Weakening Members' Power	Organizing Model Building the Union & Workers' Power
Member has a problem and views it as only a personal issue. <i>"They're not re-classifying me even though I have the responsibilities and do the job of a higher-paid classification. They are ignoring me."</i>	Member has a problem, but understands it is not just personal, but part of the conflict between management and employees. <i>"They're refusing to pay people fairly for the real work we do. This must stop."</i>
Member says to steward: <i>"Fix my problem. That's why I pay dues, isn't it?"</i>	Member says to steward: <i>"What can we do so management doesn't keep getting away with this?"</i>
Steward talks to boss alone. <i>"Let's just settle this so reclassifications are done promptly and fairly."</i>	Steward talks to other members about how the issue affects us all. Steward and member(s) together go to talk to the boss to resolve the problem.
Steward acts as an insurance agent and simply files the grievance.	Steward acts as an organizer. The steward files the grievance and involves members to take action on the issue. A united message is sent to management.
Grievance is won and individual member feels happy. Grievance is lost and member is unhappy and may blame "the union," not management.	Grievance is won and it is viewed as a victory for all. Those involved feel they have successfully defended workers' rights. Those directly affected see the difference the union makes. Grievance is lost, but members are even more determined to take the campaign to the next level to protect workers' rights.
The Result: Members have not built power. Union organization at the worksite is weak. Management takes advantage of this lack of unity and loss of confidence in the union. It becomes easier for management to get away with violating the contract and eroding workers' rights.	The Result: Members are empowered and the union is better organized at the worksite. The more collective understanding and action, the less ability for management to get away with disrespecting and intimidating members and violating the contract.