

Planning Campaign Tactics

Your choice of tactics may depend on your goals, your opponent, and your resources, and may require advice from a lawyer, but here's a menu to provoke thought. The menu is mainly drawn from union experience but should be useful to others as well.

Worksite activities, such as surveys, petition campaigns, and demonstrations, can show that workers will not be satisfied and productive without a fair settlement.

Direct action, such as refusing to do more than required by a union contract or engaging in displays of unity, can demonstrate workers' willingness to take stronger action if necessary.

Corporate analysis can lead to activities that affect relationships between a corporation and lenders, investors, stockholders, customers, clients, patients, tenants, politicians, or others on whom the employer depends for funds.

Legal and regulatory action can raise the possibility of increased costs due to increased attention by government agencies or the courts.

Community action and use of the news media can affect a company's public image and ties with community leaders and organizations.

CHOOSING TACTICS

In planning ways to encourage a company to be reasonable, consider the following:

- **Plan well in advance.** It may be tempting to wait to see if you can reach an acceptable settlement without going to all the trouble of developing possible pressure tactics. Unfortunately, by then time will be on management's side because most pressure tactics take considerable time to organize effectively.
- **Remember the threat of action often has more psychological effect than the action itself.** Your strength often is greatest when your opponent doesn't know exactly what you are prepared to do and what the impact will be. When management sees you are prepared, it becomes less likely that you will have to use your tactics, while failure to prepare invites management to test your strength.
- **Choose tactics that really match your opponent's weaknesses.** It is easy to confuse activity for activity's sake with a genuine strategy. For each activity, explain clearly how it is expected to lead to increased pressure on management.

No tactic is always successful or always unsuccessful -- it depends on the particular situation. A strike may be the only way to win a good contract -- or a sure way to destroy the union. To some opponents, media coverage is important; to others, it's not.

• **Analyze the risks as well as the benefits.** What will your opponent's reaction be? What about your members? How about the community? Each action you take might provoke a negative reaction, which you must take into consideration.

• **Learn from experience.** How did various approaches work in past campaigns? Make sure that the discussion includes both those who helped devise previous campaigns and those who may feel freer to be more critical. Make the discussion as specific as possible. For example, if someone says, "We tried that but it didn't work," or "We couldn't do that because members wouldn't support us," discuss why that was so.

• **Involve members in developing tactics.** People often give strongest support to actions they helped to develop. Staff can make useful suggestions, but if members themselves are not fully committed to a proposed action, it may fail.

• **Expect to need a combination of tactics to win.** It is rare that you can find the single, perfect tactic that will convince management to settle. More often, you have to put pressure in many ways so that the total cost of your campaign to your opponent begins to outweigh the benefits of rejecting your proposals.

EVALUATING TACTICS

What purposes will this tactic serve?

Costing the employer money. Can you threaten to or actually...

- Increase costs? Reduce productivity?
- Affect a private company's relationship with sources of income, such as customers, clients, investors, or lenders?
- Affect a private company's access to public funds?
- Affect a public employer's relationship with legislators or top government executives such as the governor or mayor?
- Create publicity which would, in turn, affect the relationships described above?
- Cause the courts or regulatory agencies to enforce laws or regulations the employer has failed to obey?
- Directly affect the careers or other interests of individual management officials?

Building unity among members and potential allies. Will the tactic...

- Make the campaign more visible?
- Increase members' sense of their own power? Increase group spirit?
- Show members that they have the support of allies, and draw those allies into making a stronger commitment to the campaign?

Making daily life difficult for management. Will the tactic...

- Distract management officials from other work they need to do?
- Embarrass them in front of their superiors, associates, families, neighbors, or friends in the community?

Be clear about the purpose(s) of an activity so members will have appropriate expectations. For example, it might be appropriate to hold a rally to increase

membership unity, knowing that it wouldn't have much immediate effect on that particular employer. But if you give members the impression that this rally is really going to shake up management and they find that it doesn't, they may become demoralized.

Will the tactic be fun for members to carry out?

Of course, most tactics involve hard work, but if a lighter side is built in, members will look forward to each new activity.

Will the tactic surprise management?

A tactic that catches management off guard has an effect both because of the action itself and because of the surprise factor.

Does it target people in management who control the decisions?

Particularly in the public sector, different officials in management—from politicians like governors or mayors to career labor relations negotiators—may have different long-term interests and career concerns. You have to figure out who really holds the power and tailor your tactics to affect them.

How long will it take before the pressure would be felt?

Compare the lead time you have to the time a tactic would take to become effective. For example, a strategy to discourage customers from dealing with your employer might only be taken seriously by management officials if they knew you had enough time to organize community support.

Will the tactic teach members new skills and build the organization?

If potential tactics will involve members in doing research, taking collective action, talking to non-members, reaching out to allies, pressuring politicians, and similar activities, then the organization will be stronger and better prepared for the next campaign.

A tactic that depends primarily on a handful of lawyers, lobbyists, communications consultants, or other professionals may help pressure the employer in the short term but not build membership unity and skills.

What will the tactic cost in terms of money, staff time, and volunteer efforts?

Do you have the necessary resources? If not, are there other groups that also would want to contribute?

Could the tactic backfire?

For example, could it turn a potential long-term ally in the community against you? Or could it be used by management to pit one group against another? That may not be a reason to drop the tactic but rather to be careful in the way you prepare to use it.

Would the tactic expose members or the organization to liability, job loss, or other damage?

If so, that possibility should be thoroughly discussed ahead of time. Everyone should realize the risks they may be taking, weigh the possible benefits, and judge how likely it is that your opponent actually will take action.

ESCALATING PRESSURE TACTICS

“Escalation” means implementing tactics one step at a time.

For example, union members might start with days when all workers wear the same color clothing, move to a one-minute moment of unity, then to a work-to-rule campaign where everyone does only the minimum required by the existing contract, and finally to some form of work stoppage if needed.

Step-by-step escalation has a number of benefits.

- **It builds members’ confidence and commitment.** At the beginning of the campaign, many members may not believe that they have the power to take on management or that other workers or community allies will stand by them if they do.

By escalating tactics, they don't make a leap of faith all at once. Instead, you start with an activity that is relatively easy to organize and has little risk—but shows workers that organized action is possible.

Once workers have taken part in one campaign activity, many will begin to see the campaign and the union as their own. For instance, if management still refuses to negotiate reasonably after a petition or rally, workers will begin to see this as an insult to them rather than a response to “the union.” Filled with increased confidence and emotional commitment, they will be ready to try the next step.

- **It tests campaign leadership and communications structure.** Weaknesses in the organization and plans for the campaign can be identified early on, before they can cause real damage.

- **It keeps the blame for increased confrontation on management, where it belongs.** Members, the news media, and allies in the community can see that each new tactic was adopted when management failed to respond to milder demonstrations of determination.

- **It gives management incentive to settle.** If management officials feel that you are determined to provoke the maximum possible confrontation no matter what, then they may have no reason to negotiate seriously. If they feel that you already have used your most powerful weapons, they may sit back and test your staying power.

If, on the other hand, you successfully carry out a series of stronger and stronger actions, management knows it can avoid further pressure by only by offering to compromise.