



STEWARDS CORNER

Monthly Newsletter for Union Stewards

Internal Organizing: Understanding Your Bargaining Unit

Whether you're bargaining a contract or solving workplace issues like grievances and safety concerns, active and united members are our greatest source of strength. We can grow our power (and our membership) by making an internal organizing plan within our local union. Internal organizing is the process of building power for your local by learning what issues members care about, recruiting new members, and increasing participation. It's also an excellent way to identify members who could be great new stewards.

The exact nature of your campaign will depend on your Local's needs and challenges. Be sure to read next month's issue on setting SMART goals. If you live in a right-to-work state or work in a public sector shop, you may want to focus on bringing in new members and helping them to see that we're strongest when everyone is union. If you are heading into a contract, you may want to use your campaign to learn what your members hope to achieve in the negotiations. You may want to build solidarity and use one-on-ones to assess members' individual interest in becoming more active in the local. The key here is that we need to ensure we build relationships with all our members. This helps us fully enforce our contract, ensure that all members are treated fairly by management, and build our bench to develop our next generation of union leadership.

Creating a Bargaining Unit Profile

Before beginning an internal organizing campaign, you need information on the workforce – the members and non-members/non-active members, where they work, and where they stand on the union.

Your profile should include names, shifts, job classifications, and membership status/seniority. To ensure this information is accurate, you should use a seniority list or a list of bargaining unit employees supplied by the employer. If you don't already have a list, consider submitting an information request, which we discussed in a [previous issue](#).

In addition to work details, you'll also want to consider demographics and/or shared interests like age, gender, race, language, faith, or hobbies.

Step 1: Identify Your Non-Members (or Members You Want to Activate)

List all non-members/non-active people in your bargaining unit by department and shift. Then, build a profile that contains information like gender; age; hobbies they like; whether they have kids or not; and who they are friendly with at work. *As a reminder, this information can help you determine who is best to approach that person. Still, please be careful not to make blanket assumptions based on someone's gender, race, etc.*

Look for patterns among the non-members/non-actives that will inform your strategy. For example:

- ▶ *Are they concentrated in certain shifts or departments?*
- ▶ *Are we having trouble reaching the younger workers?*
- ▶ *Is a language barrier preventing us from communicating effectively with some workers?*

Here is an example of a bargaining unit profile focusing on non-members.

BAD AXE BOXES UNIT PROFILE

- **Total bargaining unit employees: 114**
- **Members: 71**
- **Non-Members: 43**

Name	Dept./Job	Shift	Years of Service	Age, Gender, Race/Ethnicity/ Language	What else do we know?
William Green	Shipping, Clerk	1st	28	male white over 50	smoker, veteran, young grandkids, talks to Martin (maint. Steward)
Phillip Randolph	Shipping, Bander Operator	2nd	16	male AA 40s	smoker, cousin is member
Jack Welsh	Flexo, Operator	1st	20	male white over 50	hunter
Maria Jones	Flexo, Assistant	2nd	3	female Hispanic 40s	hunter, 2 kids, speaks English and is fluent in Spanish
Dolores Huerta	Flexo, Helper	2nd	2	female Hispanic Early 30s Spanish	Speaks mostly Spanish, lives 40 min away

Step 2: Identify Union Leaders and Activists

List the existing union leadership who can help with your internal organizing campaign. Don't just think about your officers – consider Health & Safety Committee members and other reliable activists, like Women of Steel and NextGen leaders. Also, consider union members who may not hold a position but are respected by other workers, well-connected, and informed about our union. *Remember: not everyone has to be an elected union leader to help grow our union!*

Step 3: Make Your Plan to Reach Out

A successful plan should be written down, detailed, and always contain due-by dates. Write down whom you need to reach out to, who will reach out to them (and how), and what you will ask



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continued from page 1

the worker to do (examples include joining our union, attending a union event or meeting, completing a survey, joining a union committee, or becoming a steward), and when the conversation will happen. Remember to follow up with everyone you've enlisted to help with how their conversations are going.

By following these steps, you can begin the process of closing the gaps in our membership, ensuring that our Locals have effective communication structures, and identifying new activists to grow into future stewards and leaders.

Let's Talk About Mental Health

Bad days happen to everyone. Maybe the neighbor's dog barked all day when you got to bed after working the night shift, or you hit every red light on the way to work. As the bumper sticker says, "S**t Happens." Bad days are a part of life, but what if they happen daily? Some people don't have enough good days to make the bad ones seem out of the ordinary. Wearing a pretend smile is painful for people with mental health problems.

At the recent Health and Safety Conference, when participants in one class were asked, "What are the scars on you of your work?" many responded, "my mental health." So please, if you are struggling yourself, know you are not alone and that others care about your suffering.

This isn't an easy topic to discuss. For decades, people experiencing depression and anxiety have been stigmatized or told to "suck it up." To some degree, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought mental health out of the shadows and into the open in the news, on the radio, and in workplaces. Uncertainty and stress combined with work and family responsibilities are burdens that weigh differently on everyone.

Look Out for Your Coworkers

As a steward, your most effective tools are your eyes and ears. So how can you help coworkers who are experiencing mental illness? If you notice someone acting out of sorts – maybe they're eating or sleeping less, isolating themselves, changing their personal appearance, making mistakes on the job, drinking a lot of alcohol, or racking up frequent absences – ask them how they are doing but don't become an "armchair psychiatrist." If someone sounds like they're hurting, encourage them to seek professional help. Most importantly, maintain confidentiality and avoid judging what people tell you. **Regarding these matters, the process is as important as the outcome.**

Many collective bargaining agreements (CBA) have resources to assist people in distress. In particular, check your CBA for language on leaves of absence. In addition, employees eligible for the [Family Medical and Leave Act \(FMLA\)](#) can take time off work to care for themselves or a spouse, child, or parent if they require inpatient care or have a serious mental health condition that needs continuing treatment. Also, many employers offer employee assistance programs (EAP) to aid employees in difficult circumstances and to help them find resources. Recently, it has

been difficult to find therapists and other mental health providers with availability. Finally, consider yourself an educator who can point coworkers in the right direction and represent them if they need help.

Depression, stress, and anxiety have multiple sources. For one person, it's the aftermath of a car accident; for another, it's a divorce. **Whatever the cause, nobody chooses to feel this way.** Working conditions can also affect a person's mental health. Are you working in isolation for long stretches of time? Studies have shown that loneliness negatively impacts our health and well-being. Is your department a pressure cooker because of short staffing or a push for production? Long periods of intense work can lead to heart disease. One or more of these factors can take their toll on even the most cheerful person, especially when working in it daily. If you think working conditions are a factor in mental health problems, talk to your Local Union leadership or Staff Representative.

Solidarity Works

[Resilience](#) is an important concept in self-care and leadership. Good leaders surround themselves with good people to lean on for support during tough times. Think of the safety checklist that flight attendants go through before taking off: "In the event of losing cabin pressure, put your emergency mask on first and then help the person sitting next to you." You can't help another person if you don't have oxygen. The same logic applies to stewards.

Stress affects us all differently. When your "fight or flight" response goes into action, it sends more blood to your vital organs than your muscles (including your throat), making it hard to swallow. Then concentrating is difficult because you're so focused on the "danger" at hand, and your short-term memory gets fuzzy. It doesn't take long for this to turn into chronic stress, which can cause anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Stewards have big hearts, so it's natural for you to care for those around you. But don't forget to take care of yourself. It's OK to turn your cell phone off for a while; the world will keep turning. Instead, do something for yourself for a change, even if it's just to sit down for breakfast instead of eating on the run. Make it a point to take care of yourselves.



All classes are held at **11 AM (EST)** and **8 PM (EST)**

- May 9: **May Day! The Origins of International Workers' Day in the Gilded Age** ([8 PM](#))
- May 16: **Administrative Officers Training, Part 1** ([11 AM](#)) ([8 PM](#))
- June 6: **Just Cause** ([11 AM](#)) ([8 PM](#))
- June 13: **Administrative Officer Training, Part 2** ([11 AM](#)) ([8 PM](#))



Scan the QR code or click the link to see our upcoming schedule of classes.

<http://usw.to/teachingtuesdays>