

Worksite Leader Handbook

Building Union Strength
and Power in the Workplace



LCCEF
Local 2417

August 2017

Building Union Strength and Power in the Workplace

A strong Worksite Leader system is the backbone of a union. Our Worksite Leader system makes the union visible to workers and administration. It enables communication, representation, and mobilization within the workplace.

When we come together and act collectively to improve common issues in the workplace, that unity creates positive results. Our union is not a third party, our union is us. Anywhere one of us is working or teaching in a school or campus building, the union is there. It takes commitment and effort to build the kind of structure needed to harness our collective voice to be the most organized and effective united group possible.

Worksite Leaders play a key role in our union structure, because every time we talk about common issues and common solutions at work, we build the union. Listening, educating, aiding, informing, investigating, acting - these are the tasks that can be taken up by Worksite Leaders. It's sometimes difficult, sometimes fun, sometimes tiring, and sometimes energizing, but it's always vital to the success of our union.

Role of a Worksite Leader

Organizer. Our job is to build an active, united and involved membership in our workplace. Our ability to improve conditions is based on the collective power of our membership. Some things you can do are:

- Welcome new employees and let them know how they can become involved
- Ask fair share members to join our union
- Find ways to involve more members in the activities of our union

Educator and Communicator. The most effective form of communication is one-on-one workplace conversations. Flyers, emails and meetings are all important, but the best way to inform members, get feedback, and encourage participation is through personal contact and sustained relationships. You can:

- Listen and learn about members' problems and concerns
- Educate workers about our union, their rights under the contract, and how their involvement is important to making change
- Be a link between the membership and officers

Problem-Solver. We are the people our co-workers turn to with problems and we should be prepared with various strategies for solving them. Ways to problem solve:

- Mobilize members to solve problems as a united group
- Work with LCCEF leadership to solve problems

Leader. We are builders of unity in the workplace. We motivate our co-workers to be a part of the solution and lead by example. We can:

- Help create a harmonious and happy workplace and union culture
- Build unity – find common ground on problems that may divide our co-workers
- Make sure everyone has the opportunity to be involved in our union



Duties of a Worksite Leader

No individual is responsible for all of these tasks. Each Worksite Leader can choose what tasks they are comfortable doing. Ideally, the Worksite Leader is responsible for organizing the workplace, building a worksite team and involving members so that tasks are shared and are performed on a regular basis.

- Get to know and build relationships with the employees in your unit
- Greet new members and help them get oriented
- Attend official new employee orientations, if applicable
- Ask fairshare employees to join the union
- Provide pathways for members to get more involved in their union
- Develop other members' leadership skills and abilities
- Hold worksite or department meetings
- Assist in keeping updated member contact information
- Participate in rallies, vigils, work actions, petitions, demonstrations and other activities
- Keep bulletin boards up to date
- Distribute flyers, leaflets and surveys to members
- Attend training classes
- Attend General Membership Meetings and Worksite Leader Meetings
- Work on political and legislative activities where permissible, including signing up members to contribute to the Political Action Fund, grassroots lobbying, phone banks, and canvassing



Organizing in the Worksite

Communicating and Educating. As Worksite Leaders, we're working for the members. It's our job to keep them informed. The best form of communication is one-on-one, face-to-face conversations whenever you get a chance: before or after work, on breaks, at lunch, and when you're working.

Use all forms of communication available. Regular meetings are great and can be site specific, for particular job classifications, or to talk about specific workplace concerns. Newsletters, bulletin boards, phone calls, and emails can all help to keep your members informed but are not an expectation.

As a Worksite Leader, you have an opportunity to educate our members every time you come in contact with them. Members want to know; what is the union's vision and strategic directions, how the union makes decisions and carries them out, and what challenges the union and its members are facing.

Most importantly, we must continually educate members that our union consists of each of us, the employees. Educated members support the union while it advocates for improvements.

Tips for conversations with co-workers:

- Ask open-ended questions and listen
- Find out what the person cares about
- People get involved because our union is linked to things they care about—find out what the person wants to change and why
- Connect with the person's concerns
- Share your own story and educate. Why did you decide to get involved with our union? Try to show (through your story) why having more people involved matters
- Give specific examples of recent victories or current goals that relate to the person's issues and interests
- Move the person to action. Explain why the person's involvement matters and ask them to participate in specific ways. People are more likely to agree to taking on a particular task than to generally "become more involved"
- If the answer is no, find out why, and return to the issues mentioned earlier
- Be prepared to follow up with another action this person can take (upcoming meetings, joining committees), to become an active member
- Keep track of what you learn in the conversation - take notes about the issues they care about, concerns they have, actions they're willing to take, and any follow-up that's needed.



Welcoming New Employees

The more frequently new employees have positive discussions with union activists, the greater their commitment to our union. One of the most critical roles of union Worksite Leaders is welcoming new employees into our union.

- Be a visible union presence on the job - help create a workplace culture that fosters union pride
- Greet new employees, get to know them, start to build a relationship
- Offer information, orient them to the workplace
- Give the employee a Union Welcome Packet
- Explain some of the main benefits provided by the union contract, won by the hard work of employees like them
- Talk about the importance of being a member of the union and answer any questions they may have
- Ask them to become a member, have membership forms on hand
- Introduce them to the union early, don't rely on the employer to sign them up or tell them about our union
- Emphasize that our union is the members, not an outside organization - when they have a problem, you are the person to see, not the supervisor
- Invite them to an upcoming membership meeting - offer to go with them if they're hesitant
- Make sure the employee has your contact information if questions come up
- Hold new member meetings for a more in depth orientation to the union
- After signing up new members, keep in touch and ask them to participate in union activities



Frequently Asked Questions

What is a union?

Labor unions are made up of working people working together to solve problems and build stronger workplaces. Unions give workers a voice on the job about safety, security, pay, benefits.

How much are my union dues and where does that money go?

Union dues go to building a stronger union through support from Local staff, along with State and National AFT staff, for contract negotiations and enforcement, legal support, as well as, organizing and campaign support.

Why should I join?

Our union's strength to make improvements in pay, benefits and everyday working conditions is directly related to how many members we have and how involved they are. By joining our union, you are saying you stand with your co-workers on the issues we are working to improve. The more members we have, the more powerful a message we send to the administration that we're united and the better things are at work.

What is fair share or agency fee?

Until you fill out the official membership application to be a member of our union, you pay a "fair share" or "agency fee" to pay for the services and protections the union is legally required to provide for you being a part of the bargaining unit. This fee helps cover the costs associated with bargaining our contract, improving our pay, benefits, and working conditions, as well as ensuring the provisions of the contract are followed and enforced.

"Fair share" and "Agency Fee" are interchangeable terms meaning the same thing – essentially, non-members pay their fair share of the agency's fees. The fee is lower for a Fair Share/Agency Fee payer because, by law, they cannot be charged any portion of the costs associated with political action. Unions participate in and support political action efforts in order to improve the working conditions at the state or federal level, such as supporting a change to the law that will benefit those working in your same profession. This becomes vitally important if you ever leave Lane.

Are there additional benefits to becoming a member?

Of course! As a member you:

- Can vote during officer elections, choosing people you trust to represent you
- Can vote which delegates you want to represent our local at the state and national level
- Can vote on issues the union is facing, and have a voice at the table
- Can participate in College Governance committees acting on behalf of all classified employees
- Can participate in other college committees where union representation is needed
- Will be provided a \$25,000 AD&D insurance policy at no charge to you
- Will have access to goods and services at a discounted rate. See UnionPlus.org for details and current benefits.

