

#1

Why One-On-One Communication is Essential to Effective Organizing

One-on-one communication is our most powerful way to do the following:

1. Personalize the union; give it a human face
2. Build personal relationships; establish trust. (People join other people.)
3. Give individuals a chance to be heard through listening; identify issues; and understand what concerns and motivates our individual people.
4. Obtain a greater understanding of key information relevant to the workplace, the employer, primary social and work groups, and workplace leaders.
5. Provide factual information, inoculate, and deal with questions and objections.
6. Motivate people to take action (vote, join, attend, etc.)
7. Eliminate fear.
8. Assess support for the union.
9. Enlist members and volunteers.
10. Identify potential leaders.
11. Win!

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#2

Qualities of Effective Organizing Communicators

1. We respect boundaries, i.e., we know when it is okay to talk and when it is not.
2. We are not defensive about what we are doing. In fact, we project enthusiasm and pride about our union and its mission.
3. We do not make assumptions about a person's level of knowledge or his or her understanding of the issues and the union.
4. We pay attention to the person as a *person* (They make a connection as a fellow human being!).
5. We use probing questions to get the person talking.
6. We listen more than talk.
7. We are prepared to handle common questions and objections.
8. We know our own "union story" and what we value about the union.
9. What we have to say about the union is personally meaningful to us. (We speak from the heart.)
10. We make the conversation about issues and collective interest. (What we want to achieve vs. what the union needs.)
11. We do not "third party" the party. ("*our* union" vs. "*the* union")
12. We are honest in that we do not over promise or pretend to know things we don't.
13. We don't argue. (conversation vs. debate)
14. We "call the question." (We specifically ask people to *do* things.)
15. We leave the door open for future contact no matter what.

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#3

The 70/30 Rule and the Importance of Active Listening

We most often concern ourselves with honing how we speak to communicate, but not enough time is devoted to listening—active listening—as a communication skill.

In organizing conversation the general rule of thumb is that the organizer should be listening 70 percent of the time and speaking 30 percent of the time. *Why?*

1. The organizer needs to do this much listening in to order to learn enough about the person and his or her issues, concerns, etc. To organize effectively, the organizer needs to know how to “connect” this person’s self interest with the work of the union.
2. By listening well, the organizer communicates that the union values what people have to say/their experiences and cares about individual issues and concerns.

And in organizing conversations, we don’t just listen, we *actively listen*.

- Active listening--vs. passive or casual listening--makes two-way communication possible.
- It is the type of listening through which the organizer attempts to gather the feelings as well as the facts expressed in the message.
- It is the type of listening in which the organizer attempts to gather visual as well as verbal cues that build better understanding of the message.
- It is the type of listening in which the organizer attempts to control the natural tendency to respond to a message before the message is clearly understood.
- It is the type of listening that also communicates because it acknowledges the worth of the person doing the talking and thereby builds trust and emotional connections.
- Like other communication skills, active listening must be practiced in order to be learned.

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#4

Beware of the Language We Use

In all organizing conversations, union meetings and written communication, be very careful about references to “the union.” Remember that it refers to the membership as a whole – not an official or a building or the union organization. Using “third party” references only reinforces the tendency of potential members and even member to think of something other than themselves.

- Do not talk or write about *the union* meeting with the employer when more specifically you mean *the union organizer* or *the union negotiating team*, for example.
- Do not talk or write about a meeting *at the union* when you mean a meeting *at the union office*.
- Use “we” and “our union” rather than “you” and “the union.” It is more inclusive.

Some other examples:

- “the union organizer” not “the union”
- “our response” not “my response”
- “our membership” not “my members”
- “working with” not “working for”
- “working with you” not “working for you”
- “What we did through our union” not “what the union did for us.”

Concentrate on giving the message that the members are the union, and that therefore there are only two parties in the workplace – the management and the members not three—the management, the members and the union.

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#5

Structure of “The Organizing Conversation”

The organizing conversation is part of the art of organizing, and there are as many ways to teach it as there are organizers—even though each contains the same important elements though explained differently and sometimes presented in different orders. What is presented here is but one of many models.

“Get in the Door” (Start the Conversation)

Say who you are: Make a clear and concise introduction that includes your name, who you are (different from your name), why you are starting conversation (not necessarily “the ask”).

Stress the importance of the conversation: Ask if you can proceed to talk with them (e.g., “Can we talk?” “May I sit with you?” “Can I come in?”) Do not tell them that it will “just take a minute” because it probably won’t. Build the impression that this is an important conversation—because it is.

If the person says “no” or hesitates: It is not helpful to get in a discussion about whether or not they should talk with you. Just move on to your first question in Step #2, e.g., “How long have you worked there?” Sometimes this will be all it takes to overcome the objection to talking.

“Get the Story” (Identify Issues)

If need be, ask specific fact-based questions so you know with whom you are talking: Where do you work? What do you do? How long have you worked here? How did you come to work here?

Ask open-ended questions that get the conversation going: What’s it like to work here? How would you describe your typical day? What do you think when you get to the end of a day shift? What changes have you noticed about this place over the time you’ve worked here? These are all examples of questions that encourage the person to talk and you to listen.

Listen (and observe) for feelings expressed and follow up with questions to probe the facts: Feelings that you hear or observe (positive or negative) are your cues to dig deeper for the facts that account for those feelings. For example: Someone is stressed. Why? Someone is excited about their job. Why? Someone is worried about their future. Why?

Ask more questions to get to the facts behind the facts: For every issue raised, dig deeper to understand as much as you can about the issue and the person's unique history with that issue. Most people will not give full answers unless they are asked several follow-up questions. Most people will be resistant to readily volunteer important or personal information or even complain about their lives.

Use this portion of the conversation to begin building a relationship: As we are "getting the story" we are also building a relationship with the other person in the conversation. How we carry ourselves in this conversation plays a huge role in our ability to do so. So remember body language, eye contact, active listening skills, being "present" in the conversation, etc.

- Don't ask closed-ended questions that easily lead to yes or no answers that curtail a real conversation.
- Don't assume you know the person's issues because you've seen "that type" before.
- Don't assume you know that person's issues because what you've heard before the conversation.
- Don't transfer the result of previous conversation with other people to the one you are having.
- Don't interrogate or go on fishing expeditions for the issues you expect to hear.
- Don't assume or fill in the facts for yourself. When in doubt, ask more questions.

"Share a Vision of the Union/Campaign" **(Connecting Issues to Union Activity)**

Connect the issues uncovered in the conversation to the possibilities offered through a strong union: Use one or more of these appropriate strategies:

Use more questions to have the person imagine the possibilities of union power: What would happen if workers made that decision? What would we change if we had a stronger voice to influence that decision? What would we tell the hospital about those plans? What would happen if all of us stood together and pushed back on that issue? How much stronger could we be if all were members/were active in the union?

Relate the issues to previous successful union activity: Tell a story of how union activity, especially the power of solidarity and collective action, made a difference on the same or similar issue. The more recent and more local the example, the more effective it will be.

Tell your own story: Paint a picture of the experiences that have led you to be a committed unionist. What have you seen or done that motivates you to want to share the gift of union power? Whatever your story, be specific and speak from the heart. Use your enthusiasm to convey and build more interest.

"Overcome Objections" **(Educate/Inoculate)**

As objections begin to become uncovered at this point and later in the conversation: Address them using "Feel, Felt, Found" or other technique to keep the conversation going toward "the ask" in a way that respects the validity of the objection while also directly taking it on.

No matter the objection, persist in defining the union as the power that gives the person the chance to address their issues: Continue to present a vision of something worth fighting for. Contrast their situation now with how it might be if they have a strong active union.

NOTE ON INOCULATION: In some organizing campaigns, especially where an anti-union campaign from the employer or other groups is real or anticipated, this is the portion of the conversation in which the organizer will engage in inoculation. Inoculation is used to:

- a.) helping the person to understand why the employer or outside interests fight against the union;
- b.) discuss the specific arguments of the anti-union forces; and
- c.) explain the tactics that are likely to be used in the anti-union campaign.

"Agitate and Move to Action" **(Call the Question)**

Challenge the person to take action in relation to your "ask": Remind the person of their issues. Communicate urgency. Challenge worker to choose the route of power over powerlessness.

Directly ask for the action you want: Will you take a stand by joining our union today? Will you support the effort to organize? Will you represent your unit on the organizing committee? These are just a few examples.

It is not impolite to push past “no”: Getting a no does not mean the conversation is over yet. Ask more questions to uncover or learn more about objections. Try again to address objections. Ask again. Try “if-the” statements, such as “If I can show you how much support the union in your unit, then would you do this?”

Be prepared with a set of “smaller asks”: If you cannot move the person to the “ask” that was the primary purpose of the conversation, then are there other actions you might get them to agree to take. BE prepared for the conversation a list of these and work through them from largest commitment to smallest commitment. The final “ask” on that list is simply an agreement to talk again.

End the contact on a positive note no matter what: No organizing conversation is a failure. There is always information gathered of use to our organizing. Even you could not move the person to action, do all you can to create an opportunity for further contact.

“Assess”

(Measure Support/Prepare for Debrief and Future Contact)

Observe *behavior* throughout the conversation that might allow you to accurately rate the level of the person’s support for union action: Were there things the person did or did not do (vs. say) during the conversation that indicate their degree of support—Was the person really engaged in the conversation? Were they willing to share their story? Did the person listen to yours? Did the person ask good-faith questions? Did the person agree to at least one of your asks. If your organizing campaign asks you to assess the person along a 1 to 4 scale, do this in *private* and *after the conversation*.

Prepare for “debrief”: Effective organizing campaigns usually have regular discussion among organizers involved in the campaign about the results of individual organizing conversations. Therefore, it is very important not only to relay the information gained from the conversation, it is equally important to be able to explain why you believe the information you gathered is reliable.

Prepare for future contact: No matter how the conversation went, the organizer should have enough information to consider. . . Do I and how soon do I initiate future contact? Me or someone else? What should I expect? What should I be prepared to bring to the next conversation? What actions or events might trigger a strategic reason for next contact? What is an appropriate “ask” next time?

####



“Get in the Door”

(Start the Conversation)



“Get the Story”

(Identify Issues)



“Share a Vision of the Union/Campaign”

(Connect Issues to Union activity)



“Overcome Objections”

(Educate/Inoculate)



“Agitate and Move to Action”

(Call the Question)



“Assess”

(Measure Support/Prepare for Debrief and Future Contact)

#6

Sharing a Vision of the Union

Organizing is not sales. We are not *selling* anything. We are *bringing people together* to create power to advocate for what we decide is in our common interest; for our common good.

When we organize, we are not just trying to get our co-workers to join or get active in something that already exists, we are also trying to get them to help us to create something new and better. We don't just want them to join. We want them to be committed, active members who help the union do its work.

Organizers are not salespeople who rehearse and recite "a pitch." **BUT** organizers *do* need to be in touch with why we are committed, active unionists so we can relate this at the appropriate times in organizing conversations. This telling of our union stories is key to helping people better understand what the union is all about, especially that it is a cause one supports—not a product one buys. When we speak we seek not just to persuade—but also to *inspire*. We attempt to speak both to the head and the *heart*.

Getting to the heart of our union stories.

Think about what calls you to this work of organizing; really motivates and sustains you as a unionist. What relationships, experiences, values, observations are at the heart of why you do this.

- Maybe it is something related to your personal values or family background.
- Maybe it is because of how you were welcomed and introduced to the union.
- Maybe it was one or more experiences where you witnessed the power of the union at work on specific issues or problems.
- Maybe because you have seen the way the union helps you or your colleagues do your jobs well.
- Maybe it is because of a vision for the future you share with your union.
- Maybe it is how you equate the mission of the union with your sense of professionalism, i.e., how the union supports your doing the best job you can do for the people you serve.

Whatever motivates you is the greatest testimony you can deliver to the value of your union because it is yours and you articulate it better than anyone. So practice telling your union story as your basic "rap" in organizing conversations to turn potential members into members, members into activists and activists into leaders. As you speak, speak from your heart—not just your head.

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#7

Dealing with Objections

Nearly everyone has some objection to union action. Uncovering what these are, correctly diagnosing their exact nature, and dealing with them effectively are essential skills for organizers.

Types of objections:

Bad-faith objections: Some objections are not to objections at all. They are excuses offered by people who have already made a deliberate decision not to join the union or get active in the union. To help determine if an objection you hear is being expressed in bad faith, consider: Is the objection expressed not as a question, but as a statement of *fact*? Is the person expressing it not willing to consider new information? Not willing to look at the issue from a different point of view? Really not listening to what you have to say? More interested in debate instead of dialogue? Is there any evidence to indicate that the person is truly open to the “ask?”

Good faith objections: These are objections expressed by people in the spirit that they might be answered to their satisfaction. Or, they are objections the person is willing to have disproved or rebutted. People expressing objections in good faith will act the opposite of those who have bad-faith expressions. They will consider new information and different points of view. They will listen. They will dialogue. They will commit to “if/then statements.” (Example: “If I knew that, I would.”) They will give you other reasons to show that they are truly open to union membership or activism.

Obviously, we as organizers want to spend as much of our time dealing with those who have good faith objections. As we do, there are three things to keep in mind.

1. At the root of nearly all good-faith objections are fear and/or futility. Fear: Supporting the union will turn out to be a mistake. Futility: Nothing can be done to change things, to make things better. When dealing with any objection, pay attention to trying to overcome the sense of fear and futility that is likely underneath.
2. The best way to deal with objections is with firsthand knowledge, your personal experience, what you have come to know.

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#8

Dealing with Objections and the “Feel, Felt, Found” Technique”

So, what do you do when someone says “no” to your “ask” in an organizing conversation?

- Don’t panic. It is not personal. Remain composed and confident vs. defensive and confrontational.
- Try to uncover the objection (as specifically as possible) through polite inquiry.
- Watch the total person and listen to understand any feelings associated with the objection or if there is a “message behind the message.”

An effective technique for dealing with objections by using your own firsthand knowledge and experience is the “feel, felt, found technique.” The technique is as follows:

Feel: You make an expression understanding of or empathy with the objection expressed.

“I understand how you feel about not having time to attend the union meeting.”

or

“A lot of people first feel that these meetings are not worth the time.”

Felt: You connect your own experience to the objection.

“I always felt that there were more important things to do.”

Found: You relate your personal knowledge or experience to counter the objection.

“But after I attended a few, I really started to benefit from the information that is shared at these meetings. Plus, I like being part of shaping our union’s agenda. ”

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#9

The Importance of “The Ask”

A major reason more people do not join and get involved in the union is that *nobody asks them to!* For example, in survey after survey of potential members, more than one half say that nobody personally asked them to join over the past year. (Also among members, about half say that no one over the past year had personally asked them to get involved in union activity.)

So, it is important for us as worksite leaders to include “the ask” in our organizing conversations.

Never be afraid to for membership or involvement even if you were just told “no” the day before.

Use the strategy of “the small yes” Even if you may not be able to get a someone to commit to your primary “ask” today, you may be able to get him or her to say “yes” to a secondary ask--something that brings the person closer to the union, that gets him or her more involved, that gets him or her more information, that puts you in a position to further build your relationship with the person. The more small things you can get a person to do, the more likely this person will ultimately join and get involved in the union. Some things you can get potential members to say “yes” to might be:

- attending to a union meeting or union-sponsored workshop
- completing a union survey
- agreeing to future meetings or conversations with you
- agreeing to be visited by another union colleague
- accepting union literature
- wearing a button, hanging a poster or demonstrating some other form of support for the union
- visiting the union website
- to participate in a union social event
- to support a position of the union in some way, such as by signing a petition or contacting a legislator

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#10

What Are Assessments and Why Do Them?

Assessment is a word that describes the act of organizers engaging people in one-on-one conversations to determine as best as possible their degree of support for the union, based on the *directly observable* verbal, visual and behavioral indications uncovered in the conversation. Assessments are conducted several times during the life of an organizing campaign and for various strategic purposes. Although the underlying reason for assessments is to measure level of union support at any given point in time, assessments also are used to:

- Track movement of support.
- Guide allocation of time and resources in a campaign.
- Provide a road map of who needs highest priority of personal organizer attention in a campaign.
- Measure committee effectiveness.
- Uncover issues.
- Gain feedback on effectiveness of tactics and issues.
- Assess outcome of worker “tests” throughout the campaign.
- Test effectiveness of employer campaign.

Conducting assessments is a fundamental skill that organizers must learn and constantly practice. Conducting assessments effectively calls upon an organizer’s skills in communication and observation, especially listening skills.

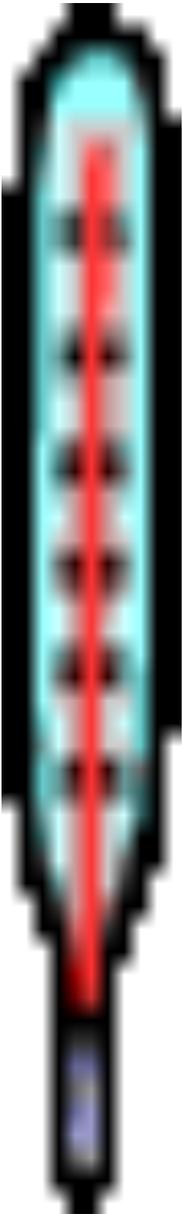
Assessments Must Be:

- As precise as possible
- Directly observable
- Measurable

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#11

A simple assessment scale for internal organizing:



COLD:

- Does not engage constructively on value of the union.
- Expresses firm opposition to the union or unions or expresses more negative than positive opinions of the union and its achievements.
- Not willing to receive and consider in good faith information provided about the union or union membership.

WARM:

- Engages constructively on value of the union.
- Receives and considers in good faith information provided about the union/union membership.
- Expresses and/ or acknowledges mostly positive opinions of the union and its achievements.
- Participates (or willing to consider participation) in union-sponsored meetings or activities upon invitation.

HOT: *All of the above for WARM and . . .*

- Actively engages in discussion on union membership, asks constructive questions, and seeks answers to objections.
- Concedes that the union would be stronger and more effective if more joined.
- Accepts membership form.

#12

Assessment Dos and Don'ts

DO always base assessments on directly observed verbal, visual and (most important) behavioral indications of the person's degree of support for the union, such as volunteered statements or more preferably observable actions in support of the union.

DO NOT base assessments on supposition, hearsay, rumor, or a previous assessment.

DO begin assessment conversations with open-ended probing questions that allow you to uncover indications upon which to base your assessment.

DO NOT rely entirely on closed-ended "yes" or "no" questions or direct questions on the person's degree of union support that will easily allow the person to provide the answer he or she thinks you want to hear or need to hear so you will just go away. If you do ask direct questions, make sure you collect other evidence to support or refute the answers you hear.

DO use active listening skills.

DO NOT be so focused on how you will respond to what you hear that you miss important indications provided to you in the conversation that will help you with your assessment or that will provide clues on how to probe more deeply for those indications.

DO watch for non-verbal indications in addition to what is being said in the assessment conversation.

DO NOT ignore facial expression and body language. They are important elements of the conversation.

DO treat the assessment conversation like any other organizing conversation.

DO NOT communicate overtly that the purpose of the conversation is to make an assessment.

DO make mental notes of how you will assess the person, how you will justify that assessment based on what you observed and any issues, problems uncovered in the conversation.

DO NOT make written notes during the conversation and **DO NOT** complete any paperwork associated with the assessment in front of the person.

NOTE: It is appropriate—and strongly advised—to make notes immediately after the conversation when the organizer is no longer with the person. Also, it is appropriate to make notes on information a person offers to the organizing campaign, such as names of co-workers, phone numbers, information on the employer, etc.—but first gain permission from the person to do so.

DO NOT be fooled by the “friendly 4,” the person who is nice to you but does not provide any evidence of having the characteristics of someone who should be assessed a “1”, “2” or “3.”

DO NOT confuse assessing worker support for the union with assessing personality. There are people who you do not personally admire who are “1s.” Conversely, the nicest person you know may never support the union.

DO end the assessment conversation in as positive manner as possible, keeping the door open for future contact.

###

Assessment Scenario #1 (Alena)

SITUATION: The union has membership density of a little less than 50 percent. Through recent polling, the union has discovered that only about 19 percent of its potential members are even open to the concept of union membership. (The rest say that they have made a deliberate, conscious decision not to join.) Having never before done assessments, the union decides to do so in order to determine specifically, one, what specific people in the bargaining unit should be its priority targets for organizing, and two, what are their issues.

WHAT WE LEARN IN CONVERSATION WITH POTENTIAL MEMBER: Alena has been on the job for a little more than two years now. Other than being invited to a new employee event when she was hired, she has had no personal contact with the union. She is, however, very curious and asks questions like: "What does the union do?" "Why do people join?" "Why does it cost so much?" "Why don't we hear more about the union?" She acknowledges that the union does challenge the school board from time to time and has a few active grievances on behalf of her co-workers. Her most serious issues on the job is the lousy assistance she received to get acclimated in her first year, the broken air conditioning system in her school, and the lack of support she receives from management on things she needs to do your job well. She has no reason or experience, however, that shows her that these are issues that a union would care about.

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT: Hot / Warm / Cold

RECOMMENDED FOLLOW-UP:

Assessment Scenario #2 (Franklin)

SITUATION: A building rep is visiting with a potential member who is not a member at the conclusion of a period of time in which the union made a special effort to activate all unit members (including those who hadn't yet joined) by using opinion surveys, issues advisory groups, wearing buttons of support for the union on designated days, and informational leafleting at school board meetings.) The worksite leader is not aware of the extent to which this potential member got involved. The purpose of this assessment is to find that out and assess the potential member's current "join quotient."

WHAT WE LEARN IN CONVERSATION WITH POTENTIAL MEMBER: Franklin has never thought about joining the union. It was for bad employees. It cost too much. It was not relevant to him in any way. He talks differently about the past year, however. He said he started seeing more of a union in his worksite. The union rep, previously a mysterious figure, began dropping in to see him. No real agenda—just "Hey, how's it going?" Then someone asked him to complete a opinion survey on working conditions. Next thing he knew, he was wearing a union button to school. One night, he even joined some members who leafleted at a school board meeting. Even though he has not yet joined the union, it has become clear to him that all the involvement the union is generating is building momentum on some important issues he cares deeply about.

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT: Hot / Warm / Cold

RECOMMENDED FOLLOW-UP:

Assessment Scenario #3 (Sean)

SITUATION: A building rep is visiting a potential member who has worked in the district for more than 10 years but has recently transferred into the rep's building. This is the first conversation the two have ever had.

POTENTIAL MEMBER ROLE: Sean took advantage of the opportunity to transfer into this building in order to reduce his daily commute, which has grown more time consuming with each passing year. At one time he was a union member, but after several years he dropped his membership. To him, the union seemed completely ineffective. Whatever it achieved in negotiations (not very much, in his opinion), he believes is only because the district was willing to give—and not a result of the union's power. Quitting the union, he reasoned, was an easy way to get an additional pay raise. It is not that he isn't willing to talk about union membership. In fact, he enjoys asking questions like, "Why are dues so high?" "Where does all the money go?" "Who makes decisions about what the union takes into contract negotiations?" "What does the president of the national union make?" "Why does the union save the jobs of so many bad employees?" "Why does the union spend members' dues on politics?"

RECOMMENDED ASSESSMENT: Hot / Warm / Cold

RECOMMENDED FOLLOW-UP:

“OPERATION KICKBALL”

Assessment Scale

COLD:

- Expresses firm opposition to attending or will not engage constructively on possibility of attending.
- Provides “surface” commitment to attend that is not supported by facts in the conversation that reveal actual commitment to do so.

NOTES: _____

WARM:

- Engages constructively on attending but is truly undecided about attending.

NOTES: _____

HOT:

- Expresses firm commitment to attend.
- Commitment to attend supported by facts in the conversation that actual plans to do so.

NOTES: _____
