

CHAPTER 6

INCREASING MEMBER PARTICIPATION AND CHAPTER SOLIDARITY

Throughout this Manual we have noted that unions serve a wide range of functions beyond that of representation. Furthermore, we have observed that a worker's motivation for joining a union is keyed to a number of factors beyond those arising from the immediate work environment. Some employees may join to fight back at an oppressive employer, while others may wish to become members out of a desire to belong to a social group. Therefore, in order to build a stronger, more effective union, we must create an environment which will tap these divergent and sometimes conflicting interests and channel them in a positive direction.

One of our primary tasks is to create and promote an atmosphere of membership participation and solidarity within the Union. Membership solidarity is not the miraculous offspring of an individual's having joined NTEU. Rather, solidarity results from a member's positive experiences within the Union.

In glaring contrast to the upbeat concept of union solidarity stands the problem of membership apathy. Webster defined apathy as a lack of emotion, interest, or concern; a listless condition; indifference. Membership apathy is reflected through such behavior as absence from union meetings; refusal to serve as an officer, steward, or committee member; failure to participate in union elections; and refusal to participate in union-organized, social activities. Clearly, one can see how apathy could destroy a union.

Unquestionably, the best interests of the Union are served by expanding membership involvement. Increased participation at the local level benefits chapter representatives by relieving them of some of the tasks which they presently perform. From another perspective, NTEU's collective strength is increased, thereby magnifying our political and bargaining clout. Furthermore, the expanding of opportunities for membership involvement serves the best interests of NTEU's present and future members by providing the Union the necessary resources of staffing and creativity without which the Union would not be able to service the needs of its members.

Certainly, we could create a much longer and more detailed list of benefits to be derived from increasing the activity level of our members. However, those additional examples would serve only to emphasize the point that a strong and effective Union is built on a robust base of unity, cohesion, increased membership involvement, and solidarity.

I. Methods For Developing Union Solidarity

As we discussed above, people join unions for a wide range of reasons. The same can be said regarding the forces which motivate activists such as you to participate in union activities. As leaders, it is our responsibility to create, identify, and publicize the many opportunities available for membership involvement.

A. Personal Contact

One of the most valuable resources available to each of us, as union leaders, is our ability to deal with people. Given the fact that we were selected by others to serve in that capacity, our ability to positively influence the lives of others has been recognized. Therefore, we should capitalize on that asset by increasing our awareness of the need not only to promote the rewarding aspects of participation in Union activities, but to invite others to join us in that work. Not infrequently, members comment that the reason they had not previously participated in Union affairs was simply that no one had asked them.

We must also never lose sight of the positive value derived from the simple process of acknowledging others. Chapter representatives are encouraged to solicit the assistance of individual members in performing the broad range of services required of NTEU. For example, you might consider asking a member-coworker to attempt to recruit a non-member with whom the coworker rides to work. Similarly, a certain member might be just the person you need to represent your department on the chapter's Good And Welfare Committee. If so, ask him or her. Get others involved!

Chapter representatives can encourage union solidarity by mixing with the members and discussing union related matters as frequently as possible. For example, having coffee or eating lunch with different groups of members increases the Union's visibility and allows the representative to determine the members' interests. Likewise, stopping after work with some of the members affords them an opportunity to become more familiar with the Union and its programs.

From the broader perspective of the chapter, the hosting of dances, picnics, and chapter nights at the ball park will spur an important sense of involvement and unity.

B. Expanding Membership Involvement

It is much easier and less cumbersome to be an autocrat than a leader committed to the principles of democratic participation. However, group cohesiveness can only be nurtured in situations which encourage a "we" attitude. Consequently, local officers must devise programs which will promote active participation by a significant number of members. Projects such as local newsletters; activities such as union ball teams; and committees such as Legislative Action, Job Safety, and Good-And-Welfare should be instituted and actively supported.

C. Achieving Membership Objectives

The attainment of this goal requires that chapter representatives:

1. identify those matters which the membership considers important.
2. devise for and offer to the membership a range of alternative courses of action.
3. exert strong leadership in identifying and focusing attention on the significant issues.
4. allow the membership to make important, organizational decisions.
5. attempt to achieve those objectives which the membership considers important.
6. inform the membership of the status of the Union's efforts to achieve identified objectives.

D. Promoting Family Understanding

We must recognize that a member's attitudes toward any organization, including NTEU, are subject to influence from a number of sources. Clearly, the perception of NTEU possessed by a member's family will influence greatly the member's willingness to support and participate in Union activities. Therefore, chapters are encouraged to host family-related social events which will allow and encourage our members to make the Union a more integral part of their lives.

E. Conducting Interesting And Informative Meetings

Studies have shown that attendance at union meetings is directly related to the membership's belief that organizational democracy is desirable and does exist. The conviction that the Union is and should be democratic seems to be an important stimulus to participation. In order to exploit the valuable resources of a union meeting, we should:

1. ensure that important chapter decisions are made by the local members.
2. instill, through action, the belief that members have both a stake and an active roll in determining a chapter's direction.
3. publicize meetings.
4. make the meetings efficient by:

- a). starting on time.
 - b). controlling the pace.
 - c). ensuring that every member has an opportunity to speak on an issue.
 - d). controlling disruptive behavior.
 - e). refusing to allow the reading of disjointed and lengthy reports.
5. carefully select correspondence to be brought before the members. Frequently, correspondence can be referred to committees for preliminary action in order to eliminate unnecessary and unproductive readings.
 6. make the meeting interesting by featuring a guest speaker or by showing a film.
 7. make the meetings convenient by ensuring that they are scheduled at times and locations which will accommodate the specific schedules which the members may be required to work.
 8. make the meeting an enjoyable event by hosting a small buffet or providing drinks after the meeting adjourns.

F. Providing Services Which Meet The Wide Range Of Needs Of Our Members

If a union were to provide only representational services, generally it would be attractive only to those individuals who either intellectually appreciated such services or issues, or expected to need their protection. Obviously, the projected success of such a one-dimensional organization would be severely limited. Alternatively, a Union which offers not only outstanding representational services but also such benefits as health insurance, tax deferred investment plans, and locally designed and administered Good And Welfare Committees will attract a broader range of people, because it will fulfill more peoples' needs. To that end, each NTEU chapter can make available to its members such services as a discount buying plan, a consumer information referral system, a chapter blood bank, and a child-care referral network.

Undoubtedly, the task of creating such a support network is time consuming and challenging. Yet, it is just this type of service which distinguishes Unions from other types of organizations. Simply stated, Unions strive to improve the overall quality of their members' lives, not just their members' working lives.

There are no easy solutions to eliminating membership apathy. It is a social characteristic which has historically plagued human society. We must be creative enough to develop new alternatives and sufficiently confident to explore all available options.

In summary, the development of union solidarity seems to require:

- A. Personal contact between members and officers.
- B. The availability of opportunities for membership participation.
- C. Demonstration that the Union is striving to achieve goals which the membership has identified as important.
- D. Communicating to members' families the message that:
 - 1. the Union is a rewarding, necessary, and worthwhile.
 - 2. in order for the Union to be successful, and thereby promote their welfare, the members' active support is required.
- E. The development of democratic practices within all levels of the Union.
- F. Providing services which meet the wide range of needs of our members.

II. Developing A Committee System

Chapter committees provide an excellent framework through which membership participation can be increased and the quality of organizational decisions and services can be enhanced.

Initially, we will begin this segment by identifying a series of committees which a chapter may want to consider establishing. We will then conclude by outlining the procedures to be followed in assembling a chapter committee program. Keep in mind that the list of committees, their functions, and their duties is only a sampling of the possibilities. Be creative, but get others involved!

A. Types

- 1. Membership Recruiting Committee (See Chapter 3)
 - a). Function
Administer the chapter's membership recruiting program.
 - b). Duties
 - (1) Identify the chapter's membership recruiting needs.

- (2) Develop the chapter's recruiting plan.
- (3) Implement and administer the chapter's recruiting plan, after it has been approved.
- (4) Identify themes and issues on which the chapter's program will be based.

2. **Communications Committee**

a). **Function**

Administer the chapter's internal and external communications program.

b). **Duties**

- (1) Identify the chapter's internal and external communication needs.
- (2) Prepare the chapter's communication plan.
- (3) Implement and administer the chapter's communication plan, after it has been approved.
- (4) Establish and maintain contact with local representatives of the electronic and printed press.
- (5) Publish a regularly scheduled newsletter.
- (6) Assist other components of the chapter prepare leaflets and other publicity related materials.
- (7) Publicize chapter activities.
- (8) Collect information and material necessary for conducting an effective communications program.
- (9) Develop a chapter communications network.

3. **Good And Welfare Committee**

a). **Function**

Promote the welfare of the members and their families by providing them

the services and activities which meet their social needs.

b). Duties

- (1) Identify the types of services and assistance available to our members through public and voluntary agencies.
 - (a) Consumer Information.
 - (b) Family Counselling.
 - (c) Hot Lines.
 - (d) Housing.
 - (e) General Information and Referral.
 - (f) Alcoholism and Drug Counselling and Treatment.
 - (g) Legal Services.
- (2) Develop and distribute materials which inform the members of the availability of these services and the procedures for engaging them.
- (3) Arrange for the training of chapter counselors who will serve as the chapter's referral agents to the many available services.
- (4) Develop and administer the chapter's social activity program.
 - (a) Dances.
 - (b) Picnics.
 - (c) Ski Trips.
 - (d) Ball Teams.
 - (e) Guest Speaker Programs.

4. Legislative Committee (See Chapter 7)

a). Function

- (1) Provide liaison between the chapter and the senators and congressional representatives serving the local area.
- (2) Provide liaison between the NTEU National Legislative Department and the chapter's members.

b). Duties

- (1) Develop a chapter legislative action program.
- (2) Implement and administer the chapter's legislative action program, after it has been approved.
- (3) Establish and maintain contact with the senators, congressional representatives, and their respective staffs.
- (4) Conduct letter writing and telephone campaigns.
- (5) Encourage membership participation in grassroots lobbying activities.
- (6) Arrange meetings with senators and congressional representatives serving the local area.
- (7) Monitor legislators' votes on federal employee issues.
- (8) Contact legislators before important votes and seek their support. After the vote, call them and express the chapter's thanks or disappointment, depending on their vote.
- (9) Inform the chapter members of the legislators' votes related to federal employee issues.
- (10) Contribute articles related to legislative action to the chapter newsletter.
- (11) Administer the TEPAC program at the chapter level.

B. Selecting Committees

1. Determine which committees your chapter needs.

2. Determine the function(s) to be served by each committee.
3. Determine each committee's size.
4. Identify candidates for membership on each committee. Characteristics which you should look for are:
 - a). Interest in the committee's subject of concern.
 - b). Ability to work with others.
 - c). Willingness to work hard.
 - d). Presently not serving in a union office, thereby reducing the probability of "burnout" and increasing the number of participants.
5. Identify a candidate to serve as a committee chairperson for each committee.
6. Determine if candidates are willing to serve.
 - a). Do not solicit their participation publicly. If you do, you place them in the position of publicly risking failure, and you create an opportunity for the Union to be publicly rejected.
 - b). Ask each candidate privately. Undoubtedly, this procedure will take more time, but it will eliminate the possibility of many negative consequences.
 - c). Be positive in your approach. Do not be apologetic. Service for the welfare of others is to be commended and promoted.
 - d). Persuade the candidate that he/she can do the job.
 - e). Remind the candidate that he/she will be working with others and will not be alone.
 - f). Briefly describe the function that the committee will perform.
 - g). Inform the candidate that the chapter will provide the committee the necessary assistance and support.
 - h). Appeal to the candidate's sense of responsibility.
 - i). Emphasize the fact that the chapter needs him/her for the job.

C. Operating Committees

1. The chapter president should schedule the committee's first meeting at a time and place convenient for all.
 - a). Inform each committee member of the meeting date, place, and time.
 - b). Remind the members of the meeting time on the day preceding the first meeting.
2. At the first meeting, the chapter president should:
 - a). inform the assembled committee members of their function.
 - b). make clear the committee's range of authority. Be specific and definite.
3. The chapter president should clearly delineate to the committee the requirements for reporting its activities and obtaining approval for its various plans and programs.
4. The chapter president should give the committee total responsibility to operate within its range of defined authority. Assist the committee, but do not interfere.
5. The committee should establish a regular meeting schedule. Do not let the committee wither and disappear.
6. The committee should identify its support needs and so inform the chapter president.
7. The committee should identify its objectives and develop an action plan, including a program completion time schedule.
8. The committee should develop its plans and programs and submit its action plan to the chapter president for approval.
9. The committee should implement and administer the approved program.
10. The committee should develop and maintain a set of official records, including copies of formal correspondence, agenda, and minutes of meetings.
11. The committee should be required to report its activities to the chapter president on a regular schedule.

