



HOW TO BE A GOOD LISTENER

- **Avoid distractions.** Look the other person in the eye, and put your phone away.
- **Slow down.** Our brains process thoughts four times faster than spoken words. It's easy to skip ahead in a conversation, using your assumptions to fill in the gaps and plan your response. Resist this urge. Focus on what is actually being said.
- **Don't interrupt.** Take the time to hear the full story.
- **Keep an open mind.** Don't assume you already know what someone cares about. People will surprise you.
- **Don't fish.** Avoid leading questions like "Don't you agree that..."
- **Practice empathy.** Sometimes people need to let off steam. Don't discourage them. Your immediate task is to hear what they have to say, not to judge.
- **Show that you hear what they're saying.** React, ask follow-up questions, and repeat back what you understood. If you don't understand, ask.
- **Find common ground.** You don't have to agree with every point, but look for areas of agreement, and acknowledge where you differ.
- **Don't feel you need to sell something.** An organizer is not a salesperson. You're genuinely looking to learn the other person's point of view and create something new together.





ANSWERING TOUGH QUESTIONS

On paper and in person, keep the focus on your message. When people come to you riled up over the spin from management, a good way to respond is “Affirm, Answer, Redirect.”

Affirm:

Let them know you’re listening, you understand, and their feelings are valid. Your co-workers may be scared or upset by what they’ve heard. Don’t get mad at them. It’s management’s fault, not theirs.

I hear you, I don't want the principal to retaliate against me either!

Answer:

Give a truthful, concise answer to the question. Don’t be evasive. If there’s a grain of truth to management’s message, say that up front.

Yes, its true our principal might be mad when we show and tell him he's treating veteran employees unfairly. That's why we're all going to his office together with a petition signed by everyone in the building, so he wont be able to single anyone out.

If you don’t know the answer, don’t guess. Tell them you’ll find out and get back to them. Make sure you follow through, to maintain trust.

Redirect:

But once you’ve answered the question, don’t get bogged down in too much back-and-forth about it. Instead, be ready with a question that brings the conversation back to your message and points out what management is trying to distract them from.

You told me earlier that he principal is always picking favorites and punishing some of us without rhyme or reason. If we don't stand up to him, when will it end?

Remind your co-workers of the issues that inspired them to organize in the first place. Ask whether that’s changed. Steer the conversation back to the plan to win, and the next steps.





INOCULATE YOUR CO-WORKERS AGAINST THE BOSS'S TACTICS

Whenever you take action at work, you can expect management to fight back. Inoculation is the part of the organizing conversation where you prepare your co-workers so they're not caught off guard.

1. Ask questions about how the boss will react.

Do you think the principal wants a group of us showing up at his office? Why not?

When he finds out we are organizing, how do you think he'll react?

What do you think he might do to try and stop us?

2. Discuss *how* the boss will fight.

- If you're preparing for a meeting with the principal, expect pushback on who gets to speak and what is discussed.
- If you're packing a school board meeting, expect the board may try to limit public comment opportunities or line up speakers to parrot their position.
- If you're planning a union sticker day, expect to be told you're not allowed to wear the sticker. In fact, any time you confront a boss with a new tactic for the first time, you will hear, "You can't do that."

3. Be sure to know your rights under state law and your contract and inform your co-workers what their rights are, and how to react when they're denied.

State labor law protects our right to wear a union button at work.

If principal or administration tells you to take off the button, write down the date, the time, who witnessed it, and let your building rep know.



4. Discuss *why* the boss will fight.

This step is most important. Help your co-workers understand that every workplace fight is about power.

We're not simply building power—we're taking power from our principal.

Any time we challenge the principal or administrations control, we can expect resistance.

5. Recommit.

Ask your co-worker whether any of this has changed her mind:

Are you still serious about solving this issue by coming with us to deliver the petition?

If yes:

Great! We're meeting in the lounge on Thursday at 1:45.

Your co-worker has strengthened her resolve by making this commitment out loud to you—and to herself. Later you can remind her of this conversation.

If no:

What's holding you back?

It's OK if your co-worker expresses some doubts now. She's getting real with you. This gives you the chance to ask more about her concerns, address her fears, and remind her about the issue she cares about. If she doesn't take action, is that problem going to solve itself?





EXERCISE: WHY WE NEED LEADERS TO ORGANIZE

Imagine a scenario where there is an urgent need to take on a fight of some kind. For instance, suppose a well-loved leader at your school has been fired, and you're planning a sticker day to demand she be rehired. You have 24 hours to get the word out to everybody and get the sticker into everyone's hands:

Use the following questions to make a plan for your sticker day.

- **Total number of people** you want wearing the sticker: _____
- **How many departments?** Can you cover them all? Who moves around the worksite and can reach other departments?
- **How many start times** are there? Who can get stickers to teachers and school employees based on each start time?
- **Where's the best place** to reach people before they start work? Where are all the entrances?
- Are there groups of workers who rotate schools and don't **come in everyday?** Who can reach them?
- Can you get a sticker onto **everyone** by yourself, or with your current group of building reps?

If not, that's why we need to map and chart our school, then recruit enough leaders to reach every teacher and school employee!





QUALITIES OF A GOOD ORGANIZER

- Effective organizers are **good at their jobs and respected** by the people they work with.
- They have the **trust of their co-workers**. Their opinions carry weight. When they offer advice, people listen.
- The best organizers are motivated by a **strong sense of justice** and clear principles.
- They're **responsible, honest, and compassionate**.
- They're confident, even **courageous**.
- Organizers must be **good listeners**. They know you don't have to be the most vocal to have the biggest impact.
- They **bring people together**, welcoming new co-workers on the job and looking for ways to involve every member.
- Organizers **move people to collective action**. They don't just solve problems alone—they equip their co-workers to solve problems together.
- They put the **interests of the group first**, ahead of their individual concerns.
- They don't operate as lone rangers. They **respect group decisions**.
- Good organizers are **knowledgeable about their contract**, but not afraid to admit when they don't know the answer.
- They can stay **cool under pressure** and handle stress and conflict.
- They're willing to **stand up to management**—and they can inspire others to stand up for themselves as well.





TEN QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN MAPPING YOUR SCHOOL

1. **Grapevines.** What paths do people travel? Who can walk freely through the whole workplace? How does news travel?
2. **Bottlenecks.** Are there spots where the flow of work gets bottlenecked? These could be important pressure points. Who works there?
3. **Work groups.** What work groups can we identify on this map? Consider the factors that determine who works together at your school, such as job, work area, and time of day.
4. **Relationships.** Which work groups have contact with each other through their jobs? Which groups are hard to reach? Which groups have contact with other schools in the district?
5. **Social groups.** What social groups can we identify on this map? For instance, who carools together? Who speaks the same language? Who socializes at lunch or outside work? Who's related? Who are all the smokers?
6. **Group concerns.** For each work or social group, how does this group relate to the principal and administration? What are the biggest problems affecting this group?
7. **Water coolers.** Where do people congregate? These could be good places for outreach conversations, or group gatherings.
8. **Broom closets.** Where can you talk out of sight of the principal?
9. **Hangouts.** Where do people go after work?
10. **As time goes by.** What on this map changes at different times of day, and week?

