

ORGANIZING AROUND WORKPLACE ISSUES

Total Time—2 hours

Learning Goals

- Explore the relationship between how members view our union and worksite organizing
- Consider different approaches for solving worksite problems
- Discuss situations where organizing around workplace issues makes sense
- Become familiar with a flow-chart tool that can help you decide how to solve problems
- Practice identifying issues that are appropriate for workplace organizing

Sections —Time

- I. Welcome, Review Goals of the Training—5 minutes
- II. How Members Think About Themselves and Our Union—10 minutes
- III. Solving Worksite Problems: Different Approaches—25 minutes
- IV. “Turn it Around” Video & Discussion—30 minutes
- V. Solving Worksite Problems Chart—15 minutes
- VI. Selecting An Issue to Organize Around—30 minutes
- VII. Wrap-Up—5 minutes

Materials Needed

Flip Chart, Markers, Tape

Copies of the UFCW Steward Handbook

Copy of the “Turn it Around” DVD (available from the UFCW International Union’s Organizing Department)

DVD player/projector, Speakers, Screen/blank wall

Handouts/Worksheets

How Members View Our Union Handout

Problem Solving Options Worksheet

Solving Worksite Problems Chart

Mobilizing to Solve Problems—Sample Form

NOTES**I. Goals for the Training—5 mins**

Post and review the goals for the training:

- Explore the relationship between how members view our union and worksite organizing.
- Consider different approaches for solving worksite problems.
- Discuss situations where organizing around workplace issues makes sense.
- Become familiar with a flow-chart tool that can help you decide how to solve problems.
- Practice identifying issues that are appropriate for workplace organizing.

II. How Members Think About Themselves and Our Union—10 mins

Distribute and review the How Members View Our Union handout.

Ask the participants, using a show of hands, whether diagram #1 or #2 best represents the views of the members at their worksite.

If the response is that most fit within diagram #2, explain that this is common.

Ask if there are times when the participants have encountered members who seem to fit more with diagram #1.

Note patterns in people's responses (i.e. when there is an issue that many members care about, then there's increased activity and communication, perhaps during bargaining and other times as well).

Ask the stewards what kinds of experiences they think might lead to the opposite—to members viewing our union as separate.

Note patterns in people's responses (i.e. "when nothing changes," "when we don't keep the members informed," etc).

Explain that the kinds of experiences members have as part of our union determines their views, as well as how they think about our union's power.

Module Icon Key

Flip Chart



Ideas



In Handbook



Worksheet/
Handout

The good news is that stewards can have a big impact in shifting this. How stewards approach our work can really help us to move towards diagram #1.



Explain that the rest of the workshop is going to explore different approaches to solving worksite problems, as this is one key way for members to experience collective power and to understand that they truly are the union.



Note that the diagrams just discussed are in the Steward Handbook.

III. Solving Workplace Problems: Different Approaches—25 mins

Observe that it's important for stewards to think about different approaches for solving worksite problems.



Distribute the Problem-Solving Options worksheet. Break the participants into small groups and ask them to read and discuss the different scenarios and to come back to the full group ready to report on the advantages and disadvantages of the different approaches. Explain that they have fifteen minutes for the exercise.



On multiple flip chart pages, create charts to record responses:

Scenario 1/Approach A: Advantages/Disadvantages

Scenario 2/Approach B: Advantages/Disadvantages

Bring everyone back together and call on different groups, asking for the advantages to Solution A and B for the scenarios, recording the responses.

Explain that all problem-solving approaches have advantages and disadvantages and that it's critical for stewards to consider a variety of options.

It's important for stewards to ask "How can I use worksite problems to build union power and involve members?"



IV. "Turn it Around" Video and Discussion—30 mins

Play the "Turn it Around" video.

Explain that while the DVD was produced by the Teamsters (a different union), the scenario it portrays—favoritism in work assignments—applies to many UFCW worksites as well.

Note: The video follows a story, pausing at different points, with questions for the participants. While you may decide to play the video all the way through, followed by discussion at the end, it's most effective to stop the video when the questions appear and to ask the group for their responses.

When the video concludes, ask if any of the participants have ever done something similar before at their current worksite or somewhere else. Ask

them to describe these worksite actions and whether they thought the approach was successful.

Note: In advance of the training, try to research a few examples of worksite organizing from the local or region to share. Often, people will have stories about collective actions (i.e. petitions or “marches on the boss”—during contract campaigns, etc) but may not think of it as “organizing around issues.” Try to draw out these experiences, as it’s important for the participants to be exposed to a variety of real-life examples.



Ask “Why would you choose to organize around a problem, even if you might be able to succeed solely through the grievance process?” Chart the responses.

Add the following, if not mentioned:

- Many members have not experienced what it feels like to be a part of collective action. Joining together to solve workplace problems is the best way for any of us to have a “union power” experience directly. Telling workers that “they are the union” may only seem like words until members can feel what this means, concretely.
- Organizing around issues increases our power—for future contract and organizing campaigns.
- The grievance process can take a long time. Organizing around issues can provide a more timely resolution.

V. Solving Worksite Problems Chart—15 mins



Distribute the handout A Steward’s Guide to Problem-Solving and explain that this chart provides a step-by-step road-map for approaching worksite issues.

Explain that the chart shows that we don’t have to choose between filing grievances and organizing around issues. Often, the best thing is to do both. Similarly, some problems are not appropriate for grievances, nor do they make sense to organize around. The chart allows for this as well. Note that all points on the chart lead to considering whether the issue might be something to raise during future contract negotiations. Observe that as we saw in the video, it’s often most effective to a) file a grievance, b) organize around an issue and c) try to address the issue during bargaining.

Ask what questions the participants have about the chart. Observe that it’s most useful as a tool when it’s referred to regularly. Suggest that the participants get in the habit of using the chart when faced with new (or existing) worksite problems.



Point out that the chart is also included in the Steward Handbook.

VI. Selecting An Issue to Organize Around—30 mins



Distribute the handout Mobilizing to Solve Problems—Sample Form.

Ask the participants to work in small groups to pick an issue that they can imagine organizing around.

Note: If the training participants are from different worksites, make sure that people from the same worksite come together for this exercise.

Explain that each group should begin by brainstorming current worksite problems and then select a problem to focus on, according to the questions on the handout.

Ask each group to select a reporter and explain that they have 15 minutes to complete the exercise.

Bring everyone back together and ask the groups to present the issues they selected and why.

VII. Wrap Up—5 mins

Conclude by encouraging the participants to follow-up by discussing their ideas with other members and with their union representatives.

Observe that the worksheets they began to complete during the last exercise are the beginnings of a worksite organizing plan.

Explain that steward trainings are most successful when the participants leave and try to put some of their plans into action.



Note that the Mobilizing to Solve Problems—Sample Form is also in the Steward Handbook.

HANDOUT: HOW MEMBERS VIEW OUR UNION

DIAGRAM # 1	DIAGRAM # 2
Union = Members/ Stewards	Union <hr/> Stewards Members
Members see that winning better conditions depends on them.	Members expect services for their dues.
When there is a problem, they ask what "we" are going to do about it.	When there is a problem members ask what is the "union" going to do about it.
Members see the stewards, staff and officers as leaders, not as people who will fix their problems.	Members think the steward's, staff and officer's job is to fix things for them.
Stewards, staff and officers discuss problems (and options for addressing them) with members.	It is difficult for members to learn about our union.

WORKSHEET: PROBLEM SOLVING OPTIONS

These are real situations faced by UFCW stewards. In your group, review and discuss both approaches and list the advantages and disadvantages for each.

SITUATION 1: DISRESPECTFUL SUPERVISOR

Since Jones became a supervisor a year ago, the number of suspensions has greatly increased. Jones is always on everyone, pushing them to work faster and harder. Whenever anyone questions him, Jones writes them up for insubordination. Top management likes Jones because he gets the work done with fewer people.

Approach A

Our union keeps filing grievances on all of the suspensions and writes another grievance charging Jones with harassment.

Approach A Advantages:

Approach A Disadvantages:

Approach B

Our union keeps filing grievances and also holds a meeting with all of the members who work under Jones, as well as the other stewards at the facility. They brainstorm what they can do and come up with the following steps:

Start a petition to Jones' boss and get as many names as possible protesting his actions.

Have everyone wear stickers that read "no harassment zone."

Send a delegation of stewards and members to top management and demand a meeting to talk about the problem with Jones.

Approach B Advantages:

Approach B Disadvantages:

A STEWARD'S GUIDE TO PROBLEM SOLVING

You hear about a problem.

You and the worker(s) investigate the problem.

Hold an informal meeting with the boss. Determine if you need to request information and/or conduct your own research. **Did you settle it?**

YES

All done.
Report
at next
meeting
or newsletter.

NO

Decide if it's a grievance.

YES

File the grievance.

Ask yourself:
"Is this an issue
we can
organize around?"

NO

Process the
grievance.

YES

Process the grievance
and create an
organizing plan.

NO

Ask yourself:
"Is it an important
issue anyway?
One we can
organize around?"

YES

Create an
organizing
plan.

NO

Explain to the
worker that
there is nothing
more to do
at this time.

Consider whether this is an issue to raise during future negotiations.

WORKSHEET: PROBLEM SOLVING OPTIONS

SITUATION 2: WORKING OUT OF TITLE

Supervisors frequently assign jobs to members that are outside their job description and threaten discipline for insubordination unless the member "obeys now and grieves later." Grievances are piling up, but the practice continues and members are wondering why it is taking so long for the situation to be resolved.

Approach A:

The union representative asks to meet with the Human Resources Director to persuade him of the negative impact of the inappropriate job assignments and the regular disciplinary slips on the morale of the workforce. He warns the HR Director that if it doesn't stop, there will continue to be a steady stream of grievances.

Approach A Advantages:

Approach A Disadvantages:

Approach B

All the stewards meet and decide to create forms entitled, "Assignment Despite Objection" (ADO). Whenever a member is given an inappropriate assignment, the steward helps the member to "write up" the supervisor. At the end of the first week, the stewards post, on the union bulletin board, a rating list of the supervisors, with negative points associated for each ADO.

Approach B Advantages:

Approach B Disadvantages:

Mobilizing to Solve Problems—Sample Form

Number of members in work area: _____

Issue: _____

Who cares about this issue?: _____

How many people are affected by this issue?: _____

Members already involved with this issue: _____

Members who would need to get involved: _____

Can this issue:

☐ Yes ☐ No Increase visibility of our union?

☐ Yes ☐ No Improve representation of underrepresented groups in our union?

☐ Yes ☐ No Be used to mobilize around?

How can pressure be exerted on:

Decision-makers in Management: _____

Outside decision-makers (government agencies, employer associations, public, etc.): _____

Remedy or Goal to be achieved: _____
