

Building Membership
Bonnie Kavanagh RN, School Nurse
Albuquerque Teachers Federation Local 1420

Question: In what ways have I been successful in maintaining positive union recruitment conversations?

Our Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) union membership of the Albuquerque Teachers Federation (ATF) local 1420 has increased by 3.5% this school year (SY). ATF is part of our national union American Federation of Teachers (AFT). I am a union nurse and newly active in the organizing team within ATF. Our organizing team is headed by ATF's staff member Dwayne Norris, Organizing and Communications Leader. While participating in the organizing team, I have grown in skills and confidence to recruit union members from previous years applying interventions outlined in my research study.

Utilizing Google Cloud Based Services (GCBS) that synchronize and assist in sharing of information has been helpful in organizing and promoting union dialogue with nonmembers. An organized list in a Google Drive of those nonmembers who have been contacted or needed to be contacted streamlines the process in making meaningful and systematized contacts.

Participating in recruitment by ATF's organizing team staff for new members encourages and educates those who are new to the organizing team. I have found it stimulating as it adds to the excitement in reaching out to nonmembers to support their concerns while I recruit. I have found it fulfilling to reach out to hopeful new members that are within your area of familiarity. I have found it easiest to develop those conversations I am accustomed to. Making successful recruitment wins to potential union members, outside of your area of expertise, is easily learned by listening and studying from other seasoned organizing team members in various specialties.

Communications by organizers to nonmembers is an active listening process. I have learned to be flexible in the conversation and focus on "being where the nonmember is" and their need for support of their union. Experienced APS staff often have a strong opinion of the union and may benefit from having union matters explained in great detail. It has been pleasant to discover a simple request of nonmembers to join our union is all that is needed at times. Much more frequently, multiple conversations with varied pro-union members are needed to increase membership.

Adding an enticement to nonmembers to join the conversations of active membership within their school or specialty has led to positive discussions and gaining new members. A Chat Room (CR) was created utilizing GCBS within the nursing specialty for members. Informative and lively discussions are ever present within the nursing CR. When a new nurse joins the union, she/he is added to the nurse CR. The nurse members, via a chat post with an announcement about the nurse including school and any desirable and agreed upon sharable information, is encouraged to welcome the new nurse member.

Rationale

Unfortunately, there is minimal built-in union recruitment presence with new hires within Albuquerque Public Schools (APS). Reaching out to nonmembers by personalizing calls made to nonmembers by supported union members, utilizing sound communications styles, and GCBS yields results. Active listening yields awareness and the need for problem solving solutions; it is essential in identifying needs of the community of educators that ATF serves and adds positive interaction opportunities.

Without an organized method to reach out to nonmembers of the union, missed opportunities to grow the union population ensue. Nonmembers will often not join the union unless asked to join. It often takes several attempts in asking nonmembers to join the union. Many potential members need more time to decide to join. The organizing team's model draws in interested and talented ATF union members who share in the common goal and success of growing our union.

Review of Literature

ATF research encourages unionists with tips and strategies for engaging nonmembers such as active listening and following the 70/30 rule of communicating. The organizer may effectively connect and grow the union population utilizing 70% listening and 30% in talking. Concentrating on listening with individuals allow the organizer to gather subtle cues that allow for a better understanding of the nonmembers needs. Trusting conversations are inevitable in this environment. This positive communication style will lead to more comfort and success in asking nonmembers to join. Labor Notes points out it is essential to build in mechanisms to ask nonmembers to join to grow membership. The Sandia Market Research digital video discs (DVDs) by AFT of interviewing nonmembers demonstrate the effectiveness of asking APS staff to join their union using active listening skills. At times, a nonmember may agree to join the union by asking once but they do still need to be asked. I have found it does take several asks to get a nonmember to join and that success is enforced when other APS staff asks colleagues to sign up with their union.

Our 54th New Mexico Legislation passed the Public Employee Bargaining Act (PEBA) enacted in July 2020 encourages union engagement and allows for activities at work. This has impacted and supported abilities that allow ATF to conduct union business on site. PEBA has increased my confidence to utilize business supplies and intellectual services afforded APS staff without reprisal. Granted, this is also part of our Negotiated Agreement, but PEBA goes a step further with making mutual rulings by making those agreements state law.

Study Design / Findings / Data Analysis

As a participant in my research study design, I was able to increase my numbers of union recruits from last SY to this SY. I was able to make improvements to my recruitment style by utilizing AFT's, ATF's, and other recommendations by union literature, programs, and GCBS as my interventions. Last SY, I recruited three members to our union. This SY, as an organizing team member, I was able to double that figure to six members utilizing the interventions discussed in my research. The organizing team has innately applied the interventions of this study and continues to gain success in their growth as a team in enlisting union members.

Overall, ATF's Local 1420 has grown from 58% last SY to 60.5% this SY. As of April 23rd, 2021 our Bargaining Unit listed 6,797 APS staff with 4,115 as members. This data was received by our local ATF office from human resources (HR). Using these figures, we were able to determine the 60.5% of union members to 39.5% of nonmember comparisons. This gave ATF a growth of 521 new union members. Clearly, the interventions outlined in this research along with the organizing teams' culture and instinctively using the interventions discussed are working.

Recommendations

Growth of the union within APS will benefit with the following recommendations:

- Strengthen and expand upon organizing efforts that are supported in the Negotiated Agreement and PEBA with mechanisms built into the orientation process of new hires and re-hires.
- Continue the interventions outlined in my research study with the organizing team.
- Promote and grow the organizing team with its current team leader and support the comradery that rewards participants of the groups and individuals' efforts.
- Promote ongoing training of current and new members of the organizing team.
- Increasing exposure and education of the organizing team in: communication of ATF union activities, services, educational DVDs, negotiated agreement updates, and formal communications classes and workshops.
- The Union Leadership classes currently made available to ATF members, would amplify the organizing team members' knowledge base and increase their unified efforts.

Resources

ATF. (no date). The 70/30 Rule and the Importance of Active Listening. Retrieved from https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/preparing_building_reps_for_the_organizing_conversation.pdf

Google Workplace. (no date). Everything you need to get Everything Done Now in One Place. Retrieved from <https://workspace.google.com/>

LaborNotes. (2018, July 2). Ask People to Join. Retrieved from <https://labornotes.org/2018/07/ask-people-join>

Sandia Market Research. (2016, September 2016). *American Federation of Teachers*. USA.

Williams Stapleton, S. (Sponsor). New Mexico 54th Legislative Representatives. (2020). House Labor, Veterans and Military Affairs Committee Substitute for House Bill 364. Retrieved from <https://www.nmlegis.gov/Sessions/20%20Regular/bills/house/HB0364.pdf>