

7 STEPS FOR

**ORGANIZING
YOUR
WORKPLACE**



RESTAURANT WORKERS UNION
SINDICATO DE TRABAJADORES DE RESTAURANTES

RWU-STR is a democratic, independent union that approaches organizing in a manner entirely different than that of the bureaucratic unions. In particular, we involve workers at every step of the process. Mobilizing workers is not simply something we encourage: it is something we expect. A union gives workers power because it unifies workers in a disciplined manner. RWU-STR members are expected carry out the decisions of the elected PLC. At the beginning of a unionization campaign, RWU-STR members organizing their shop are required to do the following:

(1) Form an Organizing Committee (OC)

Begin with trusted individuals in favor of unionizing. Reach out to coworkers outside working hours and away from the restaurant. Talk to them in the **simplest possible language**, assuming they have no idea what a union does and why workers should unionize.

The OC must have **regular, in-person meetings**. If there is no single time all workers can meet, then the OC should have staggered meetings. In no case can a text or email thread serve as a substitute for in-person meetings.

The OC **should include an outside RWU-STR member who will serve as a link to the Provisional Leading Committee (PLC)**. This will provide for a more disciplined and less “personal” process of organizing the shop, and it will allow the PLC to debate problems that arise in the campaign from a position of familiarity with the dynamics of the struggle.

(2) Map the workplace

Note individuals who are for the union, opposed to the union, and wavering. Determine the level of job commitment of those in favor of unionizing, and try to secure a promise to remain at the job until the union is established. Keep all plans from anti-union individuals who could compromise the effort.

Note “weak” areas of the restaurant that need to be brought on board. This can be entirely a matter of having weak links, e.g., if the OC members are all FOH workers, there will need to be an effort to find pro-union BOH workers. It can also be a matter of objective attitudes, e.g., if waiters and bartenders are highly paid, or if BOH workers are highly skilled and view their jobs as training for the future business they plan to open, they may be less likely to be pro-union.

The task of the OC is fundamentally **to win over the wavering workers** and secure a majority in the workplace who are committed to struggling for the establishment of the union.

(3) Meet with wavering individuals

The OC should listen to coworkers' experiences before explaining the benefit of unionizing. Do not reveal the unionization effort until you determine trustworthiness. If a worker seems pro-management, change the topic.

(4) Determine a list of demands

The list of demands should include the demands of workers from all sections of the restaurant. It should also be the result of **extensive debate**. Some demands are anti-worker, for example: productivity bonuses, management promotion schemes, lateness fines, and stock options for workers. Other demands may be trivial, e.g., asking management to make sure coffee stirrers are stocked.

It is the **duty** of the RWU-STR members on the OC to struggle against backwards and trivial demands. When assessing a given demand, we must always ask: is this demand in the **fundamental** interests of the workers? For example, stock options may be in the **immediate** interests of workers, since they can be a source of income, but they blur the line between worker and owner, giving workers a stake in increasing their own exploitation. Another example: a management promotion scheme might improve the life of the worker promoted to management, but the job of a union is not to **exit** the working class, but to struggle to improve our conditions **as workers**.

(5) Sign RWU-STR cards

Union cards are legally binding documents, authorizing the union to represent the worker for the purpose of collective bargaining with the employer. If you tell a worker the card is only to hold the election, and not be a part of the bargaining unit, the NLRB may reject the card. Cards must be signed and dated within six months of filing a petition for a union election. Do not make offers or promise incentives in return for support, which can be used by the boss to challenge petitions.

The **RWU-STR member** should **only have cards signed once the workers understand unions in general and the project of the RWU-STR in particular**. The workers must be convinced that the RWU-STR will better serve their interests than will the bureaucratic unions.

(6) Determine when to “go public”

At a small restaurant with high turnover, waiting until 70%+ of workers sign cards may be best. Going public makes illegal retaliation harder, since the efforts are publicly documented. Going public allows the union to win public support, picket, get out the vote, and openly advertise meetings. But note that recognition pickets can only last 30 days without filing an election petition.

(7) The pre-election struggle

After petitioning for an NLRB election, **the OC *must* then organize a public campaign in support of the union.** This can include pickets around demands, publicizing problems at the restaurant via the distribution of literature, and holding rallies. Workers should reach out to other workers in the same company or restaurant group. Regardless of the specific activities undertaken, **all workers in the OC should actively participate in planning actions.**

The RWU-STR members on the OC **must** explain that this is a long struggle, and that even after victory, workers will need to organize a fierce struggle for the contract. A union is **not** simply a matter of winning an election and letting union bureaucrats and lawyers do the work for you via backroom negotiations.

