

ORGANISING – UNION DEVELOPMENT

Theory and Practice

Manual for NSZZ Solidarnosc activists across all union levels

Why do the workers need Solidarnosc now?

Because they need:

- a) a professional defender of their rights,
- b) an independent representative of their interests,
- c) an organisation which gives them a strong position and power.

Why should Solidarnosc develop?

- a) to make the union more professional,
- b) to become more independent financially,
- c) without development (increase in membership) Solidarnosc will lose its moral authority which comes from the past.

What do the members expect from Solidarnosc?

- higher wages,
- good collective bargaining contracts,
- assistance when they lose job,
- job protection,
- assistance for their children,
- improvement of their work conditions,
- social protection,
- statutory benefits,
- discounts at purchases,
- legal advice and assistance,
- democracy in the union,
- strike funds,
- professionalism,
- loyalty for the members.

Various tasks

The organising issue should be covered during each union meeting on every level. It is good to appoint someone responsible for organising. Who can be perceived as having good potential for organising activity?

It is best if the organising officer is a person:

- having deep knowledge of the history, present situation, aims and objectives of Solidarnosc;
- popular with the workers;
- convincing, trustworthy and having credibility;
- with long professional experience;
- a good listener;
- patient;
- persistent in reaching the aims and strategic objectives;
- able to give advice to others.

Who do you think is a good organising officer in your union?

(Give examples of outstanding organising officers in companies, branches and regions).

Ryszard Lach, the leader of MOZ Solidarnosc PKP (Railways) Tarnowskie Gory: within a year increase from 730 to 1037 union members – this growing tendency is still maintained.

Method: direct talks to workers – “we want to conclude a collective contract; our employer is trying to avoid bargaining; we don’t promise anything, but if there is more of us in the union we have a chance to get more.” The union membership declaration cards – apart from Solidarnosc membership they also define worker’s category. “Why should we organise many unions when we can collectively solve problems for all the worker’s categories?”

Wiesława Buczkowska (Presidium member, Shoe factory ODRA in Olesnica). Out of 1200 employed in the company 840 Solidarnosc are members.

“The organising issue is always on our agenda. Every two weeks – during the shop union meeting every activist reports what he/she has done in this area.

The wages in the company are very low due to its bad financial position. Nevertheless the union found a way to support its members. You can do your shopping with a discount in various shops in the town against the union card with your picture in it.

Romuald Wesolowski (shop steward in PAM company).

The membership in his company was 21% (217 members out of 998 workers).

He sent letters (with enclosed union membership declaration cards) to his members asking them to talk to their colleagues and promote the idea of joining the union.

After the first series of letters 25 workers joined the union. He sent new letters to new members asking them to get their colleagues to join Solidarnosc. New workers joined the union. Now the membership in the company is 25% and half of the members are university teachers.

Let’s have a meeting for organising officers

We should give assistance and set up meetings for the organising officers. They should meet on a permanent basis and exchange both positive and negative experiences. Everybody at such meetings should learn from one another. The organising officers should be provided with updated information and we have to listen very carefully to what they have to say:

- What do the new members discuss?
 - What is depressing to them?
 - When and where do they need the union’s activity?
-
- **Set up a meeting for the organising officers in your company**
 - **Set up a meeting for the organising officers in your branch**
 - **Set up a meeting for the organising officers in your region**
 - **Inform in the union press on the successful organising officers’ activities.**

Recruitment planning on every union level

Company level

Membership on company level should be as high as possible from the union's point of view as well as from the perspective of its members' interests.

Branch level

In some branches the recruitment is within branch organisation, as for example in the teachers' union and health service union.

Regional level

The Regional Management has to develop such forms of its activity which will support organising – through training of the recruitment teams, give them support and inspiration at least by exchange of experience. Regional Management is in particular responsible for setting up new shop organisations. Therefore the Region has extra responsibility – organising in private companies.

It is important to describe the decision making process, planning and implementation not as a one time action but as an everyday activity with clearly allocated responsibility at each stage.

Recruitment and motivation

How should we look at the recruitment process?

- Do you fill in declaration cards, do you keep carefully all the back up documentation and do you confirm payments of the union dues?
- Do you try to encourage, motivate your colleagues, friends presenting them with the advantages of Solidarnosc activity? Do you try to listen and understand the needs of your colleagues?
- What is your attitude to recruitment? Are you open to new ideas and propositions of new members?

On the company level

Who defines the tasks and who is responsible for organising?

One of the first provisions of the Union Act bases on recruitment of the workers in the company or in a region.

The very first concrete tasks of union management and particularly of the chairman is the definition of the task of attracting workers to the union.

The task parameters:

1. a clear and detailed definition;
2. precise numbers which enables reaching the target within a planned time;

The union chairman is responsible for:

- confirmation of the recruitment plan
- union division into specific regions, with one person responsible for union organising

This manual is to be used as a practical support for definition of tasks covering union organising.

What is the company like?

No matter what the company's size or category is it can be divided into regions and areas:

- by function,
- by geographic location
- by workers' background

Try to divide your company into areas.

Department	Number of workers	Union members
Steelworks	85	22
Plating shop	33	8
Assembling	106	71
Storage	61	8

Architecture	28	1
Administration	79	3
Sales	12	2
Total	404	115

Membership: 28%

The division may as well be as follows:

Department	Number of workers	Union members
Section A	114	37
Section B	38	11
Section C	98	21
Total	250	69

Membership: 27%

Or as follows:

Category	Number of workers	Union members
Doctor, specialist	34	8
Doctor	71	14
Student – apprentice	68	2
Nurse	154	51
Apprentice	72	3
Supporting nurse	172	17
Lab	45	33
Cleaner	67	21
Kitchen staff	31	14
Electricians	14	5
Ambulance drivers	22	6
Total	750	174

Membership: 23%

Who is responsible for organising?

- The chairman is personally responsible for the recruitment of new members.
- The chairman has the following responsibilities toward his shop commission:
- He has to submit targets for the recruitment
- He has to divide his company into areas
- He has to collect experience and define directions for setting out solid grounds for recruitment

For the union members in respective areas the chairman is the head who:

1. gives tasks to people responsible for respective areas;
2. monitors results in reference to objectives;
3. provides information to people responsible in respective area;
4. provides opportunities for exchange of experience;
5. provides information to union members who want to get education.

Organising in a company

Department	Responsible	Workers	Union members	Membership %
Steelworks	Andrew, Peter, Mary	85	22	25
Plating shop	John	33	8	24
Assembling	Chris	106	71	67
Storage	Eve, Ann, Tony	21	3	14
Transport	Jack	61	8	13
Architecture	Peter	28	1	
Administration	Theresa	79	3	
Sales	Joanna	12	2	
Total		404	115	

Membership: 28%

- **Make such a review and give its results to the Commission member (at best: during every meeting)!**

What does good recruitment look like?

Recruitment varies from company to company. In one company the organising officer will be a young woman (one of the best in her profession), in others an older gentleman will be more appropriate.

A good organising officer is one who will do a good job for NSZZ Solidarnosc. She/he will feel responsible and will do whatever she/he can.

And:

- is committed to the idea of recruitment,
- is able to listen to other people,
- is calm, provident, far-sighted,
- is patient, persistent,
- is friendly, understanding, accepted by other people,
- is a good professional,
- is convincing and interesting to listen to,
- has a democratic attitude,
- has a strong personality and independent political views.

What work volume can be coped with by a single organising officer?

How many organising officers in one company?

1. One per five workers.
2. One per 10 workers.
3. One per 25 workers.
4. One per 50 workers.

Geography of the company, shop commission, division into regions (sectors) – are significant for success. Make your choice. Divide the regions (sectors) into smaller departments and appoint one person responsible for organising in respective regions, sectors, departments.

Person responsible for organising -tasks

He makes a list of workers in respective group jointly with the chairman.

Name	Solidarnosc member	Other union member	Non-member
Tony	X		
Eve	X		
Chris	X		
Tessa		X	
Jane		X	
Mary		X	
Meg			X
Paul			X
Peter			X
Charles			X

We start with a new worker from the very beginning – asking him if he would like to join the union.

There is a total of 10 workers. There will be a new one starting on Monday so we will be eleven. Our target is to get 6 new members within 6 months.

We start on Monday with a personal approach. The chairman is not sure if Tony is the most appropriate person for the task. Tony is not confident enough, he is not sure if he can manage discussion with the new colleague. But Tony is on good terms with Eve and Chris. They have been working together for quite a long time. Tony decides to talk to Eve and Chris about the task on Monday morning. When they meet him the decision will be taken on who is to approach him. They will then decide in what way his new colleague will be approached during the coffee break. They will probably say that there are already three union members in this area and that they will be happy to welcome a new one giving him a union declaration card.

Chris will be next. Politically he has always been on our side. It is a symptom of sheer laziness that he hasn't joined the union yet. We will invite him for the evening at Eve's place. Chris is her husband's old friend, it will be easier to convince him that we really need him. Besides he might be helpful in making Paul join the union. Paul has always been looking with great respect at Chris so it will be quite natural for him to recruit Paul through Chris.

At present we will leave Tessa, Mary and Jane alone. They are still very young and think that the chairman of this other union organisation is a George Michael. He may well look like George Michael all right but we will wait and see when the young girls' expectations are not fulfilled. When he lets them down we'll be there for them and that's why Tony always has three declaration cards in his pocket!

John will have to learn his lesson because he has never shown any sign of solidarity to anybody. Besides he is said to be a bit of a racist.

Nobody knows Peter well enough. He has always been pretty introvert but we know that he is very good at his job. It's a pleasure to work with him. But there is nobody brave enough to approach him on joining union.

Nevertheless our objective will be met: six new members within six months. Are the other areas as successful? If so we have doubled the membership which has strengthened us and now we can set new objectives.

Tips for the organising officer

- Be systematic. Be calm.
- Think carefully – who should join the union as the first one? Who might be the easiest one to recruit? Where will you begin?
- Personal contact. Face to face. This is your most important tool.
- Listen carefully, if you are a good listener people will come to you themselves and tell you what arguments are there to be used to approach candidates.

- Never use arguments which seems weak to you. Don't use clichés, be specific. Don't say what should be important for workers and what shouldn't.
- Be active during important union meetings and encourage your union colleagues to come too.
- You should really fight whenever you hear that someone is going to leave the union. Try to make him talk to the union leaders.
- Come to the union meetings, discuss your problem with other organising officers and share experience with them.

What is to be expected from union officers responsible for recruitment?

They should:

- make a review of workers in the company as a whole and of every specific areas;
- make a review of the union organisation as whole;
- define objectives for the company and for the respective areas;
- select organising officers;
- keep training and have deep knowledge of the union objectives;
- arrange meetings for the organising officers;
- provide the organising officers with possibilities of development their skills and of experience exchange;
- welcome every new member in the union and provide them with information on union targets and its activity, the services which every member can get from the union;
- discuss recruitment matters and its progress during every union meeting.

Welcoming procedure

The welcoming procedure is a very good concept to develop.

It is important to welcome each new members by providing him with information on union office hours, on union officers whom she/he might meet there on union tasks, union representatives in the region and about the date of the upcoming union meeting.

Such a welcome will show the union's respect for each member and for her/his decision to join this very union.

Leaving the union

It is possible only upon approval from the union chairman. The chairman's responsibility is to listen to the member who wishes to leave the union.

The chairman may be assisted by an organising officer but it is the chairman's task to talk to such a member and listen carefully to his reasons.

The chairman should at this point present arguments for remaining in the union and suggest staying for a couple of months thus giving an opportunity for the union to explain all possible misunderstandings which might have given a false union image.

What to expect from the organising officer?

Every new worker will be welcomed personally by the organising officer on her/his very first day at work. The organising officer will suggest joining the union and will see to it that the new worker returns a filled declaration card. Thus the organising officer gets information for the files.

The organising officer defines in what order new workers should be approached.

The organising officer must be familiar with the union's policy and explain its reasons to the members from the workplace perspective.

The organising officer initiates the discussion concerning the professional issues at the workplace and will submit the conclusion to the union's regional bodies.

The organising officer provides information on new actions and trends in the union.

Who should approach whom?

- We always try to get organising officers of the same kind that their target group is, i.e.:
- Young people should recruit young people
- Engineers recruit engineers
- Administration staff recruit administration staff
- Welders recruit welders.

Even our declaration card has been developed for each branch/category accordingly.

Following the union development such groups make sub-committees – category sections.

Example from the company level

It is important for shop commissions to deal with recruitment issues on every union meeting and to assign people responsible for organising. It is also important to divide the company by the site's location and professional categories. Training, information and providing motivation for those in charge of organising is the commission's responsibility.

Example:

Andrew – shop organising officer

Company: Szczecin Shipyard

Structure: multi-division company

Category environment: multi-functional, multi-category

The workers' community has been divided into two basic groups:

I – blue-collar workers

II – white-collar workers

and into regions. Andrew appointed two union members in charge of recruitment in every sector (taking into consideration the specific conditions due to shift work organisation).

Andrew's report:

STAGE I

(preliminary planning of the objectives and getting basic materials)

A

Prior to the first meeting I prepared:

Analysis charts:

- union membership in respective sectors with plans for perspective organising,
- company's current structure,
- sector's scheme within the company's organisation,
- members name list by region and by division,
- detailed list of membership by every company's sector,
- suggestions and draft of union monthly magazine.

B

I have appointed a time and place for the first meeting of regional organising officers.

STAGE II

1. The first meeting

OBJECTIVES:

- to implement the union's organising plan

ISSUES TO BE COVERED:

- to make those responsible for union organising familiar with the draft of union organising plan – discussion,
- to set up long-term plans for union organising (for six months period, year period and by the end of election term),
- to discuss the methods which seem the most effective by now with consideration of the regional community,
- definition of deadlines and address for feedback information (co-ordinator to organising officers; organising officers to co-ordinator),
- definition of how often follow-up meetings should be held.

2. The second meeting

OBJECTIVES:

- confirmation of the objectives as they were adopted during the first meeting and programme follow up.

ISSUES TO BE COVERED:

- analysis of membership numbers and percentage by region from the programme's implementation,
- discussion on the results achieved by each individual organising officer.

STAGE III

PLAN ADJUSTMENT IN SITUATION OF CHANGING EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

Discussion with the perspective union member

OBJECTIVES:

- to create dialogue possibilities enabling to increase workers' willingness to join the union.

ISSUES:

- work conditions, negative and positive aspects,
- work – positive and negative aspects of the current work and pay system,
- the current knowledge and assessment of the main problem within workers' community,

METHODS:

- direct contact with the worker by her/his workplace,
- conversation aimed at identifying worker's problem,
- contact with the worker outside her/his workplace.

The first questions are to set up mutual trust and understanding which will enable the worker to articulate her/his problems.

If as a result of such conversation the worker identifies the problems we have to answer the following questions:

Is the union able to solve the identified problems?

If the answer is YES – so how?; in what way?

Can she/he contribute during a meeting of workers with similar problems?

If the answer is YES – could she/he possibly convince others of the importance of organising if she/he joined the union herself/himself?

If the answer is YES – we hand the membership declaration card asking to fill in.

If the worker says that she/he wants to think it over – we patiently wait for the feedback.

THE WORKER JOINS THE UNION

We should always keep up the discussion when the worker is filling her/his declaration card. The discussion's aim is to get to know her/him better and provide her/him with the relevant information.

If this is taking place in the union shop office such discussion is to be done by the organising officer assisted by the chairman or by the chairman herself/himself.

The new member gets:

Solidarnosc by laws,

Union pin and union materials.

Besides she/he is provided with information on:

- the union structure,
- who is the shop chairman (depending on the structure, who is the division's chairman)
- what is the union's role in the company,
- range of union's possible assistance.

Branch level

The health service units are spread all over the region. We have divided them into city units and country units and geographically into the southern and northern part of Poland. We hold meetings in every unit on a regular basis where our union representatives discuss various workers' problems and share with their experience.

Each workers' category has its own specific problems – nurses, doctors, back-up personnel, administration.

Our objective is to have all these categories unionised in Solidarnosc. We are looking for the leaders in each category because they have the best contact with the workers, they know their problems, needs and ambitions. They are aware of the importance of being represented by a large group of workers in every category.

We discuss membership issues and union position in the company during every meeting. We share with them our experience on organising. We try to show them how, due to increased membership, we have managed to deal with problems which had always seemed to be unsolvable. We discuss what can be achieved by strengthening the union on every level.

We are looking for ways to approach the workers- so that they can tell us about their problems which we will solve together.

How we have burnt our fingers with our best organising officer

“She was a strong, charismatic personality. Everybody wanted to follow her steps. When she decided to become a union leader we had very high hopes for her. And she didn’t let us down. She recruited 100 new members which resulted in almost 90% membership.

Everybody was very happy about her activity and she was thought to be the best organising officer in the region. But after a while we started to get grudges: “When do we get our money”. We got suspicious. It turned out that our “best organising officer” was so successful only because she would promise that the new members would be given back their union dues with some surplus within 6 months. No wonder she was so effective. Not only have we lost a very good leader but also workers’ trust which can take years to restore. It was the price we paid for increased membership which lasted not longer than a couple of months.

Our voice is important

“We felt helpless, our union represented a small number of workers in the company and the management would neglect us. We were never able to deal successfully even with minor issues.

We decided to discuss it with the union members. We never suspected that one meeting could trigger off a dramatic change in our position. After the meeting our union was growing with every new week and finally we got 40% membership. Those were the union members who recruited their colleagues.

At present our problems are being solved. We have a strong position at the bargaining table and our voice is important in every issue we cover.

Branch level

Objectives: organising in companies where Solidarnosc has its shop commissions.

The Regional Board is responsible for:

- Total recruitment in the region, in each commission and on other levels (for example in branches);

- Interpretation of membership statistics for submitting proposals and for getting feedback from the shop commissions;
- Membership increase in the commissions and for the entire strategy in the region.

The objectives of the Region for the year 2000 might be defined as: we would like to keep at least 50% of the present membership. Or: For the year 2000 we plan to have at least 200 shop commissions and membership not less than 75% of the present membership. The region is responsible for giving support to the commissions within the education activity.

Objectives for the new members and for the new commissions

The Regional Board should appoint a special task group to deal with the delegation of shop commission registration (both new and old ones) in the region, appointment of recruitment groups in the new companies and looking for new organising officers.

What may happen

I had a bad luck: I recruited four new members.

“I was holding a meeting and 100 workers came to it. I have never ever in my entire life felt so humiliated. It was a disaster. I will never again deal with recruitment.

I was very successful: I recruited four new members.

“I was holding a meeting and 100 workers came to it. They listened very carefully and four workers joined union. Great people. It’s a fine beginning. Now I feel encouraged and will keep on my recruitment activity.

Conclusion

10 tips for most effective recruitment

2. Let's not forget the Solidarnosc concept

We have to keep in mind that the members make a part of solution and not problem for Solidarnosc.

Let's treat the union members as members and not as objects.

3. We have measurable, clearly defined targets for organising activity

We know that we are doing our best to make it as simple as possible and to find ways and alternative solutions which may enable us to develop skills and recruitment methods of those in charge of organising.

4. Prejudices must be forgotten

We know that these are people, and only people who we want to recruit. You have to forget all your prejudices –“he is this or that”- you have to remember that people are the same no matter what the differences are. If we share the same problems in the workplace, have the same ambitions or aspirations why don't we try to solve the problems together and to fulfill our dreams together?

5. Face to face

We shouldn't hide behind slogans, booklets, leaflets. We should talk face to face as friends or colleagues or just like human beings. We are not different from people we talk to. Maybe they will contribute to finding a solution to our problems if they only are interested and if they really want it.

6. Talk in a simple, clear way

We have to explain things in a clear, simple way, we have to be very straight about our plans for now and for tomorrow. If they join us –what they can expect tomorrow, what future they might have, how much it is going to cost, how and where they can join us. They should get all these answers from us.

7. You have to make all the union organisation support your activity

Explain to your union colleagues in the company, in the region: what you deal with, why you do it and in what way they should be supporting you. You have to repeat it many, many times and you have to keep in your mind that they are also quite busy, just like you. So if you make them listen to you it will be the same effort you make when you try to recruit people however it the benefit will be a bit different.

8. Be prepared

It will be really terrific if you manage to recruit new members but you must be really aware of how to do it and what you are doing it for. You have to choose union members who will understand your activity and who will be willing to support you and to meet other people, talk to them and make them do something.

9. Keep up working no matter what the results might be for the time being

Sometimes it might take years to recruit someone but if you really “feel it” you will never quit, you will be satisfied by talking to other people, by having contact with other people.

10. Find out explanations by yourself

Don't rely entirely on the explanation which you are given. One more important thing: you should never exaggerate with your explanations and promises. Never promise more than you and your union can give. If you have recruited a new member it means that you have to make sure that the promises you have given on behalf of our union will be kept.

11. Set new values

Inevitably you will make a lot of mistakes during organising, during your recruitment activity. Each union member and each organising officer has a unique personality which means that you will have to work out as many methods as many people you want to recruit. Be honest with yourself. Stand in front of the mirror and ask yourself: “Am I really able to convince anybody? –Will they accept what I have to tell them? –Will they have any use of it? –What should I do?”