



WHAT'S THE REAL PROBLEM?

Your workplace may feel like it's bogged down in “apathy,” but under the surface, there's always something else going on. Here are some ways to understand what looks like apathy and respond to it.

“NO ONE SEEMS TO CARE.”

What's going on: Everyone cares about something—but the something might not be what you expect.

- The issue you're focused on might not be a priority for your co-worker.
- She might feel strongly about other issues that haven't caught your attention.
- She might assume her problem isn't your issue, or isn't a union issue.

What to do: Listen.

- Pick a few co-workers you'd like to know better. Make a point of talking with them to find out what's on their minds.
- Show respect and understanding for the issues your co-workers care about, and they'll be more likely to do the same for you.

“IT'S HARD TO SEE HOW THINGS COULD CHANGE.”

What's going on: Your co-workers don't believe that they have power—yet.

- Most people have always
- Most people have always felt powerless and disorganized at work. They've never felt strength in numbers.
- Problems seem too big to tackle.
- The boss has cemented the idea that his decisions are final.

What to do: Inspire your co-workers. Show them that change is possible if you work together.

- Bring people together. Group support can help build hope.
- Start small. Look for fights you can win with the people you have on board so far. When a tiny campaign gets results, more people will be drawn in, and their confidence will grow.
- Develop a credible plan to win. Ask, “What solution are we proposing?” “Who in management has the authority to say yes?” “What could we do together to get that person to say yes?”
- Share stories of tactics that have worked elsewhere.



“NO ONE’S WILLING TO DO ANYTHING.”

What’s going on: Many people won’t initiate activity, but they might respond if asked directly by someone they trust.

What to do: Figure out small, specific requests. Approach co-workers personally.

- Respect the time constraints in your co-workers’ lives.
- Show lots of appreciation for anything they’re willing to do.
- Make it clear that any victories were won by the whole team.

“NO ONE COMES TO MEETINGS.”

What’s going on: People won’t be motivated to come unless they feel their participation matters.

- If a meeting is just to “get information,” it’s easy to skip it.
- An email or a notice on the bulletin board usually won’t inspire people to attend.

What to do: Give your co-workers meaningful roles. Let them know how their presence or absence will affect issues they care about.

- Make the meeting pleasant and productive. Prepare a clear agenda, a time limit, and a reason to attend, such as a hot issue.
- Face-to-face invitations are best. Divide up your workplace and find several other people to share the work of inviting people individually.
- Consider the practical things that can make meetings more accessible: scheduling, location, childcare, translation, transportation.
- Be flexible. Sometimes people simply can’t make it to meetings, but they can still play crucial roles in organizing while they’re at work.

