

RE-CONNECT, RE-FRESH, RE-VITALIZE WINNING ALLIES IN YOUR LOCAL



Before Right to Work for Less (RtW4L) becomes law, you and your local's leadership must reach out to every bargaining unit member.

The goal is to make each member of the bargaining unit understand the benefits of union membership and to feel a connection with the union. Then, when RtW4L comes, it will have little impact on you and your local.

The strategy for achieving this goal is to meet with and listen to every member – to understand their concerns first and then to communicate both the benefits of union membership and the dangers of “At Will” employment.

Reaching out to each member *never happens by accident*. It takes a plan. So, make a plan for you and your executive team to meet every member in late March and April. And again in May for those who still need persuading.

It takes one other thing too: people smarts. Every one of us spends time with people we like who also like us – this is human nature. We also tend to avoid those who give us neutral looks, let alone those who give us sour ones. Yet, it's these same people who we need to contact the most.

Our friends in the local tend to like their union. Through their relationships with you and other members of the local's executive board, *they feel connected to the union*. Your friends may not understand all the benefits the union provides, but they trust you and the officers to protect their interests. It's this feeling of connectedness and trust that is missing for many of the others.

While everyone is welcome to come to your local's meetings and express their views, most members don't come – with the exception of contract meetings. BUT, instead of expecting people to come to us, we need to go to them.

When you meet with your local leadership, ask them to join you in meeting and listening to the bargaining unit members. Pair up each executive board member with members of the bargaining unit. Match them up based on who has good or, at least, neutral relationships with each BU member. Talk about best approaches to each BU member based on who knows him or her – if only a little.

Be sure to prioritize those members who didn't vote for you in the last local election. Prioritize those who don't come to local meetings and don't vote at all.

We should listen to each member more than we talk to them. “A man would rather have you listen to his story than heed his advice,” a wise man once said.

As you meet with each bargaining unit member, even for 5 minutes, ask her/him about his or her job and family. Ask about any concerns he or she has about the local. “If you want to make a friend, ask a question,” said persuasion expert Dale Carnegie 80 years ago.

Look for common ground. This is the element relationships are built on. If possible, agree with something each member says. If a member expresses frustration with the local, understand the feeling *even if you strongly disagree with the thinking behind it.*

After you listen, if appropriate, point out some of the benefits of union membership and the dangers of “at will” employment. In the conversation, leave something unsaid – leave it for another conversation. Avoid lecturing or arguing.

It’s not easy – in fact, it can be very hard, but set aside any negative feelings you have about certain members. Expect some BU members to “push your buttons” – that is, to say some things designed to make you angry. Recognize this, and be above it. Commit to starting fresh with each of them.

Each inactive bargaining unit member you and your board turns into an ally, will make it easier to get things done in the local.

The most effective presidents, from Abraham Lincoln to Franklin Roosevelt, were able to accomplish so much by turning their rivals into friends and allies. This can’t always be accomplished, but the process begins with a fresh, face-to-face conversation with each member.