



CHOOSE AN ISSUE THAT'S WINNABLE

It's hard to know for sure whether you *will* win, but it's possible to have a good idea whether you *can*.

“If you are a new group, you want to err on the side of choosing an easy issue,” says organizer Marsha Niemeijer. “You want to bring more people in, so you need to have a win, to inspire those who will be skeptical. You want people to learn that they can make a difference.”

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So your group should match your demand to the power you've already got. Ask these questions:

- **What do we want?** You need to agree on a definition of what a “win” is, so your group should talk early on about what you consider an acceptable solution, including compromises.
- **Who can say yes?** Assess exactly who can fix the problem. Is it a lower-level manager, or that manager's boss, or is it the CEO? “If it's the CEO,” Niemeijer says, “you've got a long way to go.” Managers' personalities, past history, prejudices, and stubbornness will come into this assessment, too.



Stand Up to Verizon

- **For the decision-maker, what's the price of saying yes?** Consider the dollars and cents, but also how much the manager has riding on the issue politically or personally. Is this an issue that she feels strongly about and wouldn't want to lose face over? If she gave in, would it cause her other problems?

Could you imagine her giving in simply so that workers would stop bugging her? You might be surprised how often managers have some wiggle room. They just haven't been pressed on the issue.

Have workers in other departments ever won on this issue? If so, you have a precedent.

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Management gave in and the sky didn't fall. How did those workers win?

- **How high can you push the price of saying no?** How many people will be willing to do something, and how far will those people go? Take into account who's affected by the problem, how strongly they feel about it, what actions they've taken in the past, and whether the relevant leaders are on board with your plan.

To win, you'll need to make it harder for the decision-maker to keep saying no than to say yes. Would that take five people marching into the office together, 25 signing a petition, or a majority threatening to strike? The more pressure you can bring to bear, the more issues will become winnable.

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THE MONEY WAS THERE

A public employee union in New Jersey was negotiating a first contract for group-home workers who made \$9 an hour. They found out that the state government, which funded the group homes, had budgeted \$1 an hour to raise workers' pay.

The money was there—but management hadn't passed it along. That gave the workers confidence that they could win. They made up a chant about the director of the program, a Mr. Diminot, and protested outside management's offices:

"Hi ho, Dimonot, we've been looking high and low. Our dollar, where is our dollar?"

During a softball game that managers participated in, workers organized a scavenger hunt for the dollar. They pinned a dollar to their shirts and wore them to work on Solidarity Fridays. Together, they filled out charts of things they would have done if they had gotten the dollar, and faxed them to management.

When the contract was signed, workers did not get a dollar—they got \$1.60.