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Creative Pressure Tactics

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Creative Pressure Tactics

Abstract

[Excerpt] Saul Alinsky, a great labor and community organizer, once said that “tactics that drag on become a drag.” Stewards know that tactics used too often can lose their effectiveness and burn members out. That’s why wise stewards are always looking for new and creative ways to put pressure on an employer. Here are some ideas that have worked for other unionists.

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CREATIVE PRESSURE TACTICS

Saul Alinsky, a great labor and community organizer, once said that "tactics that drag on become a drag." Stewards know that tactics used too often can lose their effectiveness and burn members out. That's why wise stewards are always looking for new and creative ways to put pressure on an employer. Here are some ideas that have worked for other unionists.

RIDICULE OR OUTSMART THE BOSS

Look for loopholes in existing rules. For example, one employer had a rule against posters in work areas, but allowed calendars — so the union put their poster on a calendar. In another case an employer unilaterally required men to wear ties — so the union got everyone to wear the most outrageous ties they could find.

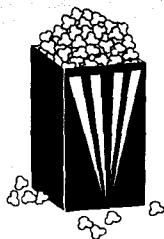


LAUGH AT THE BOSS

You could have the workers fill out evaluations of the boss on a mock version of the form the boss uses to evaluate *them*. Or you could circulate cartoons or jokes that show how silly or petty the boss is being. Or make up top-ten lists or quizzes that make fun of the boss.

REACH OUT TO THE PUBLIC

Give the public something useful with your message on it, such as shopping bags to customers entering a store that say, "Stop selling clothes made in sweatshops — it matters to me." Another idea: distribute message-bearing score cards at a baseball game or free bags of popcorn to movie patrons waiting to enter. Supermarket workers could provide



flyers from a union store to shoppers before they enter a non-union market and advise them they can get better prices at the union market.

DEMONSTRATIONS

You can use costumes to get the public's attention and highlight your issue. Example: have Santa Claus deliver coal to unfair employers just before Christmas. Or you could have members put on bandages, slings and other health-related items to dramatize the high accident rate at your workplace.



TAKE THE MORAL HIGH GROUND

Put your employer on the moral and ethical defensive by having a candlelight vigil for justice outside his or her home. You could gather members in the workplace cafeteria to pray for justice, and involve local clergy by asking religious leaders to lead their congregations in prayer for justice.

DO SOMETHING UNUSUAL

Capture the public's attention — or the attention of your employer's clients. In one case, janitors trying to organize a nonunion building went there and started cleaning the building's lobby until they were ordered to leave. In another, workers with a lot of job stress bought an old car, painted their employer's logo on the door,



and took turns bashing it with sledgehammers.

USE PEOPLE POWER TO PRESSURE EMPLOYERS

In one recent case, supporters of restaurant workers trying to unionize protested the owner's refusal to recognize the workers' right to bargain by going into the diner in large numbers and ordering one cup of coffee and sitting there all day. In another case, huge numbers of calls were made to 800 lines.



WORK ACTIONS

Demonstrate unity by doing things as a group. For example, everyone can wear their baseball caps backwards on the same day, or their collars turned up. Employees can march into work together behind the American or Canadian flag, or give the boss the silent treatment, or tap their pencils or cough at the same time each day.



ADJUST HOW YOU DO YOUR JOBS

Examples: Restaurant workers with a lot on their minds have been known to err on the side of generosity by giving larger than normal portions. Bus drivers have been known to not be too strict on who qualifies for senior citizen fares or youth fares. Police have been known to issue more "warnings" than real tickets. Employees have been known, as well, to follow every safety and other management rule to the book.

— Ken Margolies. The writer is on the staff of the Cornell University Labor Education Extension Division, New York City office.