

WORK ACTIONS AND UNION BUILDING

WHAT IS AN ACTION?

It's an activity related to an issue that gets the membership involved. It is usually part of a larger strategy to address an issue felt widely by a number of people.

WHY WOULD WE DO WORKPLACE ACTIONS?

It empowers people by giving them the opportunity to do something about their problem. It builds solidarity and strengthens the Union. It can be effective. It builds leadership in others. It is usually more fun!

WHY, THEN, DON'T WE ACTIONS MORE OFTEN?

We are conditioned to "fixing" peoples' problems for them. Unions are recognizing the need to change our way of thinking about that and about the way we conduct the business of the Union on a daily basis.

It also feels like more work initially. For example, for a health and safety action that affects many people, the steward first meet with the affected employees to develop a strategy. Combined strategies could include a march to the office of the Health and Safety representative. It could also include a "group" grievance where everyone affected presents testimony. All this takes more time to prepare.

Organizing events requires communication with all involved. There may be more time spent initially, but the payoffs are great and well worth it.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PAYOFFS?

Involving more people in the Union means that there will be more people to carry on the work of the Union. Perhaps some of these people would be willing to serve as a steward themselves one day, or be willing to assist the steward in other job actions.

Seeing the results of actions is a very energizing and positive feeling. It becomes our agenda instead of the boss' agenda. Building enthusiasm into others will help you maintain it in all your steward activities.

A stronger Union means a greater ability to accomplish the changes we are trying to make whether it is in the workplace or at the bargaining table. Anytime we have greater visibility and show management that we are strong and willing to stand together and take collective action when needed, the more we are taken seriously.