

The eight hour day is not enough;
We are thinking of more and better stuff.
So here is our prayer and here is our plan,
We want what we want and we'll take what we can.

Down with wars both small and large,
Except for the ones where we're in charge:
Those are the wars of class against class,
Where we get a chance to kick some ass.

For air to breathe and water to drink,
And no more poison from the kitchen sink.
For land that's green and life that's saved
And less and less of the earth that's paved.

No more women who are less than free,
Or men who cannot learn to see
Their power steals their humanity
And makes us all less than we can be.

For teachers who learn and students who teach
And schools that are kept beyond the reach
Of provosts and deans and chancellors and such
And Xerox and Kodak and Shell, Royal Dutch.

An end to shops that are dark and dingy,
An end to Bosses whether good or stingy,
An end to work that produces junk,
An end to junk that produces work,
And an end to all in charge - the jerks.

For all who dance and sing, loud cheers,
To the prophets of doom we send some jeers,
To our friends and lovers we give free beers,
And to all who are here, a day without fears.

So, on this first of May we all should say
That we will either make it or break it.

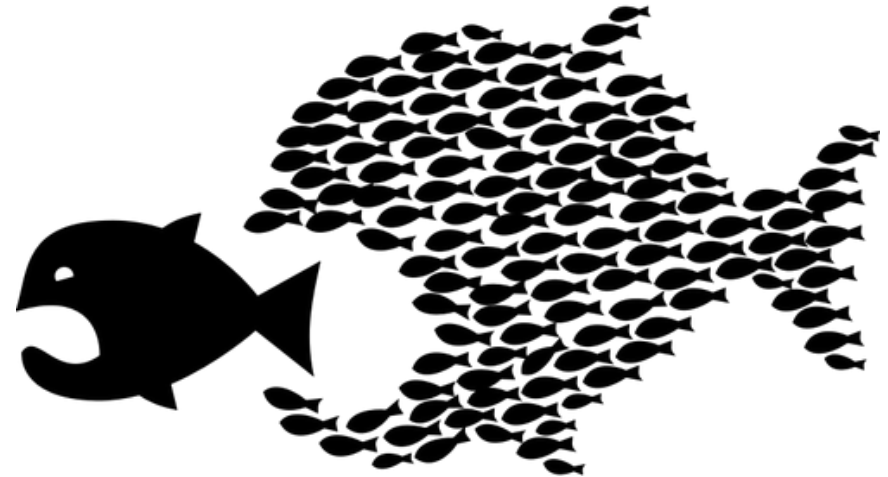
Or, to put this thought another way,
Let's take it easy, but let's take it.

- Mr. Toad, May Day 1980

(The Incomplete, True, Authentic, and Wonderful History of May Day)



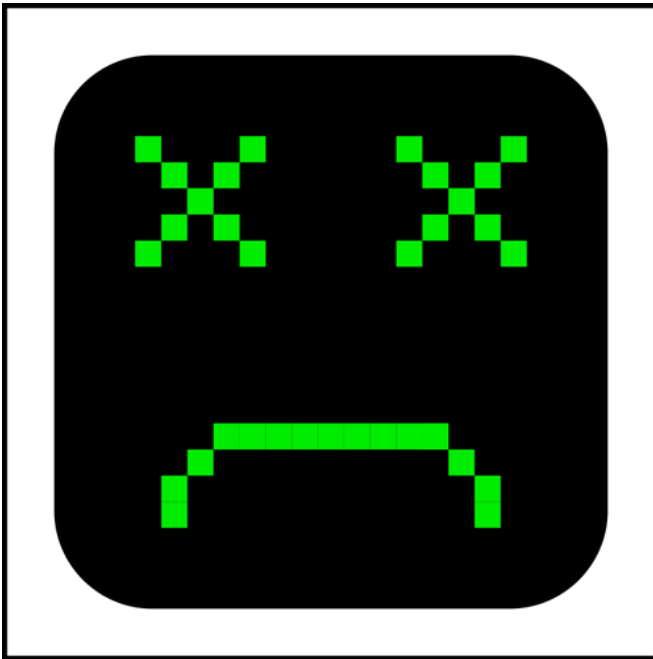
GET ORGANIZED



an interactive guide to building and
exercising worker power

by christine // online @ tableflip.tech

"Organizing is providing people with an opportunity to become aware of their own capabilities and potential."



v1.0 - Oct. 2019
v2.0 - Jan. 2020
v2.1 - Feb. 2020

"A good organizer is a social arsonist who goes around setting people on fire."

- Fred Ross, *Axioms for Organizers*

Wrap Up

Hopefully this guide provides a solid foundation of knowledge on how to begin building worker power in your workplace. It's not an easy road, but you will likely find it an intensely rewarding one. Relationships and learning founded in struggle are a special kind of meaningful, even through failure.

Nobody can fight these battles for you. What happens to the state of organizing around you is up to you and those you collaborate with. And now, the real work begins.

What can you commit to doing in the next week?

- Do a 1:1 with a coworker
- Read one of the cited resources
- Start a workplace mapping
- Connect with an organizer outside your workplace
- Other:

Additional Resources

Academics Taking Action

academicstakingaction.wordpress.com/zine

Finally Got the News

youtu.be/gw2Wr-odBJg

Lessons from the Long Sixties for Organizing in Tech

magazine.scienceforthepeople.org/vol22-1/lessons-from-the-long-sixties-for-organizing-in-tech-today

Mutual Aid, Trauma, and Resiliency

theanarchistlibrary.org/library/the-jane-addams-collective-mutual-aid-trauma-and-resiliency

Organizing Work

organizing.work

The Californian Ideology

citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.460.8355&rep=rep1&type=pdf

We Are All Very Anxious

resonanceaudiodistro.org/2015/11/18/we-are-all-very-anxious-audiozine

What Is Security Culture?

resonanceaudiodistro.org/2015/08/06/what-is-security-culture-audiozine

Intro

This guide is an attempt to provide people who've already decided to organize or take action in the workplace with the minimum skills and knowledge to get started safely and responsibly. It preferably accompanies in-person training, but can also be read alone, alongside separate learning and community building.

This material is directed mostly at U.S. white collar tech workers, who are steeped in cultures of overwhelming individualism and professionalism, and are currently less likely than many other types of workers to already have unions, organizing knowledge, or access to experienced organizers. But much of it should apply across and outside the industry, and similarly, white collar tech workers can find far more resources and people to learn from outside their own milieu.

If you're reading this, presumably you've already learned that those who pay for your labor are more beholden to capital or those above them than to you and your coworkers, and that banding together with your coworkers is the only reliable way to shift the scales of power. Maybe you've already been organizing but are struggling to take next steps, maybe you don't know how to start, or maybe you don't believe you can because your coworkers appear too happy, too apathetic, or too afraid. This guide aims to look past some of those initial myths and obstacles, and shed light on a path forward.

Take what you find helpful, and leave what you don't. There is so much out there to learn from, but ultimately you and your coworkers are the experts in your own contexts.

Written with help from Tegan and extensive learnings and ideas from *Secrets of a Successful Organizer* by Labor Notes (labornotes.org/secrets), *Organizer Training 101* by Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and *Organizer In Training Training* by Tech Workers Coalition (TWC). Thanks to the organizers of TWC Portland for trusting me, investing in this project, and making the first version become a reality.

1:1 Basics

1:1 conversations are the cornerstone of organizing. Organizing is ultimately about relationships and people, and 1:1s are how you build and maintain relationships and learn how to organize with different people. Group meetings are not the place to find out everyone's disparate issues, politics, and fears. A 1:1 should take place in a calm and private space outside of work such as a coffee shop, with at least an hour reserved for the conversation. This can be a video call for remote workers, and could also potentially be done in the office, but in both cases consider the risk of surveillance.

How hard it is to get a 1:1 with someone varies greatly depending on workplace culture and role. In some contexts it is normal to get coffee with your coworkers during work hours. In others, you may need to find time outside work and/or tell a coworker you want a conversation with them to talk about their experiences at work. This can be especially difficult with remote workers, but you can further explain that you wish to get to know them better to improve working relationships.

Although this is a very specific type of conversation and may feel uncomfortable, remember that this is still just a conversation in which you are trying to connect with someone else. This isn't a sales pitch, interrogation, or monologue, and it shouldn't feel like it is! Don't rush it - it will likely take multiple 1:1s with someone to get to know them well enough to get to the organizing part of the conversation. Anytime the conversation isn't going forward as expected, take it as an opportunity to get to know someone better.

Conversation Stages

A - Agitate

To get through our days, we all push down our problems. Agitation is the process of bringing them back to the surface. People take action when they feel strongly about an issue or cause and how it impacts them, and if you fail to bring and keep these feelings top of mind, actions and people will fall through the cracks, especially when things get tough. "Your job as an organizer was to find out what it was that people wanted to be different in their lives, and then to persuade people that it mattered whether they decided to do something about it. This is not the same thing as persuading people that the thing itself matters: they usually know it does. The task is to persuade people that *they* matter: they know they usually don't." - *Spadework*
(nplusonemag.com/issue-34/politics/spadework)

- Come up with specific game plans and/or role play dealing with particular situations in advance
- Build strong, trusting, caring relationships and resilient communication structures before taking action, and continue to consistently maintain and build those relationships
- Ensure everyone is aware of and prepared for unique risks that particular groups may have, such as visa or contractor status
- Gather external community support before highly escalated actions
- Consider alerting the media
- Consider legal action such as a ULP filing
- Document everything
- Communicate communicate communicate

Responding to Opposition

You have two main choices when opposition occurs: push past it, or take on the opposition itself as a new issue. In order to decide, you can go through the issue selection process. If you decide to act on the opposition, then you can proceed similarly to with any other issue. If you do not, then you can fall back on relationships and stay in close contact with everyone. Ensure people are getting care work or material support as needed and possible, keep reiterating why and how everyone is fighting, and directly discuss why and how bosses will act in opposition to worker power.

There are some cases, of course, where the retaliation may end the road of organizing, but good organizers aim to minimize the employer's ability to destroy organizing well before they're tempted to try. That's one of the main reasons why all the aspects of organizing outside issues and actions are so important. When people are able to successfully withstand opposition, it can often backfire for the bosses. People become more aware of their own power, build stronger ties with one another, and are all the more prepared for the next fight.

What have organizers you know, or are able to find perspectives from, learned from experiencing opposition?

If you believe that your employer has violated your rights protected by the NLRB, then you can file an Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) with your local NLRB office within six months. You should gather as much documentation and recollection of events as possible and have at least one coworker to back you up. More information about the rights the NLRB protects and how to file can be found at www.nlr.gov.

The NLRB and associated legal rights are useful tools to have on hand. However, even in clear-cut situations, cases often take a year or more to conclude, and the most positive expected outcome is job reinstatement, payment of back wages (minus wages made in the meantime), and a requirement that the employer post a notice. This is to say, the NLRB will absolutely not get you the money to pay rent if you lose your job, but it may (or may not) make your employer think twice about retaliating again.

The best way to protect yourself? Organize and take action in ways that minimize the risk of retaliation, and be prepared to use worker and community power to withstand or shut down retaliation that occurs.

What happened when employees of Lanetix filed ULPs after being fired? What do you imagine daily reality was like for them between the firings and the NLRB decision?

Preparing for Opposition

Inoculation means introducing people to negative situations that may occur so that they will not be caught off guard and will instead prepare and effectively fight or remain calm through the situation when it occurs. Relationships - the foundations of organizing - along with inoculation, will be the keys to surviving anti-organizing tactics. Some tips:

- Analyze, explain, and discuss the risks and challenges that may arise through each step of organizing and taking action
- Make agreements in advance about how to handle particular situations and how to quickly make decisions about unknown situations that may occur

E - Educate

After we've brought up the things that really matter to us, it would be irresponsible to leave our coworker without a vision of how to change things. Educate is about talking through collective action as a solution to the issue we agitated about.

I - Inoculate

This means giving workers a taste of how the boss might respond so they can be prepared. "How do you think management would react if we did that?" is a good question. There may not be much to say early on, but this becomes key as your calls to action become more serious. This will be covered more by the Opposition section later.

O - Organize

This is about giving people tasks. It's hard to tell how committed someone is just by talking to them. Asking someone to agree on a concrete, measurable task that will help the campaign builds your coworker's engagement and leads towards their participation later in collective action. Start small and low risk, and then build. Good initial tasks: making a list of their teammates and potential grievances, mapping who has power over their own grievances, etc.

U - Uplift

Follow up on the tasks you've agreed on. Few things are as demoralizing as doing or even not doing something hard and then feeling like it didn't matter. Tasks should have a due date; follow up right before the due date, asking if they were able to complete the task. If they weren't, don't shame, but care, digging into what the barriers were and helping the coworker out in getting around them. This part of organizing is scary, because it feels "pushy," and U is called "the pUsh" in some union organizing trainings, but it's actually about supporting each other. We also need support for ourselves, which is why we encourage training attendees to keep in touch after the training. As you build up organizing, you can also think about having a culture of uplifting each other and making sure your coworkers support you in your tasks as well.

Conversation Path

A successful organizing conversation should guide someone to reach these conclusions without simply being told, because they will remember better and be more invested if they came to the realization themselves. It must go in a particular order - AEIOU, or, more simply, the flow below. You can't move forward without successfully completing each step, or none of the following steps will really land or make much sense.

- Your coworker cares 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 coworker really wants this problem fixed, they will have to join you and other coworkers in taking collective action

Active Listening

From *Support* by cindy crabb

- Active listening is about trying to truly understand what someone else is thinking, even if what they're saying is muddled
- It involves indicating that you hear, understand, and accept what someone is saying, but allows them to do their own problem solving and discovery
- When someone makes clouded statements, you can look for what is behind them by asking questions like "do you mean" or "are you saying" and then repeat your understanding
- You should avoid exaggerating or minimizing, ignoring things they are saying, judging, telling them what to do, or adding your own insight or analysis
- You should feel accepting, want to help, take sufficient time, trust that they can solve their own problems, empathize without becoming overly involved, and be aware of your own feelings
- Active listening is an important part of building trust and relationships and finding out what a coworker is experiencing or feeling, but the entirety of a successful organizing conversation may not follow these guidelines

Agitational and Educational Questions

How do you agitate people or change their understanding without assuming too much or preaching? It's all about asking the right questions - these are just some examples.

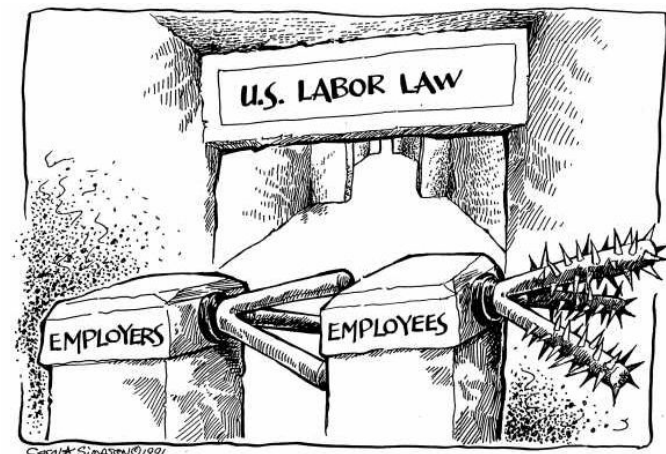
- What do you like about your job?
- What do you not like about your job?
- How many hours do you work a week?
- Do you work anywhere else?
- How much do you make?
- Walk me through a typical day.
- Is this your first job?
- Why did you take this job?
- How does it compare?
- Is it what you expected?
- What kinds of changes have you seen since you started?
- How does that affect you?

Legal Rights

There are various ways in which workers can leverage the legal system in the U.S., but the most relevant and simplest to explain here is the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which can protect workers' rights to organize using a collection of associated laws and precedents. In short, even workers without a union are legally protected against employer retaliation for acting together with one or more coworkers to discuss working conditions, request improved working conditions, refuse unsafe working conditions, or organize a union. This is referred to as protected concerted activity. Illegal retaliation includes firing, reprimands, spying, demotion, threats, and other forms of implicit or explicit penalization in response to protected concerted activity.

However, workers can be legally retaliated against for acting alone or disparaging the company falsely or outside the scope of working conditions, and independent contractors, public sector employees, and managers (the definition of which can be fuzzy) are not protected. Other loopholes exist as well, and union contracts, when present, can alter what is protected. People often organize or act without NLRB protection, but risks vary. However, in most cases, you can at least expect collective action around working conditions by non-union full-time employees to be covered.

Workers may also be able to file lawsuits or file complaints with entities such as the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (www.eeoc.gov) in some other cases. But in general, expect that employers will disregard their own legal restrictions while holding you to yours. *Labor Law for the Rank and Filer* goes into far more detail, but the TLDR is that you cannot rely on law to protect you, and you'd have to consult a lawyer to get an accurate read on your own legal status in any particular situation.



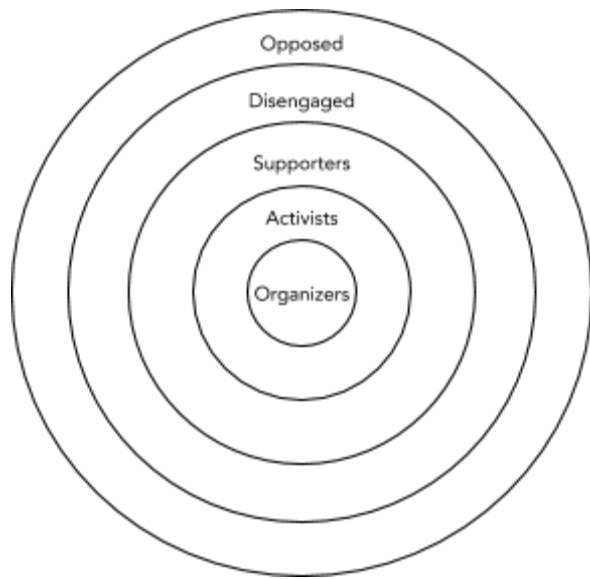
- I've never observed this issue and I've spoken with many people who do not have this problem - it is just you
- You're such a great [leader/employee/friend/etc] and it really saddens me that you would hurt the relationship we had
- You do so well advocating for your coworkers, and you can better help them if you work with us to change things
- You've been misguided by someone, and I know you're better than this and would never do something like this on your own
- Some people have very extreme views and confused others into following them but this is really not what we're about here
- This is disrespectful/dishonest/lazy/extremist/unprofessional
- The complaints you're making are ridiculous lies and I have no idea what you're talking about
- There will be serious consequences for poor performance, so you cannot allow others to distract you from your work
- What you're doing could have legal consequences
- Anyone displaying behavior not in line with the values of this company will be fired
- Leakers will be found and disciplined to the full extent of the law and the employment contracts you all signed
- This recent behavior puts the revenue of the company at risk and may result in job losses
- The people involved in this are risking your jobs and safety, and these actions put the most vulnerable people in the company at risk

What lines or tactics have you experienced? What about your coworkers? What about other people you know?

- How does that affect your partner?
- How does that affect your family?
- How does that affect your kids?
- What toll does that take on you?
- How long has it been going on?
- What does that mean to you?
- How do you feel when you wake up in the morning to get ready for work?
- What would it mean for you if [issue] was fixed?
- How does that make you feel? [as a human being, parent, partner, friend, son, daughter, etc]
- If you had a magic wand and could change any one thing about working here what would it be?
- Is that what you deserve?
- Is that fair?
- Are you ok with that?
- Don't you work hard?
- Is that all you're worth?
- Can they afford to do better?
- How did it get this way?
- Why are things this way?
- Who benefits from things being this way?
- Who has the power to make the decision to give you [issue]?
- What does the company care about more than anything else?
- Are you ok with sacrificing [issue] for the company's profits?
- How much longer can you put up with this?
- What is your plan to change this?
- Do your other coworkers feel this way?

If you can practice 1:1s, do so. Did your conversation partner feel you got them to open up and get on board? What would you do differently next time?

Building Solidarity



Organizers - Plan around organizing, build up new people, strategize

Activists - Participate in actions and other work, bring in new people

Supporters - Participate in actions, are supportive of organizing

Disengaged - Participate in actions only on occasion, if at all

Opposed - Are opposed to organizing

All roles are important, all roles should be filled at any given time, and people may move between roles at different times. However, it is important to be building people into more core roles as they have the potential to do them. You should not expect people to fulfill a particular role until they have shown through action that they can be relied upon to do it, and you should not expect people to move more core faster than one role change at a time - people can rarely if ever jump successfully from supporter to organizer.

Mapping

Building social and power mappings of the workplace are some of the most key activities you can do early in organizing. This means assessing implicit and explicit structures and relationships in the workplace. Power mapping focuses more on formal bureaucracy, and it can help tell who you'll need to put pressure on when trying to address workplace issues. Social mapping

Anti-Organizing Tactics

- Bosses being nice and/or a sympathetic listening ear
- Captive audience or otherwise intimidating meetings (group or 1:1)
- Anti-organizing written materials such as mass emails
- Threats of legal consequences
- Suddenly enforcing policies that were never enforced before
- Demoting, firing, or otherwise disciplining workers
- Sabotaging workers' ability to perform or making work miserable
- Promoting workers to management
- Offering bonuses, salary increases, or other perks
- Making unrelated or partial positive changes
- Promising relevant changes and then endlessly delaying them
- Claiming solidarity, empathy, or victimization while undermining organizing
- Spreading rumors or bad-mouthing workers to each other
- Increasing workload, meetings, or expected work hours
- Increasing scrutiny or criticism
- Convincing certain workers to snitch or voice opposition
- Restructuring to separate or remove/replace organized workers
- Playing up job type, identity, or other divides between workers
- Threats of losses of perks, jobs, positive relationships, etc.
- Bringing in consultants or new managers to intimidate
- Making changes too quickly for workers to keep up with
- Increase difficulty of accessing information, communication with bosses, etc.
- Isolating workers physically, emotionally, or in other ways

Anti-Organizing Lines

- I support unions, but they're for marginalized workers - your organizing is appropriation and hurts less privileged workers
- I can't believe you would do this to me; I feel personally betrayed
- Your complaints are understandable, but you need to go about them in the right way, by speaking 1:1 with HR/management
- I understand you're angry but I think this is really all a big misunderstanding/overreaction
- This is creating an us vs. them dynamic and it's toxic/confusing
- We're all friends/family here, and we have your back, so you just need to talk to us instead of being oppositional
- This is how things work everywhere, and you just need to learn what is realistic and normal
- As a [identity] in tech, I can assure you that this is the best company you will find for [identity] and I haven't had any problems here
- We greatly appreciate this fantastic feedback and dialogue

Opposition

No matter how “good” or seemingly law-abiding your company or boss, their success depends on maintaining power over their workforce. While anti-organizing tactics can vary greatly and be infinitely creative, you can be certain the bosses will not simply roll over and transition to a worker-owned cooperative model. You have to be prepared for opposition.

shows how workers relate to one another, and can reveal implicit worker leaders, people who are dangerously friendly with management, and more.

Social mapping is key to deciding who to talk to. Contrary to popular belief, you will not want to seek out only people always posting activist tweets in Slack, but rather people who are widely respected and listened to by their peers or people who are enmeshed in groups with clear grievances. Getting on board with addressing workplace issues doesn't require particular politics or personality, but building power does require relationships. Mapping is a great way to get started with choosing who to have 1:1s with, and it's also a great ask to give to people you're trying to bring more core.

Organizing Committee

An organizing committee (OC) is a group of people committed to organizing and taking action in the workplace. This is the primary way to organize across a workplace without a union. This is not the only way to organize, but it provides a long-term structure for organizing in the workplace and encourages the creation of a governance system for organizing. An OC should aim to include people from every key group (departments, ERGs, major social groups, etc) as much as possible over time.

When building an OC, you should make sure to only include people who have, through action, moved into the core as organizers or solid activists. Including people who only talk the talk or have many unaddressed fears will drag down the whole OC. However, as you advance in organizing, you should also be consistently reconsidering how you and your fellow organizers are choosing to include or not include people, as this can easily become corrupt or exclusionary in the wrong ways.

If you've started having 1:1s, can you map those people on the organizing role chart? If you haven't, who would stand out on a map of your team as people to have 1:1s with?

1:10 rule

You cannot have a few 1:1s with someone and then stop talking to them and rely on their support in the future. You must continue having regular 1:1s or



other substantial communication with everyone you're responsible for involving in organizing and maintaining strong relationships with. Does this sound quickly unmanageable? Good.

Any given person should not be having regular 1:1s with more than ten people. One person should not be doing that much work, and one person should not have that much communication and information, and therefore power, centered around them. The point of organizing is to spread power among workers, not to centralize it in a new place! This means that you *must* prioritize building up new organizers, sharing your skills and responsibilities, and taking part in mutual support.

Communication

Both in person or video/audio and text-based communication will be necessary to grow and continue organizing. Frequency and type of meetings depends greatly on context, but it's important to have semi-regular group meeting for core organizers. Group text-based communication depends on tradeoffs among security concerns, cultural norms, and other needs, but what is most important is that you never use company infrastructure.

Support

Maintain support, trust, and responsibility among fellow organizers:

- Agree on shared goals and values for organizing
- Hold yourself and each other accountable for doing the things you say you'll do
- Work together to learn and problem solve - consistently communicate, especially about challenging issues, and teach and learn from each other's diverse skills
- Build strong and trusting relationships - prioritize communication with them and support them when they are facing difficulties

What steps can you start taking now to decentralize and improve support in your organizing?

How many people are ready to take each action? How might other workers react? How might management react?

Will these actions build organizers and/or solidarity? What groups of new people could they draw in (or alienate)? What valuable experience could they provide?

What are the risks of each action, and how will you prepare for the potential consequences?

disruption or disobedience is present. These types of actions are usually most effective early on or in concert with other actions or a larger campaign.

- March on the boss
- Disseminate a petition
- Tweet storm
- Leak or speak to media
- Protest with external activists
- Change profile photos
- Collectively speak out on internal platforms

Some questions to ask when considering what actions to include in your escalation strategy:

Are there any actions that workers could take which would fulfill the proposed solution(s)?

What actions would increase pressure on the person who has the power to implement the proposed solution(s)? How do these actions relate to the issue?

What does each action bring to the table - creativity, relevance, impact, simplicity, fun, etc?

Workplace Issues

As you expand and deepen your relationships with coworkers and find people who are interested in organizing or taking action, you'll want to figure out what to do with that momentum as it is building. Ultimately, of course, you'll want to take action, but first you'll need to decide what you want to aim to change with any potential action. If you've had deep enough conversations with a wide enough variety of people, this will likely prove difficult, as people in any workplace will generally have a variety of grievances. However, there are certain questions you can ask among yourself and your co-organizers in order to help decide which issues to pursue.

What issues continue to come up in 1:1s?

What solution(s) would we propose for each issue?

Is this issue widely felt? How many people directly experience, or at least agree with, this issue?

Is this issue deeply felt? What level of action would people be willing to take on this issue?

Is this issue winnable? Who has the power to implement the proposed solution(s)? What level of pressure would it take to make that happen?

Will this fight build organizers and/or solidarity? What groups of new people could it draw in (or alienate)? What valuable experience could it provide?

No issue will be perfect, and not every fight will be a success, but you can prioritize issues that have better chances of success and will likely have a positive impact on organizing regardless of whether the fight is won.

Workplace Actions

The scariest part... or the most empowering. There are many options for how to act, but only you and your coworkers can know what will be most effective for your situation. There's varying levels of intensity, classic actions to novel actions dreamed up on the spot, and a few different genres of actions that you can consider.

In most cases, you'll want to follow an escalation strategy - plan a series of actions which progressively become higher risk and higher pressure but will only be done if each preceding action fails. Having a plan means that a failure is only a natural step in the process, and by escalating over time, you can minimize unnecessary risk and allow everyone to gain experience working together in lower intensity actions before escalating.

Disrupt

Companies and bosses rely on smooth flow of work and power. Disruption, particularly when it tangibly interrupts flow of incoming money or the production/maintenance of the product, is incredibly powerful. These types of actions are often the most risky but also the most effective, and those that interrupt operations can be effective again and again.

- Walkout
- Sickout
- Strike
- Work to rule
- Work slowdown
- Meeting interruption

DIY

Some things you don't necessarily have to demand from someone in power. Why not, for example, encourage workers to make their own salaries transparent instead of asking HR to provide the information? These types of actions are only usable in limited cases but can be extremely effective.

- Follow new work processes
- Change work hours
- Share information
- Introduce mentorship or other programs

Flex

Some actions don't necessarily change things or tangibly disrupt work, but challenge power structures and imply that the potential for more intense