



## APATHY ISN'T REAL

The first attitude adjustment an organizer needs is to get over the idea that co-workers don't care—that your workplace is bogged down in “apathy.”

It's a common gripe. In Labor Notes workshops we often ask union members to make a list of the reasons why people don't get involved where they work. Typical answers include:

- Lack of time.
- Don't know how to do it.
- The union is not open; there's no easy way in.
- Conflicts between groups.
- Conflicts between individuals.
- My co-workers feel that nothing will change.
- They think everyone *else* is apathetic.
- They're looking for individual solutions.
- And the big one: fear.

Sound familiar? It might feel like your co-workers don't care. But push a little bit, and that's never really true.

Everyone cares about something at work. Just about everyone cares about their wages, for instance. Everyone wants respect. No one's indifferent to whether their shift is miserable. It's impossible not to care.

Could it be that your workplace is the one in a million where everything's fine? Maybe your co-workers are completely secure about their jobs, love their supervisors, make excellent money with terrific benefits, have no worries about downsizing or layoffs, face no health hazards, and are confident about their retirement. If so—put down this book and get another hobby!

Everyone cares about something at work.

But it's more likely that people are scared to say anything, or feel powerless.

They might say everything is fine because they don't believe it can change, or they can't imagine it being different, or they assume the problem they care about isn't a “union issue.” Organizing is the antidote.



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Remember Maria Martínez’s co-workers at the meatpacking plant? Most had never been to a union meeting—but they did care that their supervisors were harassing them. They just didn’t think they could do anything about it. Once they saw people organizing to tackle the problem, they wanted to get involved.

So when you’re assessing why more people haven’t stepped up to take on the boss, it’s important to find out the actual reasons. You have to diagnose the problem before you can write the prescription.

It’s not apathy—but what is it?

You have to diagnose the problem before you can write the prescription.

Step back from your frustration and look at things from an organizing perspective. This chart shows five common problems and how you can help your co-workers get past them:

### HOW THE BOSS KEEPS US DISORGANIZED

The boss relies on...	The organizer...	Co-workers find...
... <b>fear</b> of conflict and retaliation.	...taps into <b>righteous anger</b> about workplace injustices.	...the <b>courage</b> and determination to act.
... <b>hopelessness</b> , the feeling that things can't change and we have no power.	...helps develop a <b>plan to win</b> , and shares examples of victories elsewhere.	... <b>hope</b> that change is possible and worth fighting for.
... <b>division</b> , pitting workers against each other.	...identifies <b>common ground</b> and builds relationships.	... <b>unity</b> to act together.
... <b>confusion</b> , passing around messages that will alarm or distract us.	... <b>interprets</b> and shares information, fitting it into a bigger picture.	... <b>clarity</b> to see through the boss's plan.
... <b>inaction</b> , since problems can't be solved, so why bother?	... <b>mobilizes</b> co-workers to do something together.	...that action gets <b>results</b> and solves problems.



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