



Teamster Power: A Guide to Building an Active and Strong Membership



Training and Development Department
International Brotherhood of Teamsters

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Why Build Membership Participation?

Introduction

A union is a group of workers coming together to advance and protect their common interest. Today more than ever we need a strong and active union, made of members who understand their role in the movement as well as their collective strength. Whether bargaining new contracts, re-negotiating existing ones, addressing workplace issues, supporting a grievance, showing political clout, or engaging your membership in the union our strength lies with those members. However, the reality today is that union leaders often feel that they are overworked spending much of their time servicing their members while their members are not involved. Members feel that lack of time, family responsibilities, fear of the boss, disinterest and apathy and lack of adequate communication with their union.

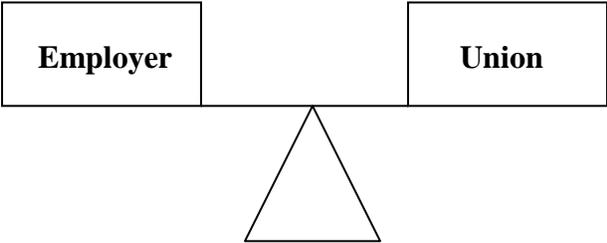
What can Teamster locals do? Many locals have begun setting up a way to *systematically* reach out to members, educate them on what's happening to working people and get them involved in campaigns to fight back.

The information contained in this manual offers ideas for building and maintaining membership participation within your local through a structured communication system, on-going education and planned actions.

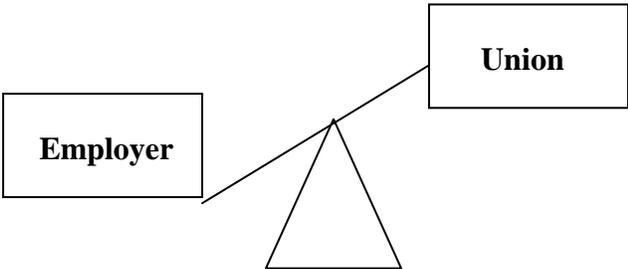
What are We Up Against?

Today's Organizing and Bargaining Environment

Is this what the balance of power in workplaces looks like?



Unfortunately, in today's anti-union environment, reality often looks more like this:



Today, employers have the advantage over workers mostly due to anti-union legislation such as weakly enforced labor laws, right to work legislation, and the right to permanently replace strikers.

What can Teamster locals do to change that balance of power? We can increase the number of people who support issues of concern to working people. Who are those people? Members, workers not yet organized, community organizations, elected officials, members of the media, and others. Organizing those groups to work together can increase the weight of unions that face employers. Given the current climate, Teamsters have to take the lead to show how *our* issues as working people are *everyone's* issues. Our first job is to start with involving our own members.

How Do We Build Membership Participation?

One obstacle we face when trying to involve our members is that they see the union as something separate from them. They often see the union as a third party, different from them and different from the employer. The best way we can bridge that separation is by setting up a program that includes **communication, education and action**.

COMMUNICATION has to work in two ways. Members must be kept informed about union activities but there also have to be opportunities for them to talk about their ideas. Newsletters, flyers, social media and contract updates can provide an important link between union leadership and the members. However, communication works best when done on a one-on-one basis. Since no one union leader has the time to talk to all the members, it is helpful to set up a process of one-on-one communication using officers, business agents, stewards and members where everyone is responsible for talking to a few people.

Communicating information is a first step. However, most members will only get involved if the issue is important to them. That's where **EDUCATION** fits in. We have to be able to present the information, find out what their questions and concerns are and respond to them. Again, this can be done through various avenues, but to make sure members really understand the issue, it takes talking with them individually or in small groups. That's possible by using the one-on-one structure.

Finally, we need strong membership participation when it's time to take **ACTION**. That means we not only need to let the members know what the issue is and why it is important, but also what they can do about it. The purpose of asking members to *wear buttons, sign petitions or come to a lunchtime rally* is to show the employer that large numbers of people are willing to take a stand and that we are united. It is through strong and visible actions by the membership that the balance of power shifts in our direction.

Communication, Education and Action through a One-on-One Structure

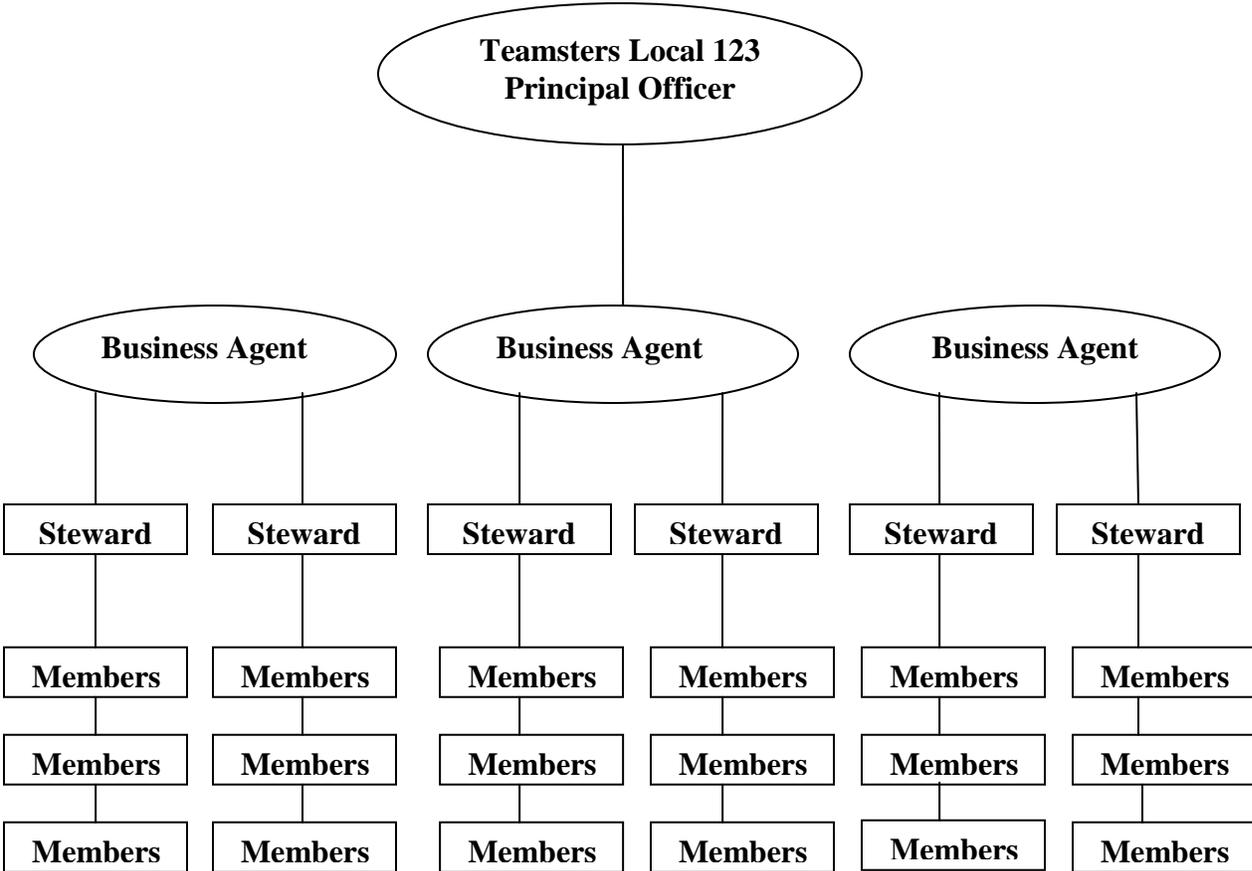
Why is a one-on-one structure important? Think about the time before contract negotiations when you needed to find out what the main issues were affecting your members, or the time you needed help during a political campaign, possibly to support a pro-union candidate for Congress or to defeat an anti-union one. Many times locals post requests for information or assistance on union bulletin boards or in newsletters. While written communication is important, you may miss those people who don't read the board or who throw away the newsletter. Also, these types of communication are one-sided giving the members little opportunity to give feedback or ask questions.

One-on-one communication allows for every person to be contacted, educated on issues and have an opportunity to offer their ideas or ask questions. It means that local union officers, staff, stewards and members can talk to other members one at a time, face to face, about important issues and, in the process, encourage them to participate.

The theory behind one-on-one communication is that it gets more people to participate in local union activities and through this participation, become committed to the union. It also shows members that you are concerned with the problems you and they face together helping to overcome feelings of "us" versus "them." The members begin to see the union as all of us, not just the local leaders or the local hall.

The chart below is an example of how the one-on-one structure works:

The One-on-One Structure



This one-on-one structure ensures a flow of information from the local to the members and back to the local with no one person having the total responsibility or workload for contacting all the members. Very simply, a principal officer or business agent may need members to attend a rally. Through this system, he/she would notify the next person(s) on the flow chart with all the information and these people would contact the ones assigned to them until all the members have had someone verbally communicating with them. In the process, the members would be educated on the issue (why a rally?) and what exactly they are being asked to do (attend from 2:00-4:00 on Saturday in front of City Hall), and be given the opportunity to make comments or ask questions.

While the principal officer oversees the entire communication structure within the local, business agents are responsible for each of the shops they represent. There will be times when all the members of your local will need to be contacted; therefore, the principal officer will notify the business agents, who in turn will notify the stewards or key people in each of the shops they represent. Likewise, there will be times when only the members in one shop may need to be contacted. The direction for this may come from the principal officer, the business agent or the stewards/key members.

Although the one-on-one structure seems simple, it takes a lot of work for it to be successful.

- 1** The first step in setting up the structure is to map out each workplace - list departments and/or sections then who works which shift, and what days they have off.
- 2** Next, you will need the stewards in each shop to be the main contacts responsible for meeting and talking with key members who have agreed to volunteer to have 5-10 other members assigned to them for the one-on-one contacts. These volunteer members may select the ones they want assigned to them such as friends, relatives or anyone else with whom they have a good rapport. This may make the one-on-one contact more successful when friends are talking to friends.

The chart on the following page can be a useful way to keep track of the members who have been contacted and what activities they have participated in.

ONE-ON-ONE ACTIVITY CHART FOR STEWARDS

Steward _____

Building, Location and Shift _____

Members to Contact:

Contact?

Name _____

YES NO

Phone (W) _____ (H) _____

Activity _____

___ ___

Activity _____

___ ___

Activity _____

___ ___

Activity _____

___ ___

Name _____

YES NO

Phone (W) _____ (H) _____

Activity _____

___ ___

Activity _____

___ ___

Activity _____

___ ___

Activity _____

___ ___

Name _____

YES NO

Phone (W) _____ (H) _____

Activity _____

___ ___

Activity _____

___ ___

Activity _____

___ ___

Activity _____

___ ___

Some Teamster local unions may have problems in securing enough people as volunteers to make sure the one-on-one structure works. The next section gives some tips for recruiting volunteers. However, it is helpful to keep in mind that volunteers often come forward when only asked to contribute a few hours of their time to a specific activity. Also, many local unions have found that a number of people are willing to talk to their co-workers about matters of importance to the union because, unlike shop stewards, they do not have to engage in investigative activities nor in adversarial relations with management.

Recruiting Volunteers

Union leaders often find it very difficult to get members involved. Many leaders say "Nobody wants to do anything," or "I can't even get members to agree to be stewards." It is never easy, but here are some useful tips for getting people to participate as part of the one-on-one structure or in a union action.

Think about the reasons you first got involved in the Teamsters Union. Always think about a person's motivation for getting involved before you attempt to recruit them. Understanding what makes people tick will help you overcome problems with recruitment.

Reasons people get involved:

- raised in Teamster families...it's a way of life
- want to see real change
- believe in the labor movement
- someone asked them to get involved
- think they can make a difference
- want social interaction
- seek recognition
- feel strongly about an issue and see the union as best way to accomplish goal

When seeking their participation, always think of people's motivation and try to insure that their needs are met in the process. Also, recognize that many people don't participate because they are afraid of failing, don't know what's expected of them or see an endless commitment in front of them. People need reassurances, training and realistic expectations to increase their chances to succeed.

How Do We Get Members Involved?

Ask them. Few people will volunteer their services. This doesn't mean that they don't want to be active. People wait to be asked. Asking builds activity. Activity builds commitment.

Make clear what job you are asking them to do, and be sure it has a definite beginning and end. People don't want to sign up for life, so don't get them to over commit themselves.

Ask people to do things they can do well, especially in the beginning. People are more willing to try things they already know they can do. Later, when they feel comfortable, they will be more willing to try new things. Start slowly with people. As their confidence grows, so will their participation.

Tell each person how his/her job fits in with the rest. People want to understand things they are part of, and they work best when they know that others are depending on them.

Let each person know that his/her particular help is needed. If they feel that you are just "looking for people," they will also feel easily replaceable and less responsible for doing a job.

Discuss their own goals and how they fit into those of the group. People have their own reasons for getting involved. You need to know them in order to lead effectively. Also, you must help people keep their expectations realistic; otherwise you will not be able to meet them.

Ask what they would like to know, and give them plenty of time and help in raising questions. Many people are reluctant to ask questions. Often tasks we consider easy such as leafleting or telephoning, may create anxiety for people who have never done them before. By encouraging questions, you build understanding. When people know what's expected, they do a better job.

Ask people in person if possible; don't rely on phone calls. Never rely on a letter inviting them to participate. There is no substitute for talking face-to-face. It lets the person know that you consider the discussion important, and it gives you a chance to get acquainted. It is much harder to say **no** in person.

You have a right to be enthusiastic about the importance of your work. Don't apologize or belittle it. Your mood will get across to the people you talk to, and they will respond to it.

Keep people accountable. After you ask someone to do something, check back to see if and how the work was done. In doing this you send the message that his or her contribution is important and you catch mistakes early. A well trained member will be a strong source of support to the local union.

Educating Through Surveys and Leaflets

Communicating with members is a key part of encouraging their participation. Surveys provide an effective way for members to communicate their thinking.

Surveys serve a number of purposes:

- ◆ **To find out what workers think** about organizing a union, negotiating a contract, lobbying for legislation, controlling stress or other health and safety hazards, reducing discrimination, and so on.
- ◆ **To get members involved in union activity.** Those who conduct the survey gain experience and a new sense of commitment. The workers surveyed appreciate that union leaders are interested in what they have to say.
- ◆ **To send a message to management, government officials, or other authorities.** Involvement of workers in a survey shows that it is not just union officials who are concerned and organized on a particular issue.
- ◆ **To develop information which can be used to support media campaigns, bargaining demands, grievances, or other activities.**
- ◆ **To interest potential volunteers in getting more involved in the union.** Sometimes, people are not involved because they don't even have enough contact to know what the union does and why it is relevant to their concerns.

12 Tips for Designing a Survey:

1. Determine the specific objective of the survey and make sure this goal is reflected in the questions.
2. Determine who should receive the survey; for example, union members, non-union employees, or both.
3. Keep the number of questions to no more than 15 and keep them short and to the point.
4. Guide respondents through the survey by asking clear questions which flow logically from topic to topic, beginning with more general questions to more specific ones.
5. All questionnaires should include a brief introductory paragraph or letter from the president/executive board explaining the purpose of the survey, stressing the importance of the members' input, and thanking them in advance for their time and effort.
6. Very large local unions may wish to survey a representative sample of their membership instead of trying to contact everyone.

7. Demographic questions (age, sex, length of service, etc.) should be kept to a minimum, but should be included if the responses need to be divided into sub-groups.
8. Open-ended questions are harder to code and tabulate, but can be quite useful because they allow for opinions. It is suggested that you use the open-ended format when you cannot anticipate responses. Otherwise closed-format questions are the norm.
9. It is important to include an area for comments. People like to have the flexibility to express how they feel, perhaps concerning areas not directly covered in the survey.
10. Appearance and format are important (color, borders, clarity, etc.).
11. Methods for distribution and collection of surveys should be clearly outlined and explained to the stewards or other persons involved so that accurate records can be maintained.
12. General results of the survey must be relayed to the membership by some means (newsletter, bulletin board, etc.)

Distributing and Collecting Surveys

Surveys should be distributed and collected in person if possible and not by mail. This provides the opportunity to hear what people are thinking and to educate workers about their role in achieving union goals. It also will mean that more members will answer the survey. Make sure to offer help to any worker who wants assistance in filling out the survey.

The people distributing the survey should be given a brief training session. *Some key points of that training should include:*

- ◆ The surveyor's primary job is to **get other people's views**, not to give their own.
- ◆ **If a worker makes negative comments about the union, the surveyor's job is not to argue but to find out more.** After all, union leaders need to know where the weaknesses are, and workers need to feel that their comments are respected and will be reported back to leaders for serious consideration.
- ◆ **Surveyors must emphasize that what we win depends on everyone's involvement.** Ask workers to start thinking about how they are willing to help, and give them examples of the volunteer efforts that will be needed. It is important not to let workers think that "the union" is going to deliver results without membership support.
- ◆ **You can create some spirit and visibility for the survey by publicizing the period when it will be conducted.** Posters and flyers ahead of time about Survey Week can emphasize the importance of membership involvement in the survey.
- ◆ **You might consider combining the survey with a membership drive** if you have units with non-members, including agency/service fee payers:

- One way to do that is to end the survey form with a membership application and ask volunteers to make a pitch to non-members to join.
- Another way is to distribute the survey only to members, and to talk with or write to non-members saying that for the success of both the survey and achieving union goals you need their participation, ideas, and support.
- The advantage to this approach is that you show non-members what they are missing by not participating. The disadvantages are that you may drive them farther away and may miss the chance to learn more about their concerns.

Writing Effective Leaflets

A leaflet is an effective way of reaching people and getting them to do something -- like come to a union meeting, register to vote, or join the union. In order to write an effective leaflet, there are several things you should consider before you even start to put it together. For example, *consider the following questions which will help clarify your thinking and improve your ability to communicate:*

Why are you writing this leaflet? What action or attitude do you hope to influence?

What do you want to communicate to the reader? Clearly define your objective in your own mind.

Who are you trying to reach with this message? Your audience will determine (1) the tone of your leaflet (2) kinds of arguments used and (3) action requested.

What are your most persuasive arguments? Identify the main reasons why it is to the reader's interest to act in the manner you suggest.

After thinking about the problem, you're ready to write:

Get attention through a headline. Use a cartoon if possible.

A cartoon can add interest and sometimes humor.

Use strong, action verbs in a headline. A question can provoke interest. Example: *"Is it Fair to Freeze Wages But Not Prices?"* or *"Are Your Taxes Too High?"*

Leave plenty of space around the header, the cartoon, and the copy. Try to reduce your message to a minimum amount of copy. Most people don't want to read a long, rambling leaflet.

State your position in the first paragraph. Then, back it up with key points, facts, and possibly quotes from some respected source.

Summarize your case in the final paragraph and end with an appeal for action

Planning Actions

Now it's time for your members to take action! They know what the issues are, they understand why they are important, the next step is to get them involved in an action that will show the strength and power of the union. Using the one-on-one structure, it's possible to make direct contact with members quickly and thoroughly.

Workplace actions show the following:

- ◆ Members participating together
- ◆ A visible message

You may want to plan actions that start with a small number of people, involve less risk, and take less time. Then, escalate to actions that are more visible and involve greater numbers of people.

Here's a list to choose from. Not all actions will work in every situation:

- ◆ Signing a petition
- ◆ Wearing buttons, stickers
- ◆ Wearing UNITY colors on special t-shirts, hats, armbands, etc.
- ◆ Balloons, banners to carry into work together or to march to work behind
- ◆ Health action days: "We're sick over___." Use bandaids, canes, eye patches
- ◆ Postcard, petition, pledge card campaign - everyone signs at work and pledges to sign up more in the community
- ◆ Color-coordinated ink
- ◆ Member rallies at lunch
- ◆ Families on parade - excellent media "grabber"
- ◆ Dress for the Holidays
- ◆ Candlelight marches, vigils - gather at dusk in an appropriate area, remember fire safety
- ◆ Postcards to employer
- ◆ Lunch with a Bunch - noontime rally with other unions, families, coalitions
- ◆ Multi-employer march - escalate workplace actions to other workplaces with other unions
- ◆ Visits to public officials - (surprising how a large group of members who vote affect decisions with elected officials)
- ◆ Community trial or public inquiry
- ◆ Official hearings - escalates above with help from "friendly" contacts

- ◆ Phone banking, jamming - have everyone call strategic numbers; call company officers for directions to rally
- ◆ Picketing key events, targets
- ◆ Take it to their homes
- ◆ Car caravans, drive throughs - traffic jams and decorated vehicles get everyone's attention
- ◆ Stand ups (or sit downs) - "Stand Up to ..."
- ◆ Sit down, sleep in, elevator jams
- ◆ Other: _____
- ◆ Other: _____

Tips for Planning Successful Workplace Actions

Some keys for success are:

- ◆ Know what level of action members are ready for. Let them develop tactics and schedules. Don't push people too far, too fast; *success builds confidence*.
- ◆ Be well organized. Build and use stewards/member networks.
- ◆ Best effect when you can organize 1 person for every 10 contacts.
- ◆ Pay attention to details.
- ◆ Know laws and your rights; protect public safety.
- ◆ Be creative and don't play your best card first

Tactics to keep in mind:

- ◆ Power is also what the management thinks you have.
- ◆ Never go outside the experience of your members.
- ◆ Whenever possible, go outside the experience of management
- ◆ Make the management live to their own rules.
- ◆ A good tactic is one members enjoy.
- ◆ Keep the pressure on with different tactics and actions using everything imaginable.
- ◆ The threat is usually worse than the thing itself.
- ◆ Maintain a constant, increasing pressure on the opposition.
- ◆ The real action is in the reaction.
- ◆ Management properly goaded will be your major strength.
- ◆ Tactics, like organization and life, require you move with the action.