



A PRACTICAL
GUIDE

HOW TO UNIONIZE YOUR WORK— PLACE!

BY
@HOWTOUNIONIZE



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To all workers, everywhere

You are worthy
You are powerful
You can absolutely do this

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Context

This resource is for ANYONE in ANY INDUSTRY who wants to unionize. It is written from the perspective of a worker who didn't know a damn thing about unionizing, and then did it with her co-workers over the course of two years.

The purpose of this zine is to give an overview of what the process of unionizing is actually like and how to practically make it happen. I include things I wish I'd known before and advice on how to navigate the process when it gets sticky and messy and really fucking hard.

I am excited to share everything I've learned about unionizing, but you HAVE TO KNOW that there are so many seasoned and experienced union organizers who have been helping workers unionize for DECADES and they have way more knowledge and experience that will guide your unionizing effort into success. Wherever you are, if you want to learn more about organizing in your community and at your specific workplace, contact a local union and ask to speak with an organizer. They are the true experts. Appendix A lists all major unions — google their names to find out what unions are in your city and get in touch with their organizers!

Disclaimer: This is not a *definitive* guide to unionizing. It's what I've learned from a real-life experience of unionizing my workplace with my co-workers. This is what we did to successfully unionize our workplace. These were the steps for us. It might look different for you, because every workplace is different. Do what works for you!

Email [**howtounionize@gmail.com**](mailto:howtounionize@gmail.com)
or DM [**@howtounionize**](#) on Instagram
if you have any questions or concerns about unionizing :)

Glossary

Bargaining Unit: the group of workers at a workplace who are (or will be) represented by a union.

Captive Audience Meetings: a meeting where management brings workers together to talk about the unionizing effort, typically in an anti-union manner.

CBA: Collective Bargaining Agreement = the contract you negotiate over with management.

Impasse: when either management or the union feels that further negotiations are pointless and not leading to any kind of agreement.

Initiation Fees: At some but not all unions, after your contract has been ratified, you pay them a one-time initiation fee in order to join the union.

Local Union: a branch of a national union. example: IBEW Local 465 or SEIU Local 221. IBEW= International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and “Local 465” means it’s the 465th branch of that union. SEIU= Service Employees International Union. “Local 221” means it’s the 221st local within SEIU.

Management/MGMT/Employer: executives, managers, supervisors with hiring and firing power, and confidential employees.

National Labor Relations Act: major federal law that allows private sector employees to organize and form a union and engage in collective bargaining.

National Labor Relations Board (NLRB): the federal government agency that enforces labor law in the US. They will be in charge of conducting your election.

Negotiating/Bargaining Committee: the group of workers within the bargaining unit who work with their union representatives to negotiate a contract in collaboration with management.

Negotiations: the process of the negotiating committee meeting consistently with management to bargain a contract.

Parent Union: the specific local union you affiliate with.

Shop Steward: after a contract has been successfully bargained, a few workers at the workplace serve as shop stewards where they are representatives of the union and the worker's interests WHILE at work.

Unfair Labor Practice (ULP): an action taken by management or a union that violates the National Labor Relations Act.

Union Business Manager: the leading union representative at a local union who is in charge of finances and leads in negotiations.

Union Dues: a fee that you pay to the union on a monthly basis in exchange for union representation, higher wages & better working conditions.

Union Election: when an employer refuses to recognize the union, they push the effort to an election where bargaining unit employees either vote for or against the union.

Union Organizer: a union representative at a local union who organizes and guides workers in their efforts to unionize.

Voluntary Recognition: when an employer agrees to recognize a union (without pushing it to an election).

Introduction

Are you being paid what your work is worth? Do you feel truly respected by the people who are in charge of you at your workplace? When you bring up serious concerns, are they resolved promptly and with transparency? Is there racial equity at your workplace? Are you promised changes that never happen, year after year after year? Is there gender equity? Does your employer pay you the absolute bare minimum that they are legally mandated to pay you by law? Do they scoff at requests for higher pay as they simultaneously give themselves bonuses and raises?

The answers to these questions can easily make us feel helpless and incredibly angry. Because too often— whether we work at a tech company, a restaurant, a museum, a grocery store, a dentist’s office, or a call center— we are overworked in our day-to-day tasks, undervalued in our compensation, and we witness toxic cycles of dysfunctional management practices that are dehumanizing and make our work more difficult.

Unfair wages, toxic work environments, and questionable working conditions perpetuate because many companies are essentially able to operate like dictatorships. A small group of people, typically executives or owners, make nearly every single decision about wages and working conditions without input from the people who actually perform the work: the workers!

Isn’t this a little fucked up? What would it be like to have an actual say in how much you get paid? To not fear losing your job because your boss doesn’t like you? To be able to hold your boss accountable for unethical behavior? To be able to negotiate over the conditions you work in?

Another workplace is possible. Accountability, higher pay, and reasonable working conditions at your workplace is POSSIBLE.

That's what this zine is about: walking you through the process of unionizing your workplace, so that you can have a voice in how your workplace operates.

We all deserve to be paid wages we can live on and be treated with dignity and respect at work— but, unfortunately, that doesn't just happen naturally. Operating within capitalism, management is conditioned to exploit their workforce in pursuit of maximum profits for themselves and their shareholders. We have to make an equitable workplace happen through coming together collectively as co-workers and deciding to take control over our lives at work.

Besides getting horribly paid, many workers are harmed by the racism, sexism, transphobia, ableism, homophobia, xenophobia, ageism, or classism that exists at their workplace. If you and your co-workers care about dismantling these systems and protecting workers who are targets of this systemic oppression, unionizing helps you hold perpetrators of harm accountable. Without a union, you can file a complaint with HR and see where it goes. With a union, you can bring a union representative and their lawyers into a meeting to back you up if your concerns are met with denial or negligence.

I hope this zine demystifies the process of unionizing your workplace and that it gives you the energy to do so!

Another reality is possible in our workplaces but it is only so if we make it happen. We are in charge now. Let's go!!!!!!

PART 1:

**WHAT
IS
A UNION?**

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS A LABOR UNION AND WHAT DOES IT DO?

A labor union is an organization that legally represents and protects the interests, rights, and voices of workers.

Examples of labor unions include:

- International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)
- Teamsters (IBT)
- UNITE HERE!
- United Auto Workers (UAW)
- American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

A comprehensive list of unions is available in Appendix A on page 69.

Historically, unions have formed because workers in a specific industry experienced exploitative and harmful working conditions, and the workers collectively decided to do something about it. Because of this, certain industries have a high concentration of a unionized workforce: teachers, steel workers, electrical workers, auto workers, public service workers, freight drivers.

Workers who are unionized, on average, get paid 11.2% more than workers who are not.¹ Unionized workers also are more likely to have more paid sick days and greater access to healthcare than nonunion workers, in the same industry, doing the same work!

¹ <https://www.epi.org/press/union-workers-are-paid-11-2-more-and-have-greater-access-to-health-insurance-and-paid-sick-days-than-their-nonunion-counterparts-policy-makers-must-strengthen-workers-ability-to-form-unions/>

A union provides representatives — lawyers, organizers, and the leader of the local union — to help you with the union organizing campaign, contract negotiations, and contract enforcement. The union provides training, strategy, knowledge, and funding to help win elections and to maintain fair contracts.

What does the union get out of this?

When you vote on and succeed in negotiating a fair contract with management at your workplace, the members of the bargaining unit pay union dues and sometimes an initiation fee for joining the union.

Every union is different when it comes to dues! Dues are paid to the union typically on a monthly basis. Many local unions are autonomous and set their own fees and dues structures while other locals follow what the international/national union sets as the standard dues structure.

At the union my co-workers and I affiliated with, our dues are \$20 a month plus 1% of our wages. So if I am making \$15.75 under the union contract, working 40 hours a week, \$25.20 is 1% of my earned wages. In all, I pay about \$45 dollars in union dues per month. Per year, this means I'd pay about \$540 in union dues. That might seem like a lot, but before the union contract, I made \$25,440 per year at \$13.25 an hour, and now I'm making \$30,240 per year at \$15.75 per hour. I am making \$4,800 more per year than before we unionized, and after paying dues my increase in pay will be \$4,260. You pay dues so that the union can win you wage increases you'd never see without the union's help.

Be sure to ask the union you want to affiliate with EXACTLY how much their dues are and how often you pay them. Ask if they have initiation fees or any additional monthly or yearly fees. Don't be afraid of asking too many questions or demanding specific information! Transparency is key.

CHAPTER 2

WHO CAN UNIONIZE?

MOST private sector employees.

People who work at:

Coffee shops, restaurants, grocery stores, fast food joints, literally any retail store in the mall, museums, nonprofits, banks, schools, pharmacies, airline companies, any office!

At the hospital, doctor's office, dentist's office.

At the hair dresser's. At the auto parts store!

AT WALMART. AMAZON. APPLE. CVS. CAR INSURANCE COMPANIES. HEALTHCARE INSURANCE COMPANIES. AT&T. VERIZON. TARGET. UPS. AT BEST BUY!

Disney world baby! Albertson's. Jamba Juice. PinkBerry.

Waste Management. TJ Maxx. PF Changs. Chipotle.

Subway. Starbucks. Taco Bell. Wendy's. KFC. Panera. White Castle. Carls Jr. Michaels. Macy's. Express. H&M. Kohls. Marshalls. BED BATH AND BEYOND! Gucci. Fendi. Prada.

Anyone who earns wages or a salary and is NOT a part of management can unionize. People who have hiring and firing power, such as managers, directors, and executives cannot unionize. Confidential employees (who have access to sensitive company information) are also not eligible to unionize. Supervisors can go either way. If a supervisor has explicit hiring and firing power, they can't unionize. But if a supervisor doesn't have that power, they can join the union!

If you have at least two people on staff who are not managers, you can unionize! Yes, just two people can unionize!

Be aware that there are ridiculous, discriminatory laws that exclude certain workers from unionizing. Many farmworkers, domestic workers, government workers, and railroad employees are excluded from being able to unionize. It depends on where you live— farmworkers in California can unionize while farmworkers in Arizona cannot.

If you have doubts, ask a local union organizer whether a worker is eligible to be in the bargaining unit or not. They'll help you figure it out.

Some public sector employees:

If you are a public sector employee (working in some way for the government: as a teacher, firefighter, construction/ infrastructure worker, office worker), you will have to contact an organizer in your town, city, or state to see if you and your co-workers are eligible to unionize. Every state has different laws about public sector employees and whether or not they can unionize.

CHAPTER 3

WHY DOES THIS MATTER? WHAT CAN A UNION DO FOR MY CO-WORKERS AND I?

Listen. It matters because most of us spend at least 5 days a week, 8 hours a day, working at a job where we are not getting paid as much as the company we work for could pay us. Workers are literally essential to the proper functioning of any business or workplace. Businesses would NOT be able TO FUNCTION without workers.

Many businesses get away with paying their workers the least possible amount of money that they are legally required to pay as mandated by law (minimum wage!). When for-profit businesses in the retail and service industries pull in high profits, somehow the people who keep these industries running, working on the floor of a restaurant or at a store, get paid somewhere between \$7.25 and \$15 dollars per hour.

These are unlivable wages. Low pay forces workers to take on multiple jobs, struggling to make rent, buy enough food, and pay essential bills. Meanwhile, the owners and shareholders of these industries take home hundreds of thousands of dollars. Profits are hoarded; they never trickle down into the pockets of workers.

UNIONIZING MATTERS because your work is worth more than you're currently getting paid. You deserve to have a wage that you can live on if you are performing work. You should not need to work more than 40 hours a week to be able to survive.

It matters because without a union, your workplace is a dictatorship.

Who makes decisions that affect the entire workforce? Usually, one or two people at an organization call the shots. The management team may be bigger, but the big decisions are really up to a few executives.

A few people making decisions that affect an entire group, without the input and consent of the entire group, is the definition of a dictatorship.

Unionizing brings democracy to your workplace.

When you unionize, you, the worker, get to negotiate over how much you get paid. You negotiate over whether you get healthcare, paid sick leave, maternity and paternity leave, vacation days, personal days, etc. You get to address and agree upon specific working conditions face-to-face with management. You get just cause protections, which means that management can't fire you for any reason; they need evidence of misconduct to do so.

Unionizing gives you a voice on the job that is legally protected. You can voice concerns at work and ask questions without worry of retaliation. If you have a physically, verbally, or sexually abusive boss, you can report the behavior without fear and with the backing of your union's legal representation.

A union can help you completely change what your life at work looks like. A union can win you: higher wages, job protection, healthcare, better working conditions, access to lawyers, and the support of thousands of other workers who are also protected by that union.

A union provides:

JOB SECURITY!

HIGHER WAGES!

WORKPLACE PROTECTIONS!

FAIR WORKING CONDITIONS!

A VOICE ON THE JOB!

BETTER HOURS!

COMMUNITY SUPPORT!

POWER!

JUSTICE!

REPRESENTATION!

ADVOCACY!

PART 2:

**HOW DO I
UNIONIZE
MY
WORKPLACE?**

STEP 1:

GET EDUCATED

Reading this is a good start. Keep reading :)

Besides this guide, go to the **National Labor Relations Board website** and learn about your protected rights as a worker who is interesting in organizing at: <https://www.nlrb.gov/about-nlrb/rights-we-protect>

The **AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations) website** is also a great resource: <https://aflcio.org/formaunion>

Jessalyn Aaland put together an incredible resource for art/nonprofit workers looking to unionize called **Organizing Power**: <https://jessalynaaland.com/Organizing-Power-2019>

Besides these three resources, use Google! Research local unions in your geographic area. See if anyone you know has been in a union and talk to them about what it's like to be a unionized worker. Call a local union and ask to speak with an organizer. Watch YouTube videos about the labor movement. Soak in as much as you can.

You have to educate yourself about what unionizing actually is, what it would look like where you work, and what it could practically do for you and your co-workers. You have to know what's up, because after you educate yourself, you'll need to educate your fellow co-workers and convince them that unionizing is a fantastic and worthwhile idea!

Will you know all of the answers, all of the time? No. But you can promise to find out the answer and get back to your co-worker when you find it out. Follow through (saying you are going to do something, and then ACTUALLY DOING IT) is really, really important when you are organizing.

Lean on other workers in your industry who have gone through the process of unionizing. A lot of new unions popping up have a social media presence either on Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook. Direct message those accounts and see if you can talk to someone behind that union's efforts! Ask them questions! No question is stupid!

Remember that this knowledge has strategically been hidden from workers, because corporations do not want their workforces to unionize! If their workforce unionizes, they will likely be forced to pay their workers more than they currently do, provide healthcare, and treat their workers like human beings.

The narrative that "unions are bad" is perpetuated by wealthy people in the corporate and political worlds through both creating biased and sensational media narratives that condition viewers to perceive unionizing negatively, and through anti-worker legislation that actively disenfranchises workers.

STEP 2:

TALK TO TRUSTED CO-WORKERS + REACH OUT TO ORGANIZERS

Once you feel like you have a general IDEA of what unionizing means, start talking to trusted co-workers, or co-workers who you think would *definitely* be down to unionize.

In my unionizing experience, about four of us at work would intermittently joke about unionizing whenever management did something stupid and generally counterintuitive to the success of the organization, that also negatively impacted us. We would joke, until one day, one of us said, “but what if we really did it?” My co-worker’s mother had attempted to organize her workplace and she had a contact for a union organizer. For a few months, we simply lagged on calling the organizer and when we finally did we played phone tag for weeks.

And then, on a fateful April morning, I had had enough of the bullshit for that day and on my ten minute break at work I cold called the organizer (don’t do this! call the organizer away from work where you will not risk being overheard!) I was terrified because I was so unaware of what organizing even entailed! She was very kind and we set up a meeting. The adrenaline I felt! The excitement was palpable! We were making it happen!

The four of us then asked 3-4 more trusted co-workers to attend the meeting. One of them said yes. At this point, everything was extremely covert. We swore secrecy, because if management knew that we were trying to unionize our workplace, everything would have gotten infinitely more difficult and complicated.

As you *begin* organizing your co-workers, only talk to co-workers who you are nearly certain would support it, and who can keep their mouths shut. The secrecy makes work a lot more fun tbh, kind of like you're on a CIA mission, but the mission is to get paid enough to be able to live and be treated with dignity and respect. But seriously, keep unionizing a secret in the beginning.

When we met with our organizer, we had no idea what to expect. I thought we had to pay her for helping us. I learned that you do NOT have to pay an organizer to work with you on a campaign. They'll just meet with you!

We came to the meeting with a million questions and our organizer answered them all! She gave us handouts and reading material to help educate us on what the process would be like. She asked us to keep bringing co-workers to the meetings so that we could learn more about the process.

This was difficult. In the customer service industry, one job is usually not enough, and service workers usually have other responsibilities when they're not working like: school, caring for family and kids, 2nd or 3rd jobs. It's hard to get people to attend meetings. If someone is supportive, but can't attend a meeting, just talk to them one-on-one about the process and keep them in the loop.

STEP 3

SELECT A UNION TO AFFILIATE WITH

Selecting a union is A BIG DEAL. Huge. YUUUUUUGE.

You want to affiliate with a union that is invested in the success of your workforce, that is excited to bring you under their wing, and that lends support in the specific ways that you need.

We got super lucky with our organizer Anabel and the IBEW. They happened to be a fantastic fit for us! Anabel was incredibly supportive and reliable, and Nate, the local's business manager, was also extremely invested in our success and supported us in the ways we needed.

With that being said, KNOW YOUR OPTIONS. At this point in our process, I couldn't name a single union in Appendix A. If we could do it again, we'd probably meet with different unions for good measure (even though we absolutely love the IBEW, SHOUT OUT IBEW LOCAL 465!)

Research all of the unions in your geographical area. Investigate local unions online and see what their by-laws, financials, and social media presence is like. What kind of workers do they represent? Who do they support politically? How do they think about community? Where do they stand financially? What do their contracts look like? What's their history like? Who are the leaders at the local?

The point is to figure out which union will be the best possible fit for your workforce. Schedule meetings with different organizers, and ask the organizers a lot of questions. If there isn't a clear answer, build consensus with your co-workers to make the decision. You don't have to decide this right away, but it is wise to get to know union organizers at the very beginning of your campaign.

STEP 4

BUILD THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

The organizing committee is the folks who keep showing up to meetings and who really want to make the union happen! We slowly looped in co-workers from different departments so that in our organizing effort, every department's interests would be represented! This is so, so, so, SO crucial. Everyone, in every department, is pissed off about something at work! Everyone, in every department, has issues they want to see resolved! Some of these issues can be solved by unionizing, some of them can't. Your union organizer will help you decipher whether unionizing can address an issue or not.

THE IMPORTANT THING is that EVERY WORKER'S INTERESTS, FROM EVERY DEPARTMENT WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO UNIONIZE, is REPRESENTED.

Why? Because what the union is striving for is giving a voice to all workers. No one's interests should be bypassed or made more important than the others. This requires people from all departments (or however many will join the union) to show up to meetings and express their desires, concerns, and hopes for what the union can do for them. During your

organizing process it is absolutely okay to loop in folks from different departments in a staggered manner.

It is completely normal for the organizing committee to change and shift over time. People's lives change and the committee will be reflective of that.

STEP 5

1:1

CONVERSATIONS + HELLA MEETINGS

After you have met enough times as an organizing committee, feel confident in your knowledge of the process of unionization and that unionizing could really change your reality at work in a positive way, you are now **READY** to have one-on-one conversations with your co-workers!

This step is *CRITICAL! IMPORTANT! IMPERATIVE!* This is where you jump in and do the scary things.

You've educated yourself, and now it's your job to educate your co-workers and give them all of the information they need to know about what unionizing means and what it could do for your life at work.

This step is hard AF for many reasons:

1. People think unions are evil/bad/the devil
2. People are afraid of losing their jobs
3. People don't really understand what a union is

Be prepared for a lot of initial pushback, confusion, and resistance from your co-workers when you begin to talk to them about unionizing.

This is an example of what a conversation might look like with someone who you think would *likely be* supportive of unionizing:

Organizer: Hey, how's it going?

Worker: What's up, how's your day?

Proceed with some small talk and maybe some shit talking

Organizer: Ok so you know how they refused to give us more than a 3% raise this year?

Worker: Ummmmm, yeah. What else is new around here?

Organizer: So I was looking at their tax forms and it looks like our CEO made \$200,000 last year...and he got a 15k bonus. Meanwhile, we don't even make \$13 an hour.

Worker: What the actual fuck dude. A BONUS? IN THIS ECONOMY? Those assholes.

Organizer: Yeah I know. Ugh. Okay well a bunch of us have been talking and we think there's something that we can do about our wages, because there's clearly enough money in the budget to pay us a little more. Are you free after work to talk about it?

Worker: I guess, yeah, sure. What is it though?

Organizer: I'll tell you after we clock out!

Worker: Okay sick! Talk to you later.

This is an example of what a conversation might look like with someone who you think *might* be supportive of unionizing:

Organizer: Hey! How's it going?

Worker: It's okay. Just another day.

Organizer: How has (x) been going? (X= ask about any dynamic or situation that might be aggravating the worker)

Worker: Oh, you know. Same old shit. What do you expect?

Organizer: Damn I'm sorry. It's so frustrating. Hey, I wanted to ask, has anyone here ever talked about like...unions? Or unionizing? Has anyone ever tried that here?

Worker: Eh. I don't think so. Not that I know of. Why?

Organizer: Oh I don't know. Just curious. Sometimes I wish there was something more we could do to get paid more you know?

At this point in the conversation, try to see how the person has reacted to the words union and unionizing, and how they answer the question above. Use your judgment as to whether you should change the topic or continue the conversation. If they seem interested in "something more we could do", mention the idea of unionizing and see what they think about it.

Worker: I mean...what could we do? We've tried talking to our manager about making \$15 an hour but it seems impossible.

Organizer: Some of us are meeting up to talk about doing something together. We are thinking of forming a union. What do you think?

Worker: Oh shit! I don't know about that. How hard is it to do?

Organizer: It's possible. Would you be down to come to a meeting and learn more about it?

Worker: I guess. Are they long? I don't have a lot of free time.

Organizer: They're under an hour. You don't have to stay the whole time.

Worker: Okay, I'm down.

If they express interest, invite them to the meeting. If someone is hesitant about unionizing, don't push them. Offer people information and answer all of their questions honestly. If you don't know something, find out the answer and get back to them as soon as you can. Follow through matters!

If you think one of your co-workers won't support the union, wait to tell them about it for a while, either right up until the moment you go public or shortly after. Workers who are openly anti-union may tattle to management and spill the details or whatever they know about the organizing effort before the union drive goes public. If management knows their workers are making an effort to organize a union, they will likely do everything in their power to thwart it from succeeding. The longer you can go without management finding out, the better!

1:1 conversations are when someone from the organizing committee talks to another co-worker about the idea of unionizing. The goal is to get the co-worker to support the idea of unionizing, and to eventually sign an authorization card (more on this later!) Depending on the relationship between the two people, the conversation will look different.

When my co-workers and I unionized, many of us were already close friends and spent time together outside of work. Many of us had already had conversations about the patterns of dysfunction at our workplace. An easy way to talk about potentially unionizing was to bring one of these problems up, to get someone talking about it, and then to present unionizing as a solution to that issue. Some issues, like an incompetent supervisor or tedious job responsibilities can't be solved by unionizing, but HUGE issues like pay, working conditions, and job protections can be negotiated over at the bargaining table. Wage increases, better working conditions, and a protected voice on the job is a pretty big fucking deal, and these are things that can be won!

As you and your organizing committee have 1:1 conversations with your fellow co-workers, continue to have weekly meetings at a discreet but nearby location close to your work. Invite each person you talk to (who seems interested!) to come to the meeting.

The goal is to get more workers to come to meetings so that:

- 1) workers get educated and informed about the process of unionizing
- 2) workers meet and get to know your union organizer(s) who are working with you
- 3) workers can make their own informed decision on whether they want to support the effort or not

This phase of having one-on-one conversations can last for months. It depends on how big your workplace is, how well you and your co-workers know each other, what your collective group dynamic is like (do you get along? is there a lot of beef between co-workers?), and a lot of other factors because every workplace is unique and every worker is unique.

Tips for this phase:

Meet people where they are. Don't force anyone to come to a meeting if they are clearly skeptical. Make sure they know that the option is open, but respect their choice if they are not ready to come, if they do not want to come, or if they just aren't interested.

Be prepared to field any and all questions. People will ask you some crazy shit. Be as calm and neutral as possible in explaining the benefits and challenges of unionizing.

If you don't know an answer to a question, tell the person you will find out for them, and then follow up PROMPTLY. Nothing is more important than follow through. If you say you're going to get someone information on if the union would be able to change a specific working condition, you better find it out and get the damn information. Don't wait two weeks to do it. If your co-workers see that you aren't taking the unionizing effort seriously, why should they?

This is the time, if you haven't already, to build **TRUST**. The point of unionizing is banding together as workers to demand and achieve better pay, benefits, and working conditions. You unionize because your employer **CANNOT** be trusted to provide equitable pay and treat workers with dignity and respect.

Prepare for a million meetings. Set the meetings at times that are convenient for your co-workers, in the morning and in the evening, at someone's apartment or a local coffee shop. Be flexible. Keep them concise and organized. Have fun with it! You gotta hype your fellow co-workers up about unionizing at these meetings! Get people excited! Unionizing will likely mean making more money, better healthcare, and a voice on the job. Remind people of this in these meetings!

In these many meetings, you and your co-workers may:

- learn about the process of unionizing and ask and get any questions answered about what unionizing could do for them
- build consensus on what problems at the workplace you want to address the most in your contract
- meet with the union organizer and the organizing committee
- decide which co-workers to talk to and loop in next about unionizing
- discuss the different unions in the area and figure out which one to affiliate with
- map levels of support for the union within the workplace
- create social media / website content
- eat a lot of snacks and drink a lot of water :)

STEP 6

INOCULATION

Once a consensus has been reached among the bargaining unit that everyone wants to move forward with unionizing, you and your union organizer begin the process of INOCULATION. Your union organizer will lead you through this!

Inoculation is preparing and educating everyone in the bargaining unit for management's misinformation campaign against the union. You have to inoculate your co-workers, because when you go public with your campaign, your management will likely have **captive audience** meetings. In a captive audience meeting, management typically makes all staff attend and listen to either a top executive or a guest speaker talk about why unions are bad for the organization and the workers. There's a lot of horseshit spewed in these meetings. If you aren't educated on how unions actually work, these meetings can scare the shit out of you.

Sometimes management will say straight up lies, like saying that when you unionize, the union representative is the only person who makes big decisions (the workers make the big decisions). Or sometimes they spread misinformation, like saying that you will end up making less money because of union dues (you would never agree to a deal where you would make less money under a contract).

Before you go public, it's helpful to have meetings where you talk to everyone in the bargaining unit about what captive audience meetings are and prepare them for the lies and misinformation they will likely hear. It's helpful to make a customized inoculation handout for your co-workers to help

guide them in figuring out what is true and what is a lie in these meetings. An inoculation sheet contains information about what kind of anti-union rhetoric you and your fellow coworkers might hear at a captive audience meeting, and what the truth really is behind that anti-union rhetoric.

Take time to check in with each of your co-workers after a meeting where you distribute the inoculation sheets. See if people are confused about anything, and answer any of their questions or concerns. Of course, if someone has been educated on what unions are and they still seem skeptical about unionizing, don't bug them or persuade them to change their mind. The best thing to do is to make a lot of information available to them, answer all of their questions and concerns honestly, and let them know that you are free to them to talk if and whenever they are ready.

Not everyone will be down to unionize and that's fine. Remember that a lot of people don't know what unionizing is, and what they don't know scares them. Let folks come to meetings and digest the information at their own pace.

Example of a customized inoculation sheet:

WHAT THE ORGANIZATION MAY SAY/DO

WHAT THE TRUTH IS

<p>The organization will go bankrupt with a union.</p>	<p>We would never vote to pass a bargaining contract that would bankrupt the organization. We love where we work and we want it to grow and thrive!</p>
<p>Management didn't realize we were so unhappy and they promise to make changes within a year.</p>	<p>We have voiced concerns for years without any kind of tangible change. Even if they promise us something, without a union there is no way to hold them accountable to those promises.</p>
<p>Management starts having pizza and ice cream parties to "celebrate" us.</p>	<p>This is an attempt to win us over as if we are in 4th grade and have sawdust for brains.</p>
<p>Management says signing authorization cards mean you've already joined the union.</p>	<p>Signing an authorization card is not a legal document. It means that you show "interest" in possibly unionizing. They will never see who signs a card (it's illegal, the NLRB won't/cannot share that info.)</p>
<p>Management says they will never sign a contract.</p>	<p>The organization is legally obligated to bargain a contract in "good faith" with the organizing committee, our union lawyers, and our union rep.</p>
<p>Our negotiations will start from scratch (threatening to take away parking, other benefits).</p>	<p>The organization is legally obligated to start negotiations from the status quo of how wages/conditions are.</p>
<p>Management will suddenly start making lots of promises of change.</p>	<p>These promises have no accountability without a legal contract, no matter how great the changes may sound. Without a union they can be changed at any moment.</p>

STEP 7

OPERATION: AUTHORIZATION CARDS


Signing authorization cards is the first step you take in formally unionizing your workplace that involves official documentation.

Legally, in order to file a petition for either voluntary recognition or an election, at least 30% of the bargaining unit has to sign these cards. The **bargaining unit** is the group of workers in your workplace who are eligible and intend to unionize.

When do you start signing them then? After many meetings, the group will reach a point where people are anxious to get the ball ROLLING. A solid portion of workers have either come to a few meetings and voiced their support, or said that they want to stay out of the whole thing. Whenever it feels like there is a solid group of you (30-50% of the unit) who want to move forward with unionizing, you will begin to sign AUTHORIZATION CARDS.

An authorization card is a document that a worker signs when they are **INTERESTED** in forming a union at their workplace with a specific local union.

Authorization cards look like this:

AUTHORIZATION FOR REPRESENTATION	
I authorize Local Union No. _____ of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers ® to represent me as my bargaining representative in collective bargaining with my employer.	
Name _____	<small>(Print first, middle, and last name)</small>
Home Address _____	
City _____	State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____	Email _____
Employer _____	Location _____
Department _____	Manager _____
Job Title _____	Shift 1 st <input type="checkbox"/> 2 nd <input type="checkbox"/> 3 rd <input type="checkbox"/>
Date of Authorization _____	Signature _____
<small>Form 141 Rev. 9/13</small>	

Signing an authorization card is **NOT** a vote!

Signing an authorization card is **ANONYMOUS**. Meaning, when the NLRB receives the card after your union organizer submits them, your names and information are only used to verify that you indeed work at your workplace and represent an interest in unionizing. Management will never be able to find out who signed the authorization cards because the NLRB is legally obligated to keep them anonymous.

Although you can file with just 30% of the bargaining unit signing these cards, it is recommended that you have at least 70% of the bargaining unit sign cards. In order to win a union election, 50% plus one people need to vote for the union. It is optimal to have at least 70% of the bargaining unit sign the cards in support of the union because in the event that a few people change their mind between signing the card and voting in the election, you'll still have enough votes to win.

Beginning the process of getting folks to sign authorization cards should be a collective decision that the organizing committee and the union organizer make together. Your union organizer is your teacher, your expert, and your mentor in this process. She has probably organized many workplaces, and she can tell when your group is ready for this step. All of you in the organizing committee will also know when it feels right and when you are ready to take that step.

When you are ready, present this step as a possibility at your next meeting, have the organizing committee each sign an authorization card to give confidence to the rest of the workers, and see who else will sign a card.

Do not sign authorization cards at the workplace. It is too risky. Yes, it's convenient, but it's **TOO DAMN RISKY**. Go literally anywhere else to get someone's signature. Don't let people take them home. Don't rush anyone into signing. Keep **EXCELLENT** track of these cards. Do **NOT** lose them.

Remember: *herd mentality is real*. If a large number of workers are confident in the prospect of unionizing, it will put other workers who are more skeptical at ease. If you genuinely believe that better wages and working conditions are possible through unionization, and that unionizing is the only way to improve your lives at work, **SAY THAT** to your fellow co-workers. Especially when organizing feels crazy and hectic, re-center yourselves on why you are doing what you are doing. You are empowering yourselves and improving your lives.

Keep slowly collecting authorization cards from your fellow co-workers. See how many you have after a month or two. Notice who does and doesn't sign and find out why. Some people are just wicked paranoid about having their name being associated with unionizing, but say they would still vote yes in an election. Some people are scared that they

could lose their job, but they secretly support the union and would vote yes in an election. Some people express support for the union but won't sign a card, and you're really not sure how they feel about the whole thing. These folks are wildcards.

A helpful strategy to use during this phase is to make a list of co-workers who have already signed authorization cards (*with their explicit permission!*) and share that list with co-workers who are on the fence about the effort. If a skeptical co-worker sees that someone they trust has signed an authorization card, they will be more willing and likely to also sign one. But remember, in order to put someone's name on the list, you need their explicit permission.

As you are collecting authorization cards, you and your organizing committee will also be working on inoculating (educating) your co-workers on what to expect when management finds out that you've been organizing, on preparing a social/print media campaign for the moment you go public, and planning GOTV (get out the vote) events. Many of the steps in this zine happen simultaneously.

I know...it's a lot. At the end of the guide there is a section on caring for yourself during this intense period of time. Organizing your workplace can feel like a second job, and that's because it is one! Remember you aren't doing it alone. You have your organizing committee, your union organizer, and the labor community wherever you are there to guide you through this entire process.

STEP 8

THE HOLY POWER OF PRINT + SOCIAL MEDIA

There is nothing management hates more than bad press. Public opinion matters, and it can dictate the actions of the leaders of an organization. Using the power of the press, print media, and social media to set the narrative of WHY you are unionizing can have incredibly powerful effects. You can do this through your union having a social media presence on IG, Facebook, Twitter, a website, and by getting in touch with reporters at your local newspapers and magazines. Print media published by reputable sources about your unionizing effort gets the word out to the broader community where you live. Social media is equally powerful. Getting the word out about your organizing effort through social media (Twitter, IG, TikTok, Facebook, etc.) can be incredibly helpful and beneficial— yes, it's a little more work on top of everything you're already doing— but in the long-run your social media presence will be a gift that keeps on giving!

Having a presence on social media for your union has endless benefits. You get to shape the narrative of how the public perceives you and explain why you are unionizing. You can build an online community of supporters who are there for you in both hard times (like if management does something illegal!) and good times (to celebrate winning your union election!) You can connect with other unions in your

industry and with the labor community in general via DMs and support them by reposting their content. Reporters will contact you through social media and ask to interview you! People will ask you for advice through your account!

If your union has the funds, ask if they will foot the bill to pay a graphic designer to create graphics and branding so that there is a cohesive aesthetic people will associate with your union. This matters because it makes the organizing effort look official and professional. It isn't necessary, but it enhances your public image and reinforces your legitimacy.

The initial support you get from the public on social media can also work to pacify fears or doubts that certain members of the bargaining unit hold. When nervous workers see the outpouring of public support, they may realize that unionizing isn't scary and bad but that it's actually a great thing!

Creating a social media strategy and narrative telling your story as a union takes time. And you need to get overwhelming approval and feedback from your bargaining unit on the content and image of the social media campaign. There will need to be a meeting or two (or 10!) where you vision what you want your social media presence to look like, then you work with a graphic designer (or do it yourselves!!) to create graphics, and then you have more meetings where you show it to everyone and then accept and integrate feedback. Try your best to reach a consensus on the aesthetics and messaging.

It's important that BEFORE the day you go public and file to unionize with the NLRB, you have all of the content and graphics prepared. The weeks (and sometimes months!) before you have an election for your union can be incredibly busy, and any work that you *can* get done before you go public should be done *before* you go public!

Website example (graphics by @lydiaeakeroth):

Why We're Doing This

Work in the arts, work in nonprofits and work with children are all historically underpaid and undervalued sectors. At the intersection of all three, we also face devaluation from our own institution. Our passion fuels our work but we will no longer allow our labor to be exploited as a result. We have unionized to highlight the worth of our work and to advocate for higher pay, increased transparency and equitable practices.

Examples of graphics for Instagram and Twitter:

NCM UNION

WE DON'T WAIT FOR CHANGE. WE MAKE IT.

IBEW Local 465
 NCM Union
 SAN DIEGO IS A UNION TOWN

ART IS LABOR. ARTISTS ARE WORKERS.

GET PAID. SOMEONE IS.
 NCMU - YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD UNION.
 LEARN MORE AT WWW.NCMUNION.ORG

NCM UNION

**NON PROFITS NEED UNIONS.
 NON PROFITS NEED UNIONS.
 NON PROFITS NEED UNIONS.
 NON PROFITS NEED UNIONS.
 NON PROFITS NEED UNIONS.
 NON PROFITS NEED UNIONS.
 NON PROFITS NEED UNIONS.**

IBEW Local 465
 NCM UNION
 Non-Profit NEED UNIONS

**NCM UNION:
 FIGHTING FOR
 A MUSEUM THAT
 PAYS ITS WORKERS
 A LIVING WAGE.**

IBEW Local 465
 NCM UNION
 Non-Profit NEED UNIONS

STEP 9

GOING PUBLIC

1. File the Petition to Unionize with the NLRB

Going public is a BIG decision. The organizing committee, the bargaining unit, and your union organizer and business manager of your parent union need to reach a consensus about the right time to go public. Lean on your union organizer for guidance when making this decision. They are veterans in this process and will know when the time is right. They have a system for deciphering when the right amount of people in the bargaining unit will vote yes in the event of a union election.

Going public is the day that your union representative files a petition to unionize with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the federal agency that enforces US labor law. Your employer is then notified via call or email by the NLRB that their workers intend to formally unionize. Your management may or may not have seen this coming. It depends on how well the secret of organizing was kept. Strategically, it's best that management is caught off-guard because they'll be less likely to *quickly* implement union busting tactics. They'll still do it, but it might take them a week to get their act together because they're in shock and reeling from this unexpected disruption to their status quo.

2. Immediately Contact Any Bargaining Unit Members Who Didn't Know About The Unionizing Effort

There may be people in your bargaining unit that for one reason or another the organizing committee has decided to not tell about the unionizing effort. Maybe the worker is

explicitly anti-union, they are really close with someone in management, they are a notorious blabbermouth, or the OC (organizing committee) truly has no idea how the person will feel about unionizing and the risk of telling the person is too big to take. Not telling certain people about the organizing effort will be understandably upsetting, annoying, and hurtful to them. This is a difficult situation. Be honest about why they weren't informed— usually it's because you didn't know how they'd feel about it, they are close to management, or they are new to the organization. Apologize for not telling them. On the day you file the petition to unionize, contact everyone in your bargaining unit who wasn't already aware of the effort (preferably with a 1-on-1 in person!) and get them up-to-date on why you organized and what this means going forward.

These people will be blindsided and possibly shocked, but it's important that they hear from you and the rest of the organizing committee before they hear from management. These conversations can be difficult and awkward, but remember that it's better than an anti-union worker blabbing to management about the organizing effort months before and derailing your campaign.

3. Launch Media Campaigns: Social + Print

The previous sections, namely (print + social media, education/inoculation) are essential preparations that need to happen BEFORE you file the petition to unionize with the NLRB and go public. When you do file, you can launch your social media campaign that day or a few days later. Contact reporters to see if anyone will pick up the story before it becomes public knowledge.

4. Maintain Close Contact with Bargaining Unit Members!

After you go public, it's essential to have a pulse on how everyone in the bargaining unit is feeling about the process.

Are people nervous about going public? Excited? Confused? Have members of the organizing committee check in with each and every member of the bargaining unit regularly after going public. People's opinions and feelings towards the union could change if they are hearing a lot of anti-union rhetoric from management. More on maintaining close contact on page 50.

5. Education / Inoculation

BEFORE you file and go public, the majority of your bargaining unit, aka the members who ALREADY KNOW about the organizing effort, should be FULLY educated, inoculated, and prepared for the potential psychological warfare that management will bring forth when you go public.

Your members (and you!) need to know what unionizing could truly mean for your workplace and what the benefits and drawbacks are. The bargaining unit needs to be fully prepared for captive audience meetings, for scary 1-on-1 conversations with management (even though this is illegal it can still happen!), and for any anti-union rhetoric they may hear.

Inoculation is education that needs to happen **BEFORE YOU GO PUBLIC**. It makes bargaining unit members immune to management's bullshit speeches about how unionizing will ruin your workplace or make it go out of business. When you do file and go public, you will need to maintain close contact with bargaining unit members and be available to answer their questions and concerns. The entire next section is all about keeping the bargaining unit unified in the period between the day you file with the NLRB and the day of your election (if you have one! It's possible that your management will "voluntarily recognize" your union. This isn't likely though.)

Keep this in mind for when you do eventually go public:

It's terrifying! It's powerful. When you go public with your campaign, you are making a declaration that you deserve a voice in your workplace and that YOU, as a WORKER, deserve to have a say in your wages, hours, and working conditions.

Management is used to calling all the shots. They set your pay. They set your hours. They tell you what you need to do and how to do it. You might not be able to live off of your pay, your hours might be insane, and you might be asked to perform work that's not in your job description. But what are you going to do? Your job description includes: "other duties as assigned". If you complain or challenge any aspect of your conditions at work, your concerns are typically ignored or you are told it will be addressed but it never is, OR you are immediately labelled as a "problem" employee, OR you get fired or slowly pushed out of your position.

Unionizing changes EVERYTHING. Now you have the legal right to sit across from your management and negotiate your pay, hours, and working conditions. And they have to listen to you. This is going to piss management off like you've never seen before. Management is accustomed to having ABSOLUTE POWER over these kinds of decisions. When you go public with your campaign, expect psychological and emotional turmoil. Expect a war.

Shifts in power are never pretty. Buckle up because when you go public you are in for a fucking ride!

STEP 10

VOLUNTARY RECOGNITION OR ELECTION

When your union organizer files the petition to unionize with the NLRB, your employer is then notified. Your employer will be forced to make a decision: they can either voluntarily recognize the union or they can force an election. It's likely that the employer will force an election, and in the weeks leading up to the election, they will try to convince as many people in the bargaining unit as possible to vote no in the election. If they voluntarily recognize the union? GREAT! HUZZAH! This makes everything easier because you just go into bargaining your contract. But this is highly unlikely.

The weeks leading up to the election can be intensely stressful and emotionally taxing. During this time, there will be captive audience meetings where management brings all of the employees together and they lecture about why a union would be bad for your workplace. They don't say this explicitly; they usually say either straight up lies about why unions are bad or spew misinformation— like the idea that you will bargain from zero (you bargain from the status quo! you cannot lose any benefits you already have unless you negotiate to lose them). This is why inoculation is so important— everyone in the bargaining unit needs to be able to see through the bullshit and misinformation and make their own conclusions about how they feel about the union.

A helpful game to play during these ridiculous meetings is bingo:

B	I	N	G	O
Mandatory Company Meetings	Fire an Unpopular Manager	Anti-Union Literature	Union Is a Third Party	Authorization Card Is a Legal Document
Union Dues	Closings	Union Officers' Salary	Strikes	Negotiations Start at Blank Slate
Supervisor Becomes Mr. Friendly	Threaten Employees		If You Join, You Will Lose Your Rights	You Will Never Get a Contract
Union Promises	Union Can Get in Without a Vote	Give Me One More Chance	You May Lose Pay or Benefits	Union Protects Lazy Workers
Hard to Get Rid of Union	Higher Wages, Fewer Jobs	Company Spying on Workers	Threaten a Lockout	Pizza Luncheon

Every time management uses an anti-union talking point in a captive audience meeting - mark an X until you hit bingo!

STEP 11

MAINTAIN CLOSE CONTACT

Listen—you're almost there babe. You are so fucking close to becoming a legally recognized union. This is the final push so don't lose your momentum! After you file the petition to unionize, management will be HELLA pissed and their mission is to keep the union from winning the election. They will do anything in their power (legally and sometimes illegally!) to keep their workforce from becoming unionized.

How to combat that? Maintain close contact with everyone in the bargaining unit. Check in frequently with everyone. How do you practically do that? The organizing committee needs to designate team liaisons. What's a team liaison? Someone who is a link between two groups of people. In this case, you want to have a team liaison for every different department at your workplace. The team liaison is a point person for people in each respective department to go to whenever they have a question or concern about the unionizing campaign. It's an effective and personal way of communicating. It allows the organizing committee to stay close to the entire bargaining unit. And plus—it makes sense that each department has a leader/contact person who can easily communicate with everyone. It helps if most people in that department like the leader too!

Staying in touch with everyone in the bargaining unit is *extra* important when your election is coming up. The anti-union rhetoric can be really scary. Some co-workers who once supported the union may be having second thoughts. Maybe

their partner or family disapproves of unions, or they're afraid they'll lose their job if they vote yes. This is why education and inoculation is so important— you don't want people to get easily tripped up and freaked out by anti-union myths.

If you know in advance that your management is going to have a captive audience meeting, either hold a bargaining unit meeting right beforehand to remind everyone of the common anti-union myths that management will likely say, hand out those bingo sheets, and answer any questions or concerns. In my experience, everyone in the bargaining unit agreed to stay silent in these meetings and not say a word. The collective silence sent a message to management that we were unified and unfazed by their anti-union tactics. Agreeing to stay silent also protects anyone from being singled out as a supporter/organizer of the union.

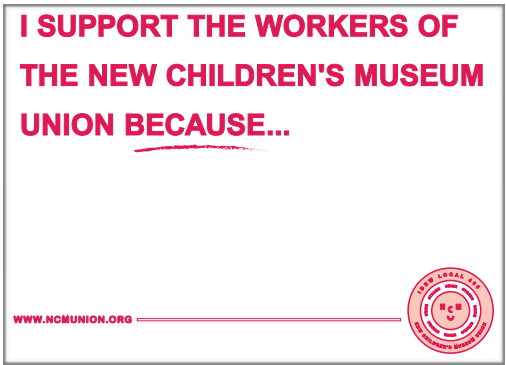
Remember that customized inoculation sheet from the inoculation chapter on page 36? Use it here and make new sheets based on whatever lies/misinformation management spews in the meetings. Sometimes what they say isn't a total lie, but they present information in a confusing way.

As organizers, make yourselves available for meetings in the mornings and evenings leading up to the election. People are going to be concerned and have a lot of questions, which is great! We want everyone involved to be totally informed. And if some people are educated on what the union could mean for the workplace and they are not in favor, don't push them. They are entitled to their beliefs! Focus on people who are on the fence about the union and be there for them as they make their decision.

Shit gets stressful after you go public— one way to take the edge off and to get people in the bargaining unit motivated and excited to vote yes for the union is to have a GOTV (get out the vote) party! We partnered with a local business (Little Dame in San Diego) who generously donated their space for

the evening for us to celebrate! We had snacks, drinks, handed out union pins, and took pictures of (consenting!) bargaining unit members holding signs for why they supported the union. Some of us gave quick speeches about how proud we were of how far we had all come, and obviously we encouraged people to vote yes the next week in the election!

Here's the digital flyer & the signs explaining union support. More pictures can be found on our IG page: [@ncmunion](https://www.instagram.com/ncmunion)



STEP 12

WIN THE ELECTION + CELEBRATE!

Now it gets juicy! THE ELECTION. This is nerve-wracking because you — your fellow co-workers — your union organizer — and your business manager have worked SO HARD to get the yes vote that will open up a path to higher wages and better and fairer working conditions.

The election will take place in an agreed upon place by both the union and the employer. It will likely take place over the course of 1-2 days. An official from the National Labor Relations Board will conduct the election. On the day(s) of the election, urge everyone to vote! Have the team liaisons check in with everyone in their group to make sure that they vote.

When the election has concluded, the NLRB official will read out the votes. Your union organizer/representative and someone elected/volunteered from your bargaining unit will be present, as well as two representatives from management. Hopefully, YOU WIN!!!!!!!!!!

If you win, CELEBRATE this AMAZING accomplishment. What you did, what your union organizer did, what all of your co-workers did, is truly fucking incredible!!!!!!!!!!!! Millions of dollars every year are spent on anti-union propaganda. Companies don't want their workers to unionize! And you overcame this!

If you don't win, return to Step 2 and figure out what happened and if it's worth trying to unionize again next year (you can only hold a vote once a year). If you lose the election, it's going to be really difficult. You worked so hard for this, and you didn't get the results you wanted. This will be deeply painful. Take time to recuperate. Remember that the odds are against you. Companies typically hire union-busting firms to scare your fellow workers into voting no for union. A company like Amazon pays its anti-union consultants 10k PER DAY to create plans that will intimidate and scare workers from unionizing.² There are so many forces working against you when you try to unionize. Remember this as you heal from the experience.

Now, **if you win the election**, it means that all of you at your workplace got together to demand a better life for yourselves, and baby, you are HALFWAY THERE.

You heard me. Halfway.

Now that you have won a union at your workplace, and now that you are formally recognized and represented by your parent union, your employer (management) is legally obligated to bargain and negotiate a contract with you concerning your wages, hours, and working conditions.

More than half first-time unionized workplaces never reach a contract. This can be for many reasons which I will explain in the next chapter. The key here is to stay focused, committed, and measured throughout this process. You have done something incredible by unionizing your workplace, now the goal is to write, bargain, and secure a fair contract for yourself and your co-workers!

² <https://readsludge.com/2021/03/08/amazon-is-paying-nearly-10k-a-day-to-anti-union-consultants/>

STEP 13

WRITE A CONTRACT

Now that you've completed the first cycle of winning a union at your workplace, you are ready for the second part: **forming a negotiating committee, writing a contract, negotiating over that contract, and then voting on and ratifying the agreement, which makes it law in your workplace!**

The first order of business is for the bargaining unit to determine who will represent them on the negotiating committee. You will typically want a leader from each department of your workplace to be on the committee, so that each worker from every department has their interests represented. These leaders might be the same representatives from the organizing committee, or they could be different folks. If a lot of people want to be on the negotiating committee, then have the bargaining unit vote on it. Writing and negotiating the contract takes a lot of time and energy. In my experience, we had people volunteer to do it and no voting was needed. Whatever works for your group!

Once the negotiating committee is solidified, usually the union you affiliated with will train you in what bargaining/negotiating (these terms are used interchangeably) a contract means and how to do it. During the training, we created a survey with the help of our organizer and business manager to send out for everyone in the bargaining unit to fill out. The survey asked specific questions about what the most critical issues were for the bargaining unit and what

should be prioritized as we wrote the contract and bargained for it. Creating a survey and having everyone in your bargaining unit fill it out is really helpful in drafting a contract because you can quantify how many people really care about a certain issue. We gave space in the survey for people to write their top three concerns at work and add any additional information they wanted us to know. Creating a survey is critical and getting as many folks as you can to fill it out is SO important. At the end of the day this contract is for all of you, so you need everyone's voice represented!

Give your co-workers a few weeks to fill the survey out, and then get to work and start writing the contract. A good place to start when writing a contract is to look at other contracts that exist in your industry. Read them over and pick out what you like and what you don't like. Get a feel for the structure of the contract. If you aren't sure where to find those contracts, ask your union organizer. Your union organizer and representatives will guide you heavily in this process. You'll have several sessions of sitting down for hours, writing, and discussing amongst your fellow co-workers on the negotiating committee what you want to include in the contract and what you are fine with leaving out. When you're writing your first contract, reach for the moon. GO FOR IT. Remember that you won't get everything you ask for. You will have to negotiate down. With that being said—write a dreamy contract. Paid parental leave. Paid domestic violence leave. High-ass wages. More vacation time. More sick time. You get the picture?

STEP 14

NEGOTIATE A CONTRACT

Now. Take a deep breath. Because this might be extremely disheartening and emotionally taxing. Negotiating a contract, especially a FIRST contract, usually takes a year or more to do. While the union is experienced in contract negotiation, it's likely that your employer is not. Maybe they've hired anti-union lawyers and they are intent on making this process difficult. Maybe they just want to get this over with, or maybe they want to reach impasse and never reach an agreement with you, because they hate the fact that you unionized.

The energy in contract negotiations is typically tense, uncomfortable, condescending, awkward, and fake. You can't control management's energy but you can control the union's. As a negotiating committee, make sure you are all on the same page about strategy, who talks when and who chimes in when applicable. If there is a conflict within the negotiating committee, sort it out before you go to the table.

You will share your contract proposal with management and they will respond to each part of it. Your employer may condescend and speak to the union and the workers as if y'all are uneducated. They may argue that your work is not worth as much as you say it is worth. It's possible that you will sit across from them as they say you deserve to be paid only what they are federally mandated to pay you (minimum wage), and nothing more. They will say "there is no money for that", or "you're asking for a lot" many, many, *many* times. Management typically wants to give the least amount of

money and power away as they possibly can. This makes sense. This is what they have been trained to do for their entire lives; to hoard power and money. It is normal for them. So, you will have to fight tooth and nail to get everything you want in the contract.

Lawyers are involved with negotiations and they are power players. During negotiations each side (union and employer) will each designate a lead negotiator. Usually, this is the CEO on the employer side and the business manager on the union side. The lawyers act as the secondary negotiator, jumping in and making arguments when the conversation gets particularly heated or legal in nature. Everyone at the table — other executives, workers, and union representatives — will speak at some points but typically negotiations are a dialogue between the lead negotiators. The union will develop a negotiation strategy with everyone on the negotiating committee and you will find a healthy balance of who speaks and when.

People on the negotiating committee will also share the responsibility of taking notes during these sessions. Why take notes? Because if your employer says something that you at any point need to prove in the future, you will need written documentation. When you are taking notes, do it on google docs and share the document with other members of the negotiating committee so that you can type as-close-to-verbatim-as possible of what everyone is saying. A written record of negotiations is critical. **KEEP RECEIPTS.**

The process of negotiations goes like this: you and the union draft a contract proposal where you ask for the moon. You then discuss this contract proposal in your first negotiation session. Clarifying questions are asked and statements are made about whether certain asks in the proposal are possible or impossible. After the first session, your employer will draft various counterproposals to each section of the contract proposal that you (the union) wrote. Maybe they will

accept some of your proposal (meaning, you don't have to negotiate over it!) It is likely that you will have to negotiate over most of the sections. After your employer sends the union a counterproposal for a specific section, all of you will look it over and decide if it is acceptable or not. At the next negotiation session, you will ask them questions about their counterproposal, and maybe you will agree to it, and maybe you won't. If you don't agree with it, you will write your own counterproposal and then send it to your employer. You will discuss it at the next meeting. This process goes ON and ON and ON until you reach a proposal that both sides are satisfied with. And you have to do this for various sections in the contract, usually simultaneously.

This process is annoying and tedious, but remember that what you are negotiating over will affect your everyday life, and the everyday lives of many, many workers for years to come! The language that you have in this contract will tangibly change people's lives— how much they get paid, if they get parental leave, what kind of healthcare they receive, etc.

Lean on your union organizer, union business manager, union lawyer, and other union representatives with years of experience in bargaining. They will guide you through this process. **Stick with it.** This process can really suck the life out of you. It's long and slow and can feel defeating. But the results that come out of it? Fucking worth it!!!

The best case scenario is that the union, workers and management have all made concessions, battled over the issues and finally reach a deal that each side is happy with. An unsavory outcome is if management declares IMPASSE. Either the union or management can declare impasse if they feel like negotiations are becoming pointless, where neither side is moving and no agreements can be made. *You want to avoid impasse!* While both parties are legally required to "bargain in good faith" according to the law, that's not always

the reality of the situation. Some employers declare impasse as an attempt to get rid of the union and frustrate workers.

The Federal Labor Relations Authority website describes what to do if negotiations reach impasse:

“In such circumstances, the parties may agree to [bilateral arrangements](#), or they may seek assistance from the [Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service \(FMCS\)](#). If the parties still cannot reach a voluntary settlement, either side, or the parties jointly, may seek assistance from the [Federal Service Impasses Panel \(FSIP\)](#).”³

A way of avoiding management declaring impasse is to leverage your power on social media and organize your community in putting pressure on them until they agree to continue bargaining. Public pressure is INCREDIBLY powerful.

The process of negotiating a first contract typically takes at least a year or more to negotiate. It will feel slow. It's in management's interest for the process to drag on because they want to make you feel less motivated to achieve the contract. This is an incredibly hard phase! Remind yourselves of WHY you unionized and WHAT you are fighting for. It is worth the effort. It is worth the tears, frustration, and anguish. Your work will impact workers for YEARS to come. You are tangibly making your lives and the lives of your co-workers BETTER through reaching a fair and equitable contract. Keep going even on the hardest days.

Hopefully, there will come a time when you have a tentative agreement on THE ENTIRE CONTRACT! Holy SHIT does this feel amazing! You did it! You all really did it!

³ <https://www.flra.gov/cases/negotiation-impasse>

STEP 15

VOTE TO RATIFY + WIN A FAIR CONTRACT!

Now— you are *so* close. It's time for the ENTIRE bargaining unit to take a look at your incredible work! Once you have reached a tentative agreement on the entire contract (holy shit, this is so exciting), hold a meeting with EVERYONE in the bargaining unit to share the good news!

You can read through the entire contract, share the highlights, scroll through the exciting parts, whatever works! Answer everyone's questions and concerns about the contract and how it will work and what it will mean for each person. Get everyone HYPED ABOUT THE CONTRACT! It's a big deal! It took so many people to reach this place. Remember that without the entire bargaining unit—the people who VOTED to have the union exist—the contract wouldn't be possible. If the contract meets the needs and expectations of the bargaining unit, people will likely vote for it— which is THE NEXT STEP! voting!

Just like you organized a GOTV (get out the vote) campaign for the union election, you need to organize a GOTV campaign for voting on the contract! Your union will set up a fair election process with you, and as the negotiating committee, it is your job to reach out to everyone in the bargaining unit (through team liaisons!) and make sure that

they are informed about what is included in the contract and how it will affect them. Be available to bargaining unit members for any questions or concerns, and then wait for everyone to vote!

If you've considered all worker's needs and desires within the contract and you've delivered on improvements like better wages and improved working conditions, you won't have a lot to worry about.

If it passes,

CONGRATS! HOLY SHIT! YOU FUCKING DID IT!

If it doesn't pass, this means you have to get in touch with your bargaining unit! Clearly something has gone amiss and it's the negotiating committee and the union's responsibility to contact everyone and see what can be improved in the contract.

STEP 16

ENFORCE THE CONTRACT

The work you've been doing, that has lead you up to this point, possibly for years, has come to fruition, and you are now enjoying the fruits of your labor— higher wages, fairer working conditions, and better hours. You have made it! Yes, you are unionized! Yes, you have a fair and equitable contract! and YES! there is still more work to be done. What kind of work? Making sure that whatever is in the contract is ACTUALLY ENFORCED.

Whatever the contract mandates that your employer must do, you have to make sure they do it! If your contract states that management must give workers at least two weeks of advanced notice to change their schedules, but a supervisor tries to change their schedule with one week of advanced notice, HOUSTON YOU HAVE A PROBLEM. If the contract says that a worker will be paid time and a half for doing specific work, and they did that work but their paycheck doesn't reflect that, then you've got a problem!

This is where the union and **SHOP STEWARDS** come in. A shop steward is a worker in the bargaining unit who was either elected or who volunteered to represent the union at their workplace while they are working. So if a worker has a problem, whether it be related to pay, their schedule, or whatever, they can bring this concern up to the shop steward, and the shop steward can directly speak with HR or the appropriate manager to remedy the problem. If the shop steward cannot remedy the issue with management, they

can call on the union for support. After the union intervenes and if no solution can be reached, the aggrieved employee can file a grievance through the grievance and arbitration clause in the contract.

Your fellow workers, shop stewards, union representatives, and officials from the NLRB are responsible for enforcing the contract with your employer. Your employer is responsible for abiding by the contract. Of course, the union must also abide by the contract, but that isn't usually a problem!

It's imperative that the entire bargaining unit know the contract well and knows what's what. If the bargaining unit does not hold their employer accountable for following the contract, the employer will be more likely to breach it.

When new employees join the team, educate them about what the contract actually means. If they are entitled to a certain amount of sick time, paid leave, health insurance, and pay rate, make sure they know about it! Make a cheat sheet that highlights the most relevant information within the contract that every worker needs to know. Having an engaged and active bargaining unit is important because if any issue arise, management will have to face their workers who know and understand their rights given to them by the contract.

PART 3:

HOW

DO

I

GET

THROUGH

THIS?

SELF CARE / COLLECTIVE CARE

Organizing a campaign to unionize your workplace is really fucking hard. It's daunting, it's difficult, and it's ultimately a huge risk. This is no cake walk! This is no dress rehearsal! You are JUMPING into the fire baby!

You will have a union organizer by your side for most of the journey, THANK GOD. Lean on them. They know the ins and outs of this process and have invaluable experience that will guide you and your coworkers to glory.

But at the beginning—it might just be you and a few excited co-workers trying to figure out how to do this thing, and it will take a lot of time and energy to get the effort off the ground. And even when you find the union that is right for your bargaining unit and you find an incredible organizer, it's still a lot of work! On top of working a full-time job or multiple jobs, organizing can be A LOT. But it's worth it in the long run. TRULY.

When you are organizing, you have to stay on top of caring for yourself. Pay attention to whether or not you are getting enough sleep, eating regularly, and taking time for yourself to relax. When you are organizing it's easy to forget about your own needs. So remember them! And lean on your fellow co-workers who are involved with organizing to take on some of your work when you need a break. And do the same for them when they need it! Take care of each other.

The point of organizing a union is to achieve a better quality of life. Lift each other up when shit gets stressful. Be patient when discussions and decision-making gets heated. Be gentle with yourself when things get intense and remember

to breathe. Forgive yourself and your comrades when there is conflict. Be easy with each other and don't forget that management will try to pit you against one another.

This process brings up a lot of emotions and there may be conflicting personalities that can clash so often it may seem like they might derail the effort. When this happens, keep the collective vision in everyone's mind. Everyone on the organizing committee will not agree on every little thing, but you will probably all agree on the big things you want to win, and that's the key! Work together to achieve the big things—when you get divided, you get conquered. Stick together through the conflict that will inevitably happen!

Remember that every organizing effort goes at its own pace. Some people organize in six months. Other people take years. Winning a fair contract can take one or two years. It's hard, slow, arduous work. You have to remind yourselves of WHY you are doing this. After you have a contract, your lives are going to change. People will get paid more and your working conditions will be a lot better! REMEMBER the why. And keep going until you get there. You can do it !!!!!!!!!!!!!

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Can workers from different departments unionize together?

Yes. As long as they are not contracted employees from another company, and as long as they are not a part of management.

How do you talk to workers in different departments if you don't know them?

Find out amongst you and the co-workers you DO know whether anyone knows one another. Get one of your co-workers who is social and outgoing to talk to those co-workers from different departments that you never see. Go to happy hour together! Invite some of them to a potluck. Stop by their desks every once in a while to say hi.

Where can I find examples of contracts?

Ask your union organizer for help with this! Or, if you know any unionized workplaces that are similar to yours, look up their union's website. Their union should publish the contract on their website.

What if none of the unions in Appendix A apply to my industry?

They don't need to! You can choose to affiliate with a union from any industry. Regardless of your industry, every union has invaluable expertise and resources to support organizing drives and negotiating successful bargaining contracts that will get you higher wages and better working conditions.

APPENDIX A

List of Major Labor Unions in the US:

Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)

American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

American Postal Workers Union (APWU)

Communications Workers of America (CWA)

International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE)

International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental, and Reinforcing Iron Workers (IW)

Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)

International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF)

International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM)

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)

International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU)

International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE)

International Union of Painters and Allied Trades (IUPAT)

Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA)

National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC)

National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU)

National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA)

Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

Teamsters (IBT)

Transport Workers Union of America (TWU)

UNITE HERE!

United Association (UA)

United Auto Workers (UAW)

United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBC)

United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)

United Steelworkers (USW)

◀3 THANK YOU ▶3

To my union ride-or-dies: Hannah Mykel, Alisa Miller, Brittney DeVeau, Cody Machado, and to all workers, past and present at the museum. WE DID IT, MY LOVES!

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To myself, because writing this was really fucking hard, and I did it anyways.