

## AN ORGANIZING CONVERSATION

Here are some guidelines for a fruitful conversation (or a series of conversations) with a co-worker about politics, the rising cost of living and affordability crisis, and the need for better wages that reflect the dedication and hard work of every Alberta worker.

Nobody should follow a script mechanically. Talk with people like human beings! But think of this outline as a tool. The steps can help you move toward a goal, so your co-worker isn't left feeling like their time's been wasted with a sales pitch or a gripe session. Done right, an organizing conversation leads to action.

Your job is mostly to ask questions. You want your co-worker to realize:

- They care about a problem.
- There's a decision-maker who has the power to fix this problem.
- The decision-maker won't fix it until someone pushes them to.
- If your co-worker really wants this problem fixed, they have to join you, other co-workers and community allies in taking action.

But just telling them all this wouldn't be very effective. Instead, you want to ask the right questions that get them to say it themselves. We tend to remember what we said, not what the other person said.

### 1. DISCOVER THE ISSUES

Begin by asking questions—and listening to the answers—to learn what your co-worker cares about. Make your questions open-ended, especially when you're getting to know someone.

*How's your day going?*

*Have you noticed how expensive groceries are lately?*

*What was it like when you first started your job?*

When you're organizing around a specific issue, your questions might get more pointed. Still, even if you have a petition about stopping the privatization of healthcare, don't leap straight into "Will you sign this?" Instead, ask:

*Have you noticed longer waiting times at the doctor's office? Have you been able to get a family doctor? Have you been impacted by bad decisions around healthcare?*

The point is for your co-worker to remind themselves how they feel about this problem, before you ask them to act. If you've discussed this issue before, you can still ask how a recent development will affect them or share someone else's story and get their reaction.

## 2. AGITATE

React to what they tell you and ask follow-up questions. By reacting, the organizer can help the other person feel that they have permission to be angry:

*Wow. How long has that been going on?*

*How does that make you feel?*

*Is that okay with you?*

*How are you coping?*

*How is that impacting your family?*

## 3. CALL THE QUESTION

Get them talking about who's responsible.

*Why do you think employers are doing this?*

*How could we stop this?  
What do we have to do to change things?*

*If this continues, what does it look like for us workers in the long run?*

For too long, workers' have been told that public service cuts and privatization are just "the way things are." Realizing that bad conditions didn't fall from the sky can be empowering. If someone made the decision that caused this mess, that someone could also unmake it.

#### 4. MAKE A PLAN TO WIN

Now that your co-worker is angry, it's time to offer some hope. Hope comes from our power in numbers and a winnable plan. That's how you make cuts to public services and privatization into a problem for Employers and the UCP Government.

*Most people in our community want to see workers receive the pay they deserve. What if a whole bunch of us sign this petition and we deliver it to our MLA's office together?*

*Almost all of your co-workers have signed on to receive more information about the campaign. What will management say? Will they ignore us?*

*Will elected officials be worried about the next election? Their decisions impact budgets that impact our wages.*

This step will be trickier if today's petition/issue doesn't address a problem that this person feels strongly about. It is easier to organize around issues that are widely and deeply felt— but still make note of the responses. Another issue will likely come around that will engage this member to take action and you'll want to make sure to follow up.

But what you can say is that power in numbers is our only way to get a say on any issue. For instance:

*If we win on this issue, do you think management will learn something? Will acting on the next issue be easier?*

*This is the first step. We've all got to start backing each other up. How else are we going to build enough power to fix the overwork that you've been talking about?*

#### 5. GET A COMMITMENT

Ask the member to be part of the solution by taking a specific action.

*Will you sign this petition and come with us to deliver it on Thursday?*

If someone is fearful, acknowledge that their fears have real reasons behind them. But still, things won't get better unless they involved. Your job isn't to convince them that they are wrong about their fears, but that they need to act anyway.

*Will we ever get the raises that we deserve if we don't act? Are you willing to let this continue?*

Helping your co-worker through it will be a lot easier when you're inviting them to act on what they've already said—not pushing an action you're trying to “sell.”

## **6. INOCULATE AND RE-COMMIT**

Now your co-worker is committed—but do they know what they're getting into? Ask how they think their manager or MLA will react to the action.

*What do you think the MLA will say when we deliver the petitions to her office?*

If there's a likely risk that they haven't thought of, warn them about it.

*Some of the UCP MLAs have been calling the police on peaceful rallies outside their offices. How would you feel if the police showed up?*

Talk through the possible outcomes and our preparations for these possibilities. Then ask whether you can still count on her participation.

*Does that change your mind? Are you uncomfortable?*

This part might sound like you're undermining your organizing. You've gone to all this work to help your co-worker decide to act, and now you're trying to talk them out of it? But like inoculating against a virus, the idea is to help them develop an immunity to any challenges faced —by giving them a small dose before they are exposed to the real thing.

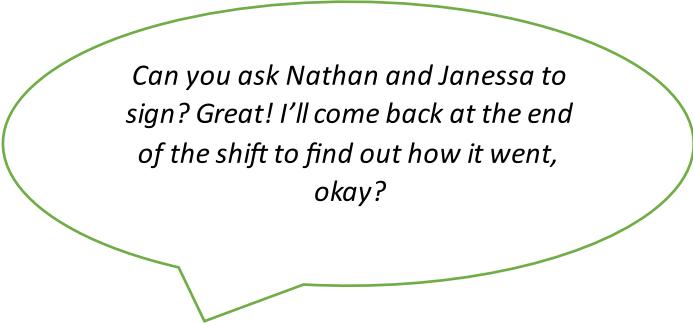
This way, if there is an issue, they won't be thrown by it. In fact, your correct prediction will boost your credibility.

## **7. SET A FOLLOW-UP PLAN**

As a famous community organizer once put it, "90 percent of organizing is follow-up."

Agree on the next step, and when you'll check back in. Maybe they're going to meet a group of you Thursday to deliver the petition, or they'll ask two co-workers to sign. Or maybe you simply promise to report back on Friday about how the meeting/demo at the MLA's office went.

Remember, you're not just trying to pull off this one action. You're also trying to draw people gradually closer to the center and build an ongoing network of communication. You're trying to make fighting back, in an organized way, a normal and natural part of workplace and community life.



*Can you ask Nathan and Janessa to sign? Great! I'll come back at the end of the shift to find out how it went, okay?*