

What to expect from your boss when you want a union

Management will do anything to stop workers from unionizing -- changing production, adding staff, or getting rid of a mean supervisor or manager (until after the election). Workers are often amazed at the changes -- even things that management always said couldn't be done!

Here are the tactics that workers usually see when they stand together for their rights. Hopefully, your boss won't be unethical but even if she is -- you can win if you stand together and know what to expect.

"Don't Sign the Union Card" -- The company tries to make the card seem scary by saying it's a legal document and you will sign away your rights. They say that if workers sign cards, there might not be an election.

Signing a union authorization card means the worker wants the union to represent him or her. The company can agree to have a neutral person review the cards to see if a majority of workers wants a union ("card check"). It's a great idea -- faster and easier than an election, without all the pressure companies put on workers before an election. If the company doesn't agree to a card check, there has to be an election. Ask them: are they saying that they would agree to a card check?

Suddenly, they're nice guys The company will start being interested in what workers think. They will solve problems that workers have been complaining about for a long time. They will tell workers that they have an "open door" and want to listen. Sometimes they even offer food!

Stop distribution of union information The company wants to be the only source of information, so they will try to stop other information from being distributed. Expect them to remove information that's posted or left in a break room. Sometimes they make new rules telling workers they can't hand out information or talk about the union (you are a right to hand out information, so long as it doesn't interfere with work).

Captive audience meetings The company will make workers go to group meetings to scare workers about the union. They are called "captive" because that is how workers feel - like they are captives of the company. If there are workers who try to answer their lies, they will be told that there is no question and answer period or they won't be invited back. They want to scare the workers who can be scared -- so they don't want any other voices in the meeting. Suddenly, there's no problem if work doesn't get done because workers are at these meetings.

One-on-one meetings One worker is called in to meet with their supervisor and sometimes another person. It's intimidating to be called in to a meeting alone. It's also intimidating when you are being pressured by people who seem to have more information than you (although when you look at it closely, their info is wrong).

"Vote no" committee The company is not supposed to work with or support any employee groups either for or against the union, but they do. They will encourage (and sometimes fund) a group of workers to form a committee to oppose the union campaign. This group doesn't have any trouble distributing their information at work!

Have other people speak for them Some companies have local politicians, newspaper editors, businessmen, or the Chamber of Commerce speak out against the union. These people do not have to obey the labor law and they can make threats or say things that are wrong.

Delay the election is a very effective way to demoralize workers who are working so hard to build a voice at work. It also gives the company extra time pressure and confuse workers.

Claim that there is "union harassment" The company wants to be the only source of information. Since workers don't have a lot of time and freedom to talk at work, it's important to visit workers at home, to answer questions and clear up the misinformation that the company is spreading. The company hopes to make it harder for union supporters to talk to their co-workers.

Last minute surprise Most companies have a bombshell right before the election, so that you can't check out the "information." It's hard to get ready for something if you don't know what it is. All you can do is remind each other that if there were important information, the company would tell people about ahead of time so that they could think about it and look into it. Sometimes, right before the election, they split paychecks into two checks (one check is what they say your check will be if dues are taken out, and the other is how much you would pay in dues). The numbers are either just wrong or the total dues for a whole year. Or they may have a full grocery cart showing what you could buy with your dues.

Union Busters Companies spend a lot of money on consultants to stop workers from sticking together. It's sad that they won't spend that time, attention, and money to treat workers with respect.