

Membership Involvement



As a steward, you will soon learn that certain concerns are shared by many members. When that comes about, to supplement the effect of a grievance and/or to add to a health and safety complaint, etc., it makes sense to get members together to determine a collective action to deal with a problem.

Working with a group and solving problems as a group shows management that you are not the only one who cares about the contract. It keeps you from being isolated or thought of as the troublemaker. Finally, when management has experienced effective collective action -- even if it's only signing a petition -- you will find your grievances get solved earlier and more to everyone's satisfaction.

Because members have to DO something in order to be successful, participation also indicates how important resolution of a problem is to the members. The cardinal rule is if people don't participate -- for whatever reason they come up with -- it is not important to them. If the members don't want it, you as a steward can go on to other things.

Getting it together

When you have found many employees with the same type of problem, it makes sense for you to call an informal meeting (on non-work time) to discuss the concern and how it may be resolved. Before the meeting, make sure you have talked -- or someone else has talked -- with each individual so you have an idea of the specific problem and that each person coming has some idea of what the solution might be and some idea of how to get the problem solved -- petition, wearing buttons, having a meeting with the supervisor,

etc. This kind of preparation is necessary so that the group can decide:

- *what the main components of the problem are*
- *how the problem could be resolved*
- *what a strategy or strategies are*
- *who is going to do specific tasks to make it happen*

Progress on specific tasks should be discussed at subsequent meetings. Members are accountable to each other for accomplishing their tasks.

Selecting a strategy

Select a strategy that:

1. Everyone -- or the majority -- feels comfortable with and will do.
2. Will be effective -- you and your members know the strength and weakness of your management. Use that knowledge to your benefit!
3. Is fun. Because there are no set strategies, use your creativity. For example, employees could bring in a birthday cake to "celebrate" their supervisor's inaction on an issue. Everybody gets a treat and the supervisor gets the point.

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4. Begin with small goals/tasks and build to larger ones.

It is inherent in the process of selecting a strategy that people really begin to narrow what it is they want. Further, in the process of pursuing an issue people become realistic about what can or cannot be achieved. If your group has pursued an issue and needs help -- ask for it! Perhaps people in other departments or agencies or other organizations have the same interest.

When can I talk to the members?

Your right to involve members and act collectively is protected by the collective

bargaining law. However, talking with people should be done on breaks, lunch or after work -- not during work.

BUILD! BUILD! BUILD!

Be patient, building membership support is a new idea to most people and it will take time to take hold. However, people will soon learn their concerns are dealt with more effectively by working together. It is of utmost importance to constantly communicate with everyone about progress. This builds solidarity -- no one feels left out.

Finally -- delegate tasks. When people put effort in their work, they appreciate the outcome much more!

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AFSCME Local 11 - AFL-CIO

Revised 4/09

Printed In-House by
OCSEA

