



**Industrial Workers of the World
North American Regional Administration
Literature Committee**



Weakening the Dam

WOBBLIES ON BUILDING
WORKER POWER

EDUCATION | ORGANIZATION | EMANCIPATION





Weakening the Dam

WOBBLIES ON BUILDING
WORKER POWER

2024

Resources

Workers Power blog

<https://forworkerspower.blogspot.com/>

Organizing.Work

<https://organizing.work/>

Think It Over

<https://www.iww.org/resources/think-it-over.pdf>

One Big Union

<https://www.iww.org/resources/one-big-union.pdf>

Work and Working Class Consciousness

by Martin Glaberman

How To Fire Your Boss:

A Workers Guide to Direct Action

Contact

Organizer Training Committee

otc@iww.org

- ❑ Develop a system for collecting and assessing worker grievances, and crafting effective plans for action and escalation. This process should draw on collective decision-making and shopfloor power.
- ❑ Develop new workers to become officers, leaders, and trainers at a rate to outpace burnout, to resist the “service model” and distribute skills around the workplace more evenly.
- ❑ Hold elections to rotate administrative and officer roles at regular intervals.
- ❑ Constant inoculation of everyone in the shop, especially against:
 - Red-baiting of the IWW
 - Firings and arbitrary discipline
 - Going public, seeking NLRB certification, contractualism
 - Union-busting tactics, captive audience meetings
 - One-on-one meetings with the boss
- ❑ Develop “messaging” for the campaign: a coherent and unifying vision of what the union is fighting for

When to close/downgrade a job branch:

- Failure to sustain
- If it comes to this, work closely in consultation with the Job Branch to determine the proper direction

Table of Contents

Why Is This Pamphlet Called Weakening the Dam?	6
Note to Readers From the Literature Committee.....	6
Introduction to the 2024 Edition.....	7
More and Better Organizers.....	8
Lasting Lessons from the Class Struggle.....	10
Emotional Pressure and Organization Building.....	13
Talking to Bosses: Stick to the Script!.....	15
Know the Union, Hear the Union, See the Union.....	17
Know the Union, Hear the Union, See the Union: Still Good Advice	19
Charting.....	21
Replace Yourself.....	23
Goals. Then Strategy. Then Tactics.	25
Level Up!.....	27
Workplace Organizing and Member Development Checklists . . .	30
Sample Campaign Benchmarks	32
Resources.....	37
Contact	37

Why Is This Pamphlet Called Weakening the Dam?

The Missoula Floods changed the landscape of what would eventually become Washington State 15,000 years ago. Small ruptures of a glacial dam on the Clark Fork River led to larger ruptures. Eventually the dam broke, discharging 2.6 billion gallons of water every second.

In the IWW, our workplace committees, campaigns, and fights with the bosses have caused similar ruptures. Working together to organize will turn these ruptures into a flood that will empower workers and forever change the landscape of the world's economy.

Note to Readers From the Literature Committee

This pamphlet is intended for IWW members as a training tool. It was designed to offer resources to build the confidence, competency, and commitment of IWW organizers. There are more resources in Organizer Training 101 and 102, and in your local IWW branch. See the references at the end of this pamphlet.

Job Branch

Criteria:

- At least 10 (or over 50% in small workplaces) IWWs in the workplace
- At least 10 (or over 50% in small workplaces) workers completed the OT101
- 3+ workers completed the OT102
- Won demand(s) through collective action
- Regular, structured and democratic workplace committee meetings
- Meeting with EOs once a month
- Strategy to turn the majority of coworkers into 1s or 2s
- Up to date contact list, social map with identified leaders, physical map and list of grievances
- At least one year of organizing
- Elect a secretary, treasurer and delegate(s)
- Written and approved job branch bylaws

Goals:

- ☐ Establish and maintain a workplace committee of at least 20% of the workforce, representative of all shifts, positions, job sites, and social groups
- ☐ Maintain a consistent majority density of IWWs in the workplace, and implement a plan to increase membership
- ☐ Think and act industrially: Develop specific strategies to reach new hires, departments, locations, shops and job functions that are not organized already
- ☐ Always be organizing: regular one-on-ones with everyone in the workplace, except those who are close to the boss
- ☐ Continually cycle new participants through the OT101
- ☐ 5+ workers, including all officers, completed the OT102

Continued....

Job Committee

Criteria:

- At least one worker completed the OT101
- 2 or more IWWs in the workplace
- Regular one-on-ones
- Grievance list
- Workplace organizing committee meeting at least once a month
- Up to date contact list, social map with identified leaders and physical map

Goals:

- ☐ At least 10 (or over 50% in small workplaces) IWWs in the workplace
- ☐ At least 10 (or over 50% in small workplaces) workers completed the OT101
- ☐ 3+ workers completed the OT102
- ☐ Plan and take collective direct action around a grievance
- ☐ Structured and democratic committee meetings every two weeks:
 - Use an agenda
 - Record minutes
 - Set goals
 - Assign and follow up on tasks
 - Vote on decisions
 - Elect a meeting chair
- ☐ Develop a strategy to turn the majority of coworkers into 1s or 2s:
 - Develop a strategy to win their grievances
 - Learn to craft effective plan of escalation
 - Understand what level of organization and support they need to win what demands
- ☐ Begin discussing officer roles (delegate(s), secretary, and treasurer)
- ☐ One EO for every 10 workers who are members of the workplace organizing committee

Introduction to the 2024 Edition

by Nate H.

In the late 2000s a friend of mine who worked at a nursing home several hundred miles away called me asking for help with problems at work. They had already started organizing and things were heating up. They were not able to get to an organizer training and said something like, “I don’t know what to do, please send me anything I can read to help me, as soon as you can.”

The point of the Workers Power column was to provide nuts and bolts help on how to organize as well as analysis and ideas to inform strategy in organizing. I thought that kind of material might be some help to my friend, so I went through the Workers Powers column and sent several of them along. My friend did find them helpful, but not as much as an organizer training.

This material is not a substitute for an organizer training, it works much better after a training. After I sent the columns to my friend, I shared the document with the columns with my GMB, who said it would make a good pamphlet if we added a little more to it, which is how it became a pamphlet.

At the time of this update writing in 2023, the Workers Power column has not run for several years and currently the best place for content like that column used to run is the website Organizing Work (organizing.work), which often features essays by people who used to contribute to Workers Power.

The spirit of all of this kind of writing is to capture workers’ experiences of organizing, in order to help future organizers draw on lessons learned so that those future organizers start off a little bit further down the road. With that in mind, anyone who has been organizing in their workplace for a while should consider writing up their experience (both successes and even more importantly, failures) and sharing it to help other people learn from the experience.

More and Better Organizers

Adapted from a text originally written by Nate H.

The IWW's number one priority right now should be to build up the confidence, competency, and commitment of IWW organizers, and to organize to turn more workers into IWW organizers. This pamphlet is meant to offer some more resources for this approach. There are a lot more resources among IWW organizers, resources that are not written down but are in people's heads.

The particular material collected in this pamphlet includes selections from the Workers Power column, edited by Colin Bossen, that used to run in the Industrial Worker newspaper. After the selections from Workers Power are two checklists, one for developing people as active IWW members and another for developing people as workplace militants. After the checklists are sample benchmarks to mark the stages of an IWW campaign.

Historical Note

The IWW was founded at a convention that started on June 27th, 1905. The IWW founding convention resulted from a prior conference in January, 1905. The January conference resulted from an informal meeting and exchanges of letters between radical unionists in November of 1904. The January conference produced a document called the Industrial Union Manifesto, which called for the June convention at which the IWW was founded.

In 1913, Paul Brissenden noted that "the Industrial Workers of the World is not the first organization of workers built upon the industrial form. Even its revolutionary character can be traced back through other organizations" such as the Knights of Labor, the Western Federation of Miners, the American Labor Union, the United Metal Workers International Union, the Brewery Workers, and the Socialist Trade and Labor Alliance. The point is that the IWW did not drop from the sky. It was the result of a process based on earlier experiences and ideas.

- ☐ Meeting with EO once every 2-4 weeks
- ☐ First one-on-one with a coworker
- ☐ Strategy to build a democratic workplace organizing committee

When to close a lead:

- No contact or meeting with EOs for over 3 months
- No progress on assigned tasks for 3 months

Campaign

Criteria:

- Joined the Union
- First one-on-one
- Meeting with EOs every 2-4 weeks
- Up to date contact list, social map with identified leaders and physical map

Goals:

- ☐ At least one worker completed the OT101
- ☐ Regular one-on-ones
- ☐ Grievance list (gathered from one-on-ones)
- ☐ 2 or more IWWs on the job (not including salts)
- ☐ 2 or more workers completing tasks
- ☐ Workplace organizing committee meet at least once a month
- ☐ Meeting with EOs every 2-4 weeks

When to close or downgrade a campaign:

- No contact or meeting with EOs for over 3 months
- Failure to keep up with assigned tasks for 3 months

- ☐ Play a key role at some local public action with the IWW (picket captain, hand out leaflets, etc. and report back to the branch)
- ☐ Write something for the *Industrial Worker*
- ☐ Attend a Union-wide event (and report back to the branch)
- ☐ Start organizing in your workplace and therefore go through the other checklist

Sample Campaign Benchmarks

Adapted from the Greater Toronto Area GMB
Organizing Committee

Contact

Goals:

- ☐ First meeting with an external organizer (EO)
- ☐ Join the Union

Note: A contact will automatically become an organizing lead after they meet with an EO. A contact should be closed if there is no meeting or communication with an EO after a month.

Leads

Criteria

- First meeting with an EO
- Join the Union

Goals:

- ☐ At least 3 meetings with an EO
- ☐ Contact list
- ☐ Social map
- ☐ Identified leaders
- ☐ Physical map

Continued...

The Western Federation of Miners (WFM), one of the most important radical working class organizations of its day, played a very important role in the founding and early history of the IWW. The WFM itself grew out of a process. A number of miners' unions merged in the early 1890s. Before they merged, they had to be organized in the first place.

There's a point to all this history. The world has moved forward, of course, but for many people in the working class, we have moved backward. Our class is less organized. If anything, the present is as much or more like the 1880s than 1905.

Our present tasks are not much like the tasks of the people who founded the IWW. Our present tasks are more like the people who worked to form the initial unions who later merged to form the WFM. June 27th, 1905 is a long-term goal. We need to begin a long-term process which will end with something like June 27th, 1905, and which will begin a new process like the one that was started with the IWW's founding convention. As a first step toward that process, we need more confident, capable, and committed IWW organizers, recruited from the ranks of the working class through our organizing. Hopefully this pamphlet helps with that. There is so much else that has to happen. We have so much to do.

Lasting Lessons from the Class Struggle

Adapted from a text originally written by M. Jones and MK

“To build the new society, you need new people, and people can be transformed only in activity.”

Martin Glaberman, Work and Working Class Consciousness

March 20th, 2004

Over the course of a year, a group of UPS parcel loaders had developed a lot of camaraderie and solidarity with one another. They came together and refused to work at the speed demanded by the bosses. A new worker started, and management tried to isolate him from the group. When he defied them and lined up with the rest of the workers – working at their pace, calling management “blue shirts” and spending his breaks with other militant workers – management told him that if he didn’t work faster, he would be fired.

His coworkers responded one morning by refusing to go back to work after a break until a certain blue shirt, the one most responsible for pressuring the new worker, was taken off the loading line. The tension was high. None of them had ever been involved in anything like this before.

They won their demand, and the supervisor was taken off the line. However, they were threatened with firings if they tried anything like that again. Over the course of the next year, they all moved on to other jobs, other shifts at UPS, or to other departments.

Roughly a year and a half after this action, two friends who had been involved met up to chat over beers. One had quit UPS, but the other still worked there. He relayed how he would bring the story up whenever he saw their old despised manager, and how the blue shirt’s face would turn red and he would storm off.

Nostalgic for the old crew and their bold action at work, the worker

Checklist for People Who Just Became IWW Members

Goals:

- Build relationships between the new member and other IWW members
- Educate members so they can understand and participate in IWW procedures and democracy
- Build people’s sense that being an IWW member is part of who they are

- ☐ Attend a new member orientation
- ☐ Attend a branch social event
- ☐ Regularly attend branch meetings
- ☐ Report at a branch meeting about IWW activity at their job or that they’re otherwise involved in
- ☐ Attend some local public event with the IWW (picket, demonstration, speak out, etc)
- ☐ Give a report at a branch meeting about an IWW activity somewhere else (this involves calling at least one person in another branch and having a conversation with them about what’s going on in their branch/campaign)
- ☐ Participate in a branch committee
- ☐ Chair a branch meeting
- ☐ Attend a meeting about organizing (either long term campaign or short term issue/workplace action) other than in their own workplace, debrief afterward
- ☐ Read and discuss *One Big Union*, *How to Fire Your Boss: A Worker’s Guide to Direct Action*, and *Think It Over*
- ☐ Deliver a report or otherwise speak publicly as a representative of the IWW at a local event/meeting (and report back to the branch)
- ☐ Write something for the branch newsletter or website

Continued...

Workplace Organizing and Member Development Checklists

Below are two checklists we can use to be systematic and deliberate about developing our fellow workers into good Wobbly organizers.

Checklist for People We’re Working with in an Organizing Campaign

Goals:

- Make this person committed to the campaign
- Get this person to join the IWW
- Make this person into an organizer
- Help this person become a good Wobbly

- ☐ Have an organizer do a one-on-one with them
- ☐ Attend an organizing meeting (to plan an action, to discuss goals, etc)
- ☐ Attend OT101
- ☐ Go with an organizer to meet with other workers and take the co-pilot role, debrief afterward
- ☐ Go with an organizer to meet with other workers and take the lead role, debrief afterward
- ☐ Set up a one-on-one with a co-worker on their own
- ☐ Hold a one-on-one with a co-worker on their own
- ☐ Participate in a job action
- ☐ Join the IWW (and do the things on the other checklist)

who had moved on called another former coworker. He too expressed pride in their defiance and said that he looked forward to the next time he could stick it to management to show them who was really in charge.

The memory of that experience lingered, and those workers held onto a desire to take action the next time they had the strength.

May 17th, 2006

Messengers from Arrow Messenger Service in Chicago gathered for a special anniversary party at a fellow worker’s home. Exactly one year before, on a busy Thursday afternoon, they had all turned off the two-way radios they used to communicate to their dispatcher. They had gone through three fruitless negotiating sessions with the company, and this was their way of showing Arrow that if the bosses wouldn’t meet their terms, the company wouldn’t run. After a pitched battle during the ensuing month, the company agreed to the workers’ demands.

Only three or four of the party guests out of twenty still worked at the company. Several had been fired during the campaign, others quit in frustration, and others just decided to move on. There was virtually no worker organization left at the company.

At first glance, one might look at these shop floor skirmishes and see defeat. But no one who was involved regretted it. For some of them, it was the greatest experience at work they had ever been a part of. The consensus was that the whole thing was life-changing. Through struggle we gain more than changes in working conditions, resolved grievances, union or no union – we produce new kinds of people who learn that a crappy workplace is not something to be endured, but to be collectively resisted.

A major part of our organizing has to be a change in consciousness, an understanding of our own power.

A major part of our organizing has to be a change in consciousness, an understanding of our own power. Direct action, where workers themselves demand change, provides that feeling of power. Once we have it, we are much harder to push down.

At UPS, workers stood up to bosses to defend a fellow worker. At

Arrow, workers took action to strengthen their position and to make a clear point: we are united, and without us, you do not have a company.

When workers act as a group, we make a statement to each other: I am ready to stand here with you. We may win the fight, or we may lose, but that always stays with us. This is why these types of actions change lives.

Conclusion

Not everyone involved in a workplace action will become an organizer, but they will think about the fight they've just been through and what it means for their own lives. Regardless of the results, they will have discovered the power they have when they stand with their fellow workers.

It may not occur to us immediately, but as with any major change in our lives, the effect of taking workplace action lingers. The feeling of pride does not go away. And when we have the chance, we line up with, or maybe even lead, an effort to organize and take a stand against the boss. This time we do it with less hesitation than before, maybe with more foresight and with more vigor, because now we know exactly what it means.

The bottom line is this: the effect of organizing needs to be an increase in workers' willingness to resist. This lays the groundwork for future organizing. To "organize the worker, not the job," as we say in this union, is to create new kinds of people, people who are less likely to roll over and take the shit the boss throws at them.

The bottom line is this: the effect of organizing needs to be an increase in workers' willingness to resist.

Trainer. There's a leveling-up system for trainers as well. In order to become an OT101 Trainer – or for OT102 and T4T – you should have taken the training a few times and put it to use in your own workplace.

Don't worry about knowing every single detail or "getting a good grade." You'll get a better grasp on things the more trainings you do, and when you start as a trainer you'll be paired with a more experienced trainer.

Keep Organizing!

The more we organize and train other Wobblies to organize, the better organizers and trainers we become. Sometimes a campaign might only get so far as being able to draw up a social chart, but then you can use that social chart when you train other IWW members. Maybe you participated in a direct action that flopped. You can turn that into a learning experience by debriefing with your coworkers or by writing about it. The more we learn to tackle the smaller hurdles, the better prepared we are to take on the next ones and to bring more Wobblies with us. Keep fighting the good fight and never stop leveling up!

on-one conversations with coworkers will flow more smoothly the more practice you get. Even if you only make a little progress at your job, you can build on that experience at future jobs.

Take an Organizer Training 102

After you form an organizing committee in your workplace, sign up for an OT102, which builds on what you learn in OT101. You should take the 102 early on because it gets into the details of practicing direct democracy, escalating direct actions, and sustaining your committee. It's important to incorporate healthy committee practices and strategic planning at the early stages of a campaign.

Business unions usually start a committee, and then once it's up and running, they petition the employer for recognition, or they file for a union election with the government. The IWW is a revolutionary union – we don't need or want the government to intervene to provide stability.

We maintain momentum through practicing robust internal democracy and through recruiting more workers to take part in bigger workplace actions. Our greatest weapon is solidarity, and the OT101 and OT102 trainings teach the nuts and bolts of Solidarity Unionism.

Take Another Training

No two trainings are ever the same. Each time, you'll learn from different trainers and with a different set of trainees. They all bring unique training styles and organizing stories. And let's be honest with ourselves: each training is 16 hours' worth of material. We are never going to memorize it all after one training or even two. Take lots of trainings and have fun with them.

Become a Trainer

Organizer Trainers are credentialed by the union to give our official trainings. When you become an IWW trainer, you're paired up with other trainers, so you can learn from their teaching styles and experiences. It's a great way to learn new lessons and to pass along your experiences in the union.

You can draw from your experiences to give a personal touch to your trainings. It can be inspiring for trainees to hear personal stories about workplace organizing, even if it's just you showing a map or social chart from one of your workplaces. The OTC can train you to be an OT101 Trainer, an OT102 Trainer, and a Training For Trainers (T4T)

Emotional Pressure and Organization Building

Adapted from a text originally written by Nate H.

Organizers need to do two things on the job: build relationships and improve conditions. We could do these separately. For instance, we could do something that builds relationships with no intent to improve conditions, like setting up a poker night or a knitting circle. Or we could try to improve conditions without building relationships, by bribing or kissing up to the supervisor.

A union needs to do both of these things, and to do that, we have to take action on the job. Direct action is the oxygen of our union. We start by taking the informal organization that already exists on the job – relationships and communication and level of agitation – and directing this towards the boss.

Direct action is the oxygen of our union.

When you plan an action, ask, "Who has the power to change this?" For instance, the night shift supervisor in the receiving department at a factory probably can't control the health insurance plan or introduce a new health plan. But they can control how they enforce policy on bathroom breaks and how respectfully they treat employees.

List the issues people want improved and list the lowest-level boss with decision-making power on each issue. Generally speaking, the lower they are on the food chain, the less it will take to make them do what you want. This is important early on when you only have a small group. Five people in one department probably won't win much for all 100 people in the plant, but they could win improvements in that department. Those improvements can be used to recruit more people in order to take on bigger issues and to do more outreach. That's building organization.

Early in a campaign it's useful to focus on what could be called emotional actions or emotional pressure. Emotional action is when we offer our boss a choice: make work less of a headache for us, or we will make work more of a headache for you. The lower the level of the boss is, the easier this will be. If the boss is a supervisor we see every day, then they care more about our opinions and how we treat them.

When we collectively confront the boss about conditions that are making our lives unpleasant, we give the boss an unpleasant experience. They want that experience to end as quickly as possible, so they may be willing to make small improvements. That small win helps us convince our co-workers that we can improve things by organizing, and that if even more people get involved, we can win even bigger improvements.

Level Up!

Adapted from a text originally written by Jean-Carl Elliott

I've met so many Wobblies throughout the years who sign a Red Card and then don't know what to do next. Without a sense of direction, our members tend to gravitate towards other activist groups, or they leave the union altogether. We want to keep workers involved and to give them a sense of purpose in the IWW.

Growing the IWW isn't just about increasing the size of our membership, it's also about increasing its depth. We aren't signing up people from our workplaces and industries for their dues. We are signing them up to make them into Wobblies!

Being a Wobbly means we know where we stand in the class struggle, we know the lessons learned from those who struggled before us, and we stand in solidarity with other Wobblies who are continuing the struggle today. Being a Wobbly isn't just about having a Red Card, it's about leveling each other up!

Take an Organizer Training 101

In the OT101, trainees learn the basic techniques of starting a workplace organizing committee that meets regularly and plans direct actions on the job to build power and address grievances. The training is revised every few years based on the experiences of IWW organizers. It's also a really great way to get in touch with other Wobblies who are organizing their workplaces.

These courses are offered by the Organizer Training Committee (OTC). Contact the OTC at otc@iww.org to find a list of upcoming trainings or to start scheduling a new one.

Start organizing your workplace

It's well worth organizing your workplace, even if you just take the initial steps. Once you start building good organizing habits, the work comes more naturally. Getting people's contact information will feel less awkward and you'll start drawing your maps in more detail. One-

Tactics are concrete actions taken to further a strategy. Our tactics must demonstrate our resolve and effectively achieve our goals.

The important thing is that the workers on the shop floor must collectively decide on tactics and to take action together. They might sign a letter and present it to the boss as a group. They might all wear a special t-shirt. If the boss refuses to listen, a “sick out” or slowdown might be the next tactic to put more pressure on them.

When workers are in the habit of collectively making demands in the workplace, we develop power. When workers feel this power, when we win, we shift from “bread and butter” demands to broader political demands that represent our larger aspirations. If workers in the agriculture and foodstuff industry worldwide get good at demanding control over our jobs, pretty soon we can demand control over the distribution of food itself.

First we set goals, to determine what we really want tomorrow and what we think we can get today. Then we strategize – we plan out the campaign to achieve our goals and build the power and confidence of workers. Then we select tactics – concrete actions that demonstrate our resolve and alter the balance of power in the workplace.

Talking to Bosses: Stick to the Script!

Adapted from a text originally written by Nate H.

Bosses seem to have an instinct for turning the tables on us, and workers have a habit of letting them do so. We spend so much time following their orders – and they spend so much time giving them – that when we speak up, it can be as disorienting for us as it is for them. That can make it easy for the boss to take back control of the conversation.

For us to maintain control in conversation with the boss, we need to know what we want to happen. Things can’t go according to plan if we don’t have one.

Let’s say we’re going to confront a boss about making someone stay late. Here are some ways the boss might respond:

- Justify the decision – “We had more work, someone had to do it.”
- Bring up some other issue – “Well, you all are out of uniform.”
- Try to guilt you in some way – “You do this after I got you that nice coffee maker for the break room?”
- Bring up the way you raised the issue – “You shouldn’t bring this up in a group.”
- Point you to someone else or somewhere else – “You should bring this up at our team meeting” or “You really should go through Human Resources.”
- Question your right to bring it up at all – “This is a private matter between me and that person, it’s none of your business.”

Think about the different ways your boss will respond and know how you will reply in each case.

The goal in replying to a boss’s response is to bring the conversation back to your demand. Don’t get sidetracked. Don’t argue. At most,

acknowledge what they said (“We appreciate the new coffee maker” or “We tried to bring this up with HR”) but don’t let them turn the conversation away from your demands.

State your issue again and what you want: “You make us work late, and it causes problems for us. Will you stop that?” If they keep bringing up other things – and they probably will – say, “This isn’t about that. We’re here to talk about you making us work late.” Then re-state your issue and what you want them to do.

If you have to, just say, “We’re not here to debate with you or to discuss other things. We want to know if you will stop extending people’s hours. That’s all we want to talk about. Will you stop doing this?”

We want to communicate that our issue and our demand are not up for discussion. We are making clear that the issue is a problem and we are presenting our demand to fix it. Stick to the script and you can turn the tables on the boss.

Goals. Then Strategy. Then Tactics.

Adapted from a text originally written by J. Pierce

Imagine free food for every human being. No one should pay for a basic human right, and no one should starve. We already have the ability to feed the world’s population, but the captains of industry stand in our way. They withhold food from the market – even food that’s being thrown away – in an effort to keep it “profitable.” If workers controlled the whole operation instead of shareholders, we could decide how to produce food and distribute it – freely, democratically, the world over. That’s a long-term goal.

An intermediate goal, then, is worker control of the agriculture and foodstuff industry. If we run it from start to finish, we can do with it what we please. This goal creates the conditions for the grand goal: food for everyone.

An immediate goal – what’s necessary to feed ourselves today – might be a pay raise for a specific group of foodstuff workers. Workers need to survive and thrive. The strategy is workers’ power – on every farm, in every plant, every terminal and warehouse, coordinated across the entire industry, worldwide. The power to change conditions and structures of power so that nothing happens in that industry unless the workers agree to it.

To build power locally and industrially, workers need to be organized. We need shop floor and industrial committees to make collective decisions and to coordinate actions. We need to develop skills and experience as individual workers, and we need to expand the leadership capabilities of more and more workers. Therefore, part of our strategy has to be actively training workers and building an ever-increasing pool of experienced and dedicated organizers. Individual development must be part of the strategy.

but we're gonna help you fit it in. You have to be there, or this thing doesn't move."

We need to help others break out and step up. It's a sign of respect to ask people to do difficult things.

Train your replacement for an officer position

"Hey, Mei, you got a second? Has anyone talked to you about becoming the chair of the Committee? I'm going to be stepping down at the end of my term, and I think you'd be great for this position. Put some thought into it. Meanwhile, I'll start showing you what the job entails."

If we train new officers properly and regularly, we can avoid inertia and power imbalances in our leadership structures.

Encourage other members to read what you've read

"For those that didn't make it to the Summit, Maxine did a killer presentation on the legal barriers to organizing in her industry. It reminded me of this thing I read in an old One Big Union Monthly, so I ran off some photocopies of that article. I think it will help us come up with some good strategies."

In making IWW history and principles accessible, you cut down on the knowledge monopoly and pass on valuable lessons and experiences.

Introduce people to each other and have them exchange phone numbers

"Tenaya, have you met Steve yet? Steve, this is Tenaya. Yeah, you both work in the same industry and would have some awesome stories to tell each other. You two ought to collaborate and submit something for the next newsletter."

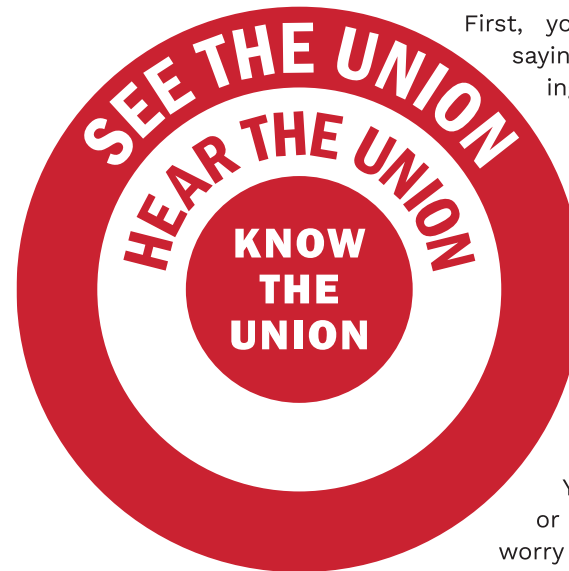
By introducing people and ensuring information exchange, you avoid "Ol' Boys Clubs," and now information doesn't have to go through you.

The task that we have as Wobblies is to build working-class leaders everywhere we go. We are constantly looking for opportunities to teach others what we know so that they can do what we do without us.

Know the Union, Hear the Union, See the Union

Adapted from a text originally written by Adam Weaver

On a 100-degree summer day I was in Stockton, California at the Sikh temple meeting room. A middle-aged trucker with a long, flowy beard asked me, "How do we show the other drivers who weren't at our meeting today what the union is and why they should join?" I struggled to give him a good, clear answer. I improvised an analogy that I think paints a picture of our Solidarity Unionism organizing model in practice: "Know the Union, Hear the Union, See the Union."



First, you give them the whole saying: "Here's how our organizing works: some workers will know the union, some will hear the union, but others have to see the union."

If you have a marker and paper, draw three circles around each other like a bullseye. In the middle one, write "know," the next "hear," and the outermost circle "see."

You'll get a raised eyebrow or maybe a "huh?" look. Don't worry – if you get a reaction, it means people will be interested to hear the explanation. Point to everyone in the room. Tell them that they are the workers who know the union. Point out that they are the workers who have attended meetings, initiated the organizing and maybe signed up for a red card. They already know collective action is needed to fight for change on the job, and that this is the definition

of a union. Usually this group is small, but it's the starting point for every campaign.

The people who know the union talk to other people. Some of them will be quickly convinced. They're the ones who hear the union. Maybe they won't come to the first meeting, or they might want to confirm that it's a legit effort, but once asked, they will participate.

Most workers are in the third camp: they're ones who need to see the union. These folks are skeptical that collective action by workers can win. They're probably scared of losing their jobs, or maybe they had a bad experience with another union. They need to see the union in action and understand that change is possible.

The workers who know the union organize, and they build relationships and leadership among the folks who hear about the union. Together both groups take action to force change on small issues. This demonstrates what a union does and allows the other workers to see what the union is. In the long run, workers move from seeing to knowing the union, becoming involved in the organizing and action.

Replace Yourself

Adapted from a text originally written by J. Pierce

The primary task of an organizer is to create more organizers. We need more working-class leaders, and the way to do this is to constantly replace yourself. Here's a few easy ways to help you build up your successors:

Share your sources so others can think with you

"I had a long talk with MK recently. He convinced me that we should reorganize as a shop committee instead of having one or two stewards. He gave me this awesome article on how IWW shop committees used to work."

Telling others where you got an idea from demonstrates that you think of them as equals. You also provide an opportunity for them to question your sources.

Show others how it's done and take them through the process

"Hey Keith, has anyone shown you how to submit an article to Industrial Worker? I'm going to submit that write-up on the strike right now, so I can show you how to do it. We need more people to submit."

Encourage people because you know they can do it

"We really need this message to get to the people up front. Can you have a talk with Shannon? She respects you, and you're the best person to talk to her."

You run faster for coaches that want to win. We've got to show that what we do matters and that we believe in each other.

Ask people to do things that are difficult

"I'm glad you've been talking things up so much at your shop. You're one of our best guys, Jerm. You should start coming to the Organizing Committee meetings. I know it's gonna be tight with your schedule,

we haven't talked to in a long time, the people who are slipping away, the people we haven't talked to at all. It might sound obvious, but charting tells us exactly who those people are. It also helps us identify the gaps in our knowledge. ("I just realized, I don't know how many custodians work third shift. We should find out.") Getting that information is a task that someone new to the campaign could take on with the help of a more experienced organizer.

On another sheet of paper, write down the tasks that have come up based on the chart. Write down who is going to do each task, and who is going to check in with everyone to make sure they did their task. Keep the charts and task lists after the meeting – ideally they should be typed up.

The next time you meet, update the chart, and the task list, too, to make sure everyone did their tasks, and discuss how the tasks went. This demonstrates progress ("In the last month we've talked to 15 more people, this means we have talked to half the workers by now!"), which can provide inspiration to keep going. It also might show patterns we might not have noticed ("We're talking to a lot more of the white workers, and to day shift workers, let's figure out how to break out of those networks and talk to more people."), which can help us identify new tasks.

If organizing is not systematic, it will likely rely too heavily on the social groups at work that we, the organizers, are most comfortable with. This puts us at risk of ignoring certain groups and perpetuating unconscious biases. Charting is a key piece of organizing that helps prevent this and helps you assess and distribute the work involved to keep the campaign going.

Know the Union, Hear the Union, See the Union: Still Good Advice

Adapted from a text originally written by x361737

Some time ago, Workers Power ran a column in which a Fellow Worker promoted "Know the Union, Hear the Union, See the Union" as a way of explaining how a healthy organizing campaign sustains itself and grows. Having done some organizing, I often found myself rereading that piece as a source of inspiration and advice.

For our friend, "Know the Union..." proved helpful when organizing slowed and workplace militants got frustrated. "Know the Union..." reminded workers to get back to the basics of successful organizing: one-on-one conversations and meetings where workers plan and undertake direct action.

"Know the Union..." also demonstrated the role the existing leadership of a campaign should play in a continual process by which co-workers are led through the hear/see/know ladder to build a culture of solidarity and collective activity.

Many self-identified radicals don't have much real-world organizing experience. There's a temptation to "intellectualize" the work of organizing, to treat it like an argument that can be won rather than a continual process.

Instead of trying to win the organizing argument, we're much better off building relationships and trust with our co-workers. Through these relationships, we engage in small-scale actions

*Instead of
trying to win
the organizing
argument, we're
much better
off building
relationships and
trust with our
co-workers.*

that demonstrate our collective power. These actions, in turn, lay the groundwork for larger struggles and deeper conversations. Like anything else, organizing takes practice, and defiance is a skill we have to exercise regularly.

Workers – whether they’re conscious of it or not – undertake individual anti-capitalist acts all the time. However, they often need to see the effect of collective action before they’re willing to join a union.

As organizers, “Know the Union” doesn’t just help us remember that organizing is a process. The most important thing organizers do is not winning arguments or making rousing speeches, but building the relationships that form the basis of any successful campaign.

Charting

Adapted from a text originally written by Nate H.

People who work out regularly know that physical fitness comes from two things: persistence and endurance. The same thing is true in organizing. Organizing gets results when it’s consistent over a long period of time, and a key to being consistent is putting things in writing. In recent times, the IWW mostly organized relatively small workplaces or small units within larger workplaces where it’s pretty easy to remember everyone’s name, what they do, and what experiences we’ve had with them. As a result, many of us are in the habit of keeping information in our heads. This may work in smaller settings, but once you go beyond 20 or 30 people, it becomes too much to remember.

When we store information in our head, our feelings shape our perceptions. Depending on whether we’re feeling optimistic or pessimistic, this can lead us to see real progress, or to overlook important steps that we fail to take. It also means that other people in our organization don’t have access to that information.

One activity that is key to organizing is regular charting: when the organizers of a campaign get together and do a written assessment of our current presence on the job.

Start with one sheet of paper. List all the facilities or departments in our campaign. List all of the IWW members in each facility or department, followed by the names of other people we have contact with, and the total number of people in each. Next to every name, write down whether or not someone has done a one-on-one with them, when it was, and how it went.

There will be more to say that doesn’t go in the chart, of course, as people talk about what worked and didn’t work in their one-on-ones. This is also a good opportunity to do a roleplay about what the organizer might have said differently, but that’s a subject for another time.

The process of charting helps us decide who to talk to – the people