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YOU

ARE THE UNION

A Guide for Union Members



Mark E. Sullivan and
Charles D. Reese

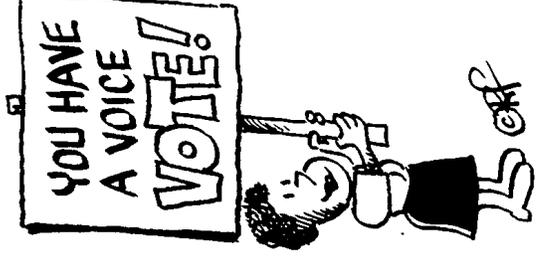
*University of Connecticut
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Conclusion

Hopefully this exercise will give you a clearer understanding regarding the different types of union members. This places you in a better position to determine what type of union member you are.

If you are in a leadership position within your union, the descriptions of the different styles will provide a clearer understanding of your membership. Understanding the complex makeup of the membership can help you to communicate more effectively with each type of member.

When you are a member in good standing within an organization, which is founded on the principles of a democratic society, it will involve a tremendous personal commitment and sacrifice of your time. You must be willing to put out the time and effort if you want the ultimate benefits. As the old saying goes, if something is worth doing, it is worth doing well. This cliché applies quite nicely to your involvement with your union. We are sure you would agree that the work of the union, and the results, such as security and better wages, are surely worth the effort. Doing them well is not only something that should be attractive philosophically, but will help you and your family have access to the American dream.

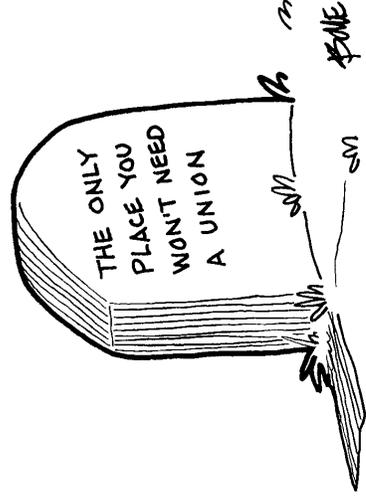


- Will say that the time for unions has passed.
- Given the opportunity will drop from the organization.
- Are generally very critical of trade unionism.
- Feel that they are held back by the rules that have been negotiated.
- View the leadership with suspicion and sympathize with management on every issue.
- Are truly anti-union.
- Give no credit to the union for any advancements and only see the organization as unnecessary, oppressive and possibly dominated by the political left or undesirable elements.

What Does Your Profile Reveal?

Using the evaluation of your answer to the questionnaire, determine which (if any) Membership Style has all three numbers (true answers) shaded. If only one Membership Style reflects this, it would appear that this would be your most comfortable style. Any other Membership Styles that have two responses shaded can be viewed as a style which you may use at different times.

For example, your primary style might be the “Good” Union Member, while you also may have a tendency towards being a Crisis Activist. This would mean that you felt most comfortable with the “Good” Union Membership Style, but during especially difficult times



Preface

This is a guidebook written exclusively for people interested in learning what union membership is really about. The book’s goals are twofold: 1) to really make you think seriously about what it means to be a union member; and 2) to provide an opportunity for you to see what type of member you perceive yourself to be presently.

There is an instructor’s manual for use with this booklet. Contact the Labor Education Center for more information.

The authors, Dr. Charles D. Reese and Mark E. Sullivan, are Associate Professors at the University of Connecticut’s Labor Education Center. Both have extensive experience as educators and have held various leadership roles within labor organizations. Dr. Sullivan is the Director of the Labor Education Center.

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- member, yet will become enmeshed when a crisis arises. Join the union as a way of protecting themselves from management abuses.

The Dually Orientated Member

These members:

- Support the union.
- See efficiency and production from a management prospective.
- Are working towards and expect to become supervisors.
- Feel strongly that union activity should be confined to collective bargaining and are very reluctant to strike.
- Question the role of seniority. They see it as a principle that harms efficiency and may have kept them from getting a promotion.

The Card Carrier or Indifferent Member

These members:

- Are completely unconcerned about trade unionism.
- Have little positive or negative to say about the union.
- Are either forced to join the union, or join because they want to be part of the larger group.
- Join the union because others are doing it.
- May be completely satisfied with their jobs and see no threat from management. While others feel they will be at their job for only a short time. Workers in this category can carry union cards, but not be involved in the organization at all.

The Unwilling Unionist

These members:

- Are forced to become members, but feel there is no benefit at all to belonging.

YOU ARE THE UNION: A GUIDE FOR UNION MEMBERS

This is a guidebook written for people interested in learning what union membership is really all about. The book's goals are twofold:

- 1) To really make you think seriously about what it means to be a union member.
- 2) To provide an opportunity for you to see what type of member you think you are today.



Introduction

In recent years it has not been easy to be a union member. Everywhere you turn there seems to be negative sentiment toward unions and their membership.

Although the concept of unionization continues to enjoy heavy public support, the difficulty of organizing has contributed to a reduced percentage of union members in the workforce. As a result, we have witnessed the:

- loss of jobs - especially those that pay well.
- loss of benefits - example: employer supported medical insurance.
- less job security - the reorganization, downsizing and right sizing which all describe the same process.
- dramatically lowered purchasing power - in all likelihood your purchasing power has not changed significantly since the early 1970's.
- degradation in the workplace - work harder, faster and for less \$\$\$\$\$\$.

These members:

- Are only slightly less devoted to the union.
- Would rarely ever cross the picket line of another union.
- Might accept a position in management, but still has strong doubts about that move.
- Does not view management as an enemy of the working class, once the hard bargaining is done. Many leaders also come from this category.

The Loyal But Critical Member

These members:

- Are very devoted to the union.
- Will criticize the leadership as being inefficient, too close to management or having dictatorial tendencies.
- Will criticize the membership as not being involved enough in the operation and support of the local and urges the union to be involved in more than just collective bargaining.
- Becomes an active and involved unionist during times of change in union leadership.

The Crisis Activist

These members:

- Choose not to be involved until there is a severe problem facing the organization.
- Then and only then, will become involved in the operation of the local.
- Support the union without being involved on an emotional level like the ideological and good unionists are.
- View the union primarily as the collective bargaining agent and do not agree with any political activity.
- Feel that the day to day operation of the union should be left to the elected leadership.
- Are generally passive when it comes to being a union

Unions have always been strong supporters of good working conditions, as well as a mainstay of the working class in the United States. Union gains during the formative years were achieved through countless hard-won battles.

With the recent and dramatic increase of negativism toward unions, it is time for members to step forward and shoulder more responsibility towards strengthening their unions' role in a society which desperately needs worker representation.

In order to have a strong and effective union, **everyone** must become involved, instead of relying on the leadership and core supporters.

You Are The Union

The union belongs to you. You joined it and support it with your dues. Everything you say and do is a reflection of the union. Whether you like it or not, you are an ambassador for the union and all the working people it represents. It is important to be the best member possible, not just because others are depending on you, but because your own long-term best interests are at stake.

This book has been written for **all** union members, not just new members. Every one of us needs to be introduced to, or reminded about, their role within this organization.

It is hoped that the following pages encourage you to recognize your importance to your union, while at the same time realizing how the union supports your needs and ideals.

What Type Of Member Are You?

Questions like these are always difficult to answer. The purpose for asking is to help you take a serious look at your involvement, commitment, interest in the operation, and personal investment in the success of your union.

By looking at your actions seriously, and with some objectivity, you are in a position to evaluate your membership style and determine any potential changes you may want to make.

Membership Types

The following is a description of each of the seven types of members identified on the previous chart. At the end of this section, you will determine what style describes you.

The Ideological Unionist

These members are:

- Completely dedicated to the ideals of trade unionism and might be considered the “ultimate” trade union member.
- Enthusiastic to trade union ideals, they are willing to sacrifice everything they have to help the cause, some times to the point of not being critical enough when examining their union.

These members feel strongly that:

- Trade unionism must also expand its agenda to include the betterment of society as a whole.
- Accepting a promotion, if it means they are no longer a member of the bargaining unit, is wrong. Many leaders come from this type of member.

The “Good” Union Member

21. The union really is run by people who are a bit shady. I don't trust them. Look what they have done to management's efforts to make things more efficient.
 True _____ False _____

Questionnaire Evaluation

Evaluating your questionnaire is going to take a little time and effort, but the results will be well worth it. When finished, you will have a profile of your membership characteristics.

The following chart lists seven styles of membership.² Under each membership style there is a column of three numbers. These three numbers correspond to the questions related to this membership style. Check your questionnaire and see which questions you marked True. For each true answer shade in the corresponding box. Remember, you are **only** scoring the **True** answers you gave on the questionnaire.

Ideo-logical	Good	Loyal	Crisis Activist	Dual	Card Carrier	Unwilling Unionist
1	4	3	2	6	11	8
5	9	7	10	12	13	16
21	15	18	14	20	17	19

2. Daisy Tagliacozzo and Joel Seidman, "A Typology of Rank and File Union Members," American Journal of Sociology, University of Chicago Press, 1986, pp. 546-53

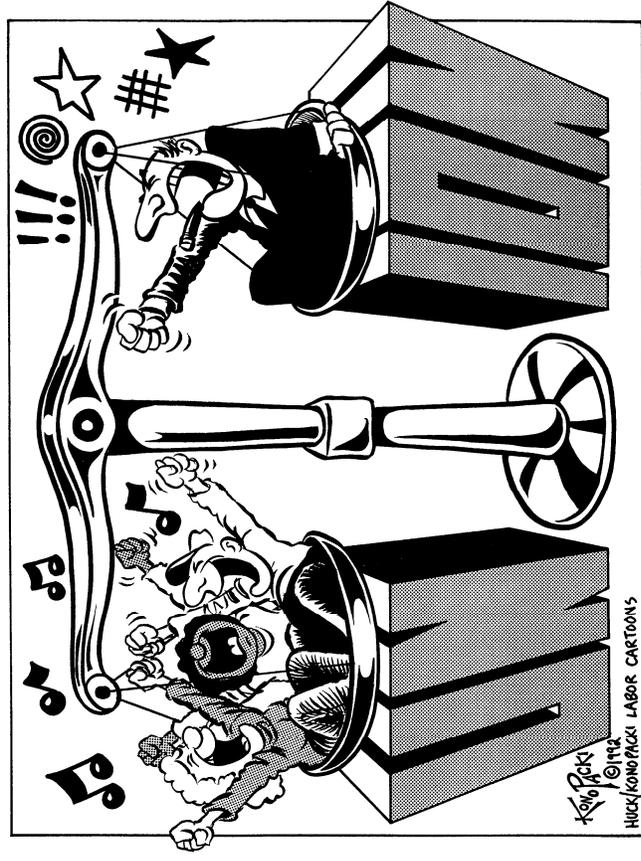
What Is A Union?

Spell the word union. "U . . . N . . . I" "That's it; you have just described what the union is and its only source of power. It is U and I working together for a common goal: be it dignity, job security, better pay or . . ."

With this simple description, we can see that the real meaning of unionism is workers joining together for a common good. Historically, the primary reason for organizing was to demand a certain level of dignity on the job. What could be more important, even today?

How do working conditions differ when you have a union contract?

In the case of unorganized workers, the center of power is the employer, who continues to decide, alone, what you will be paid, whether any benefits are included, or if you even have a job today. Without a contract the employer has the authority to do what they want to you, with very few exceptions.



Why Did You Join?

Why did you join the union? Maybe your motivation was the belief that you would receive:

- Higher pay
- More benefits,
- A safer workplace,
- More security,
- Protection on the job,
- Equitable treatment.

Perhaps membership was a required part of your employment. Or, maybe you have been raised in a union family where union-backed employment has always been a part of your life.

Often there are social reasons for belonging to an organization: friends and family may belong to a union or it may be important to feel part of a group with similar desires and interests and belonging to a union would satisfy this need.

Possibly you joined because:

- The goals, purpose and mission of the union agree with your ideals and beliefs about individual dignity.
- The union is an organized group working for the benefit of its members.
- Union members are joined by a common interest in the health and welfare of each other.
- The organization will bargain for and represent you.

The strength found in numbers, combined with a focused approach, has been and will continue to be, more successful than individual efforts to improve conditions at work. Through collective efforts unions have helped to provide members with:

- Higher wages,
- Health insurance,
- Pension benefits,
- Fair and equal treatment on the job.

union offers, but really could care less about the operation of the union.

True _____ False _____

11. In paying my dues I really feel I have complied with my obligation to the union.
True _____ False _____
12. My involvement with the union is best described as, "Let the officers run the local, they were elected to do so."
True _____ False _____
13. Although I support the union, Management must still control production and any moves designed to improve efficiency.
True _____ False _____
14. Eventually, I will be promoted to a managerial position, and be out of the union.
True _____ False _____
15. If the union wants to do something that is not directly related to wages or collective bargaining, I am against it.
True _____ False _____
16. I joined the union only because I had to.
True _____ False _____
17. I really love my work and see lots of opportunity ahead, with or without the union.
True _____ False _____
18. I really don't feel one way or the other about the union. I know it's here, but so what. When it came time to join, I saw that most everybody else did, so I went along with the majority.
True _____ False _____
19. I really don't see a good reason to have a union. It doesn't work well at all. Its time has come and gone.
True _____ False _____
20. If it weren't for the seniority rule, I would have had several promotions.
True _____ False _____

Membership Profile Questionnaire

In response to each question please check the answer that best reflects your opinion. There are 21 questions in all, each of them asking for a True or False response. Take your time answering the questions, reading each one carefully. Answer True if you agree with the statement, False if you do not. When you have completed all of the questions, follow the directions at the end for scoring.

1. Unions need leadership that is more militant.
True _____ False _____
2. Although the union is primarily interested in the labor management relationship, it must also be concerned with the overall objective of a new, more equitable social order.
True _____ False _____
3. The labor movement should seriously think about developing and supporting its own political party.
True _____ False _____
4. If a strike does come, I am pleased to picket. Not only is it my duty, but it helps protect the power and prestige of the union.
True _____ False _____
5. I always honor the picket line of any union.
True _____ False _____
6. Because of the tremendous good brought about by the trade union movement, I am reluctant to criticize it.
True _____ False _____
7. Although I am a strong supporter of unions, I feel my local has a long way to go when it comes to competence and efficiency.
True _____ False _____
8. I feel the membership is really apathetic
True _____ False _____
9. You wonder, if the vote to unionize was held today, would there still be a local at your work place?
True _____ False _____
10. You are very interested in the benefits that belonging to a

Other gains include:

- Union sponsored training and apprenticeship programs that continuously upgrade job skills.
- Having an effective impact on legislation and elected leaders.
- Being a part of the community in which its members live and work. It is long standing tradition for unions to come to the aid of their members and communities during times of crisis.

Because they are governed by the membership, unions are a living example of democracy at work. Through elections, the union is administered by its members with each member having the right, in fact, the responsibility, to express their views on what the union is doing, where it is dedicating resources, and how it is functioning.

An effective union belongs to each of its members who control their destiny and make unionism work for the benefit of everyone. Making it work means you *must* be involved. This is the price of being a member of a democratically run institution.



What Are The Benefits?

The question most often asked is, “What’s in it for *me*?” It is important to recognize the benefits of union membership.

The benefits of union membership include:

- Dignity on the job,
- A good salary and benefits,
- Job security,
- A guarantee that you will be treated fairly,
- A stronger voice for fair employment practices,
- Assurances that you will never be fired or laid off from a union job without the union going to bat for you, protecting your contractual and legal rights.

The union is a very strong family which takes pride in helping each member, no matter what the problem.



How Can You Grow As A Union Member?

Your job is covered by a union contract, but what does that really mean for you?

It is assumed by many old and new union members that the union “owes them” simply because they pay dues. On the surface this may seem to be true, but this is only part of the equation.

Understanding better how the union works for you starts with having a better understanding of what type of union member you are. Your attitudes about your union have a big impact on how effective your union can be.

Before you go any further, please take the opportunity to answer the questions contained in the following questionnaire. This is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers. It is a tool that will help identify where you stand today as a trade union member.



Rights of Union Members

Along with the responsibilities of union membership, come the rights of membership. Members who fail to exercise their responsibilities will find that their rights could be seriously eroded or even lost.

The rights unique to union membership are also reflected in the writings of Arthur Goldberg. He lists these rights as follows:

- The right to a democratic union.
- The right to due process of law in union disciplinary proceedings.
- The right to a clean, honest union.
- The right to an effective union.
- The right to a union free from discrimination because of gender, race, color, or creed.
- The right to a responsible union - responsible not only to its members and employers, but to the community and to the nation as well.

You can easily forfeit these rights by not actively taking on your responsibilities as a member. In other words, use it or lose it.

You have a right to expect:

- Honesty.
- A higher standard of ethics than is commonly found in the everyday business world.
- No conflicts of interest.
- No kickbacks or under-the-table payments.
- A good contract.
- Efficient and effective representation at the bargaining table.
- Fair and equal treatment of all members.
- A union free from discrimination and supportive of the basic civil and human rights of every member and citizen.

You Have A Voice!

You, the organized worker, have a voice that the employer **must, by law**, listen to seriously. On the surface this may not sound important until you begin to think what it really means.

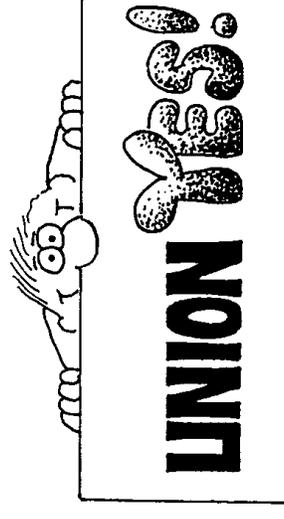
Employees at an organized work site have a **voice** which communicates with management. Unilateral moves by the employer, against what has been negotiated or protected by law, are grievable and enforceable through the courts. In an unorganized workplace there is no requirement that management listen to complaints about changes in working conditions. The decisions of management are final.

Union members obtain recognition through the unity and expression of their voices. It is important for people to feel that their opinions are taken into serious consideration. This creates a bond that is difficult to overcome, and one that cannot be found in the unorganized worksite.

Do You Exercise That Voice?

How do you evaluate your participation in union activities? Having a voice does not mean that you automatically exercise it regularly. Do you:

- Vote in union elections?
- Get involved in the day to day operation of the union?
- Attend union meetings and speak out?



What Are Your Responsibilities?

A member, as defined by Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, is "someone who is a part of a group." It is *your* decision whether or not to become an active member within your union. Becoming involved means taking on responsibilities and obligations, not only for yourself but for the rest of the group.

For the organization to be successful, as a member you must accept the duties and obligations which come with membership. The union is effective through the collective efforts of all its members. It is part of your obligation and responsibility to assure the success of the union through your active participation.

Many opportunities are provided which would allow you to use your unique talents to serve the union. Some of these are:

- Hold an office.
- Support union projects.
- Attend meetings.
- Communicate with other members.
- Help with organizing.
- Volunteer to work on committees.
- Give input by voicing your opinions and desires.
- Enroll in union educational programs.
- Be a steward.
- Work on the union's political action committee.

With so many opportunities for involvement, each member can contribute to the good and welfare of the union by participating in projects that best suit him/her. Whatever you can do will add to your union's strengths and assist your own development into an effective union member.

You do not have to be involved in every aspect of the union as a member, but you do have an obligation to contribute to the union, *not just pay your dues*. The more you are involved, the more successful your union will be.

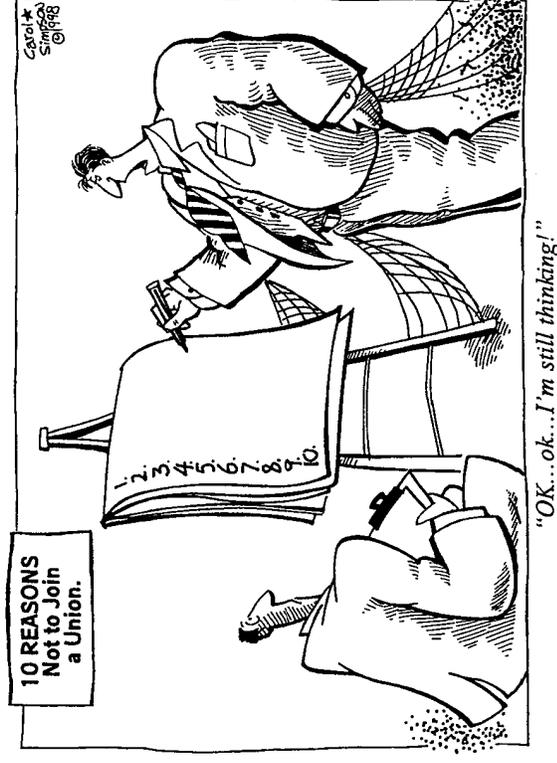
It is very easy to make comments and criticize things we don't

agree with or understand. Making negative comments and "bad mouthing" the union are counter productive for both you and the union. It takes energy and action to make changes and understand new concepts. Loyalty does not mean that you turn a "blind eye" to problems, but rather to work towards the improvement of the organization by being involved.

The shortest, most complete list of a union member's responsibilities was put forth by Arthur J. Goldberg, Secretary of Labor under President Johnson and a U.S. Supreme Court Justice.¹

These responsibilities are:

- Participate in union affairs.
- Help set the broad ethical standards under which a union operates.
- Adhere to our American concept of respect for minorities.
- Be good citizens and recognize fully the role of their union as a responsible volunteer organization in the national society.



1. Arthur J. Goldberg, "Rights and Responsibilities of Union Members," *American Federalist*, 1958 pp. 15-18