

# **School for Workers**

Education for a  
Democratic Workplace

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**International Association of Fire Fighters**

# **Building a More Effective Union**

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**School for Workers,  
Continuing Education, Outreach and E-Learning.  
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## **BUILDING A MORE EFFECTIVE UNION**

### **INTERVIEWS**

Please interview a partner (preferably someone you do not know), exploring the following questions with him or her. You will be asked to share some of your discoveries with the group.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Position in Union: \_\_\_\_\_ How long? \_\_\_\_\_

*1. What unique contributions do you bring to your union work?*

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*2. What do you consider your biggest success as an activist, so far?*

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*3. What do you hope to accomplish in your Union/your Union role?*

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*4. Where do you want your Union to be three years from now?*

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# VISION

## Identifying and Working From Strengths

As we move into the future, we want to take the best of our past with us, and create the future we desire. The first step of this process is to discover the best of what is. The goal is to identify and learn about the best, so that we can increase it and/or emphasize it. By identifying the best from the past to take into the future, we also use the best of our past to shape the future.



Lessons about this approach come from quantum physics, medicine, sports, business, and psychology.

- The questions we ask are “fateful”.
- *Change begins at the moment you ask the question.*
- Organizations are an “open book” – they are not static, they are not finished, and they can be changed.
- Deep change = change in active images of the future.
- *The more positive the question, the greater and longer-lasting the change.*

### Finding the Best: the Process of Inquiry

- ❖ **High points:** “a perfect day ...” “a time when ...”
- ❖ **Valuing:** *Self and Work*
- ❖ **Positive Images of the Future:** *Creating The Organization You Want*
  - ✓ “You wake up to perfect organization ....” “What would it look like if ....”

### Key Considerations

- Organizations move in the direction of inquiry
- Involve those who have an important stake in the future
- Involve the whole system to the extent possible.
- Everyone is an active participant
  - Diversity is essential.
  - Vocabulary is important — words create worlds.
  - People commit to topics they have helped develop.

## Group Discussion

### Engaging Members

If we are going to engage members, we need to think about what needs to be done, what we want them to do, and what *they* want to do. Presumably, we want to build more effective unions. What would that look like?



In small groups, please consider the following questions and be prepared to summarize and share the results of your deliberations. You may wish to choose a scribe and a recorder; you will be asked to share the results of your discussion.

1. **What makes an effective union?** (think primarily of your own local, and, if you have time, consider regional and national bodies as well). Also, think about how you might be able to *measure* effectiveness. What indicators of effectiveness might you consider? How do you know a union is effective? Would others judge effectiveness in the same way?

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2. Did your discussion encompass a **vision** of an effective union or *goals* from the previous discussion? What do you think is the role of vision in union effectiveness?

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# UNION EFFECTIVENESS<sup>1</sup>

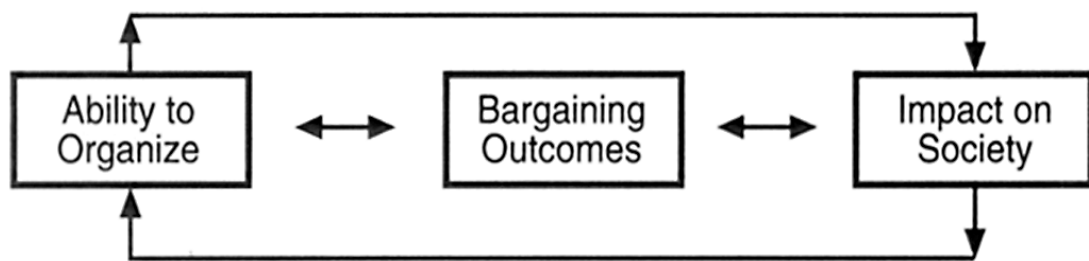
As Paul Clark notes in his book, *Building More Effective Unions*, “Union effectiveness is a highly complex, dynamic concept.” Extensive research identifies three general measures by which to judge the effectiveness of labor organizations:

- ✓ the union’s ability to organize new members;
- ✓ the outcomes of its collective bargaining efforts; and
- ✓ the union’s effect on society as a whole.



Note that these three factors are inter-related, so that they can be represented as follows:

**Figure 1.1** What Makes an Effective Union?



## 1. Ability to Organize

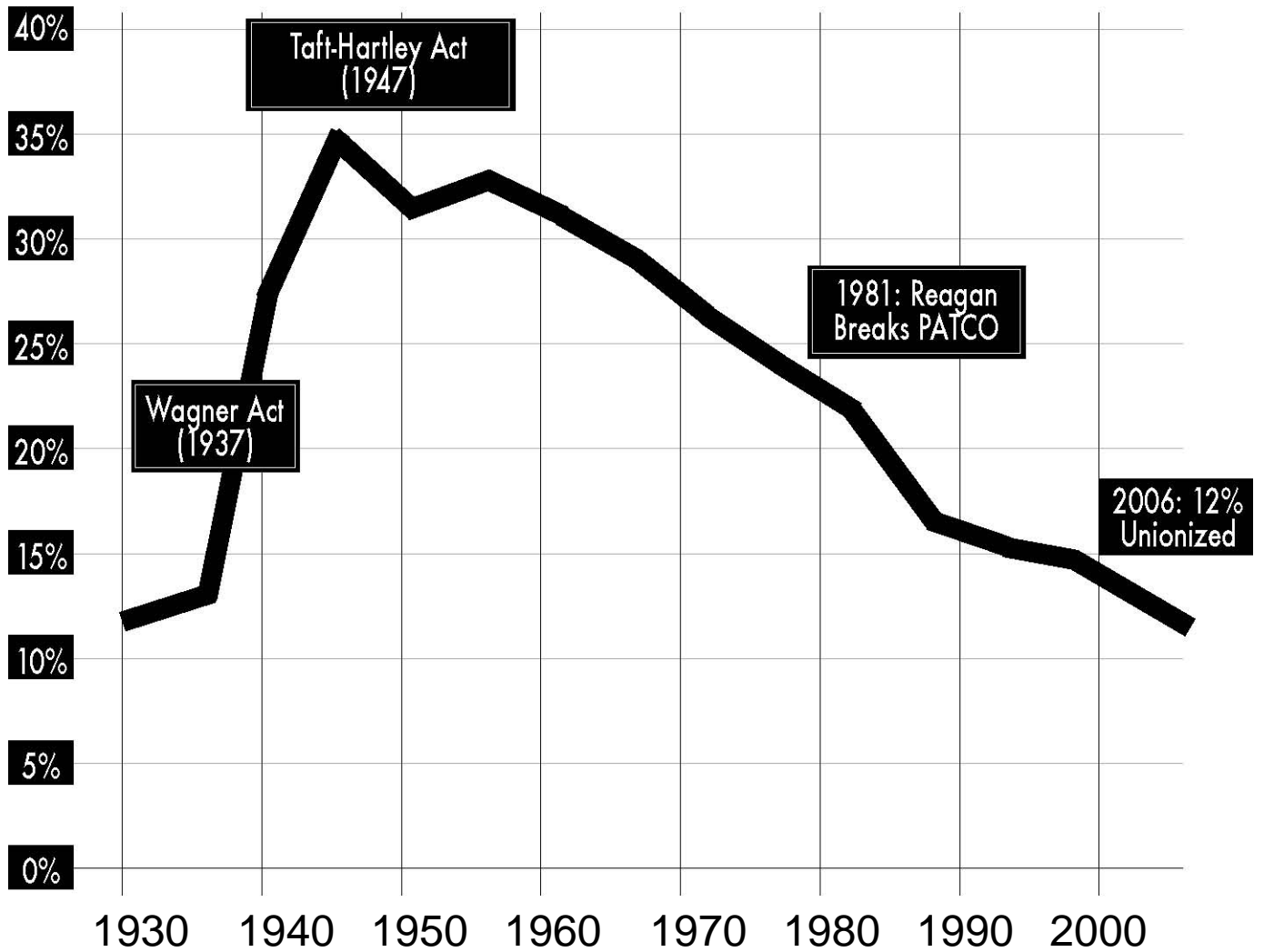
Over a third of the non-agricultural workforce was organized in 1946. That figure has now dropped to under 13%. How are we doing with respect to our ability to organize?



<sup>1</sup> Clark, Paul. *Building More Effective Unions*. ILR Press, Cornell, 2000.

# Percentage of the Workforce in a Union, 1930-2006

*Anti-union policies weakened the power  
and voice of workers*



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

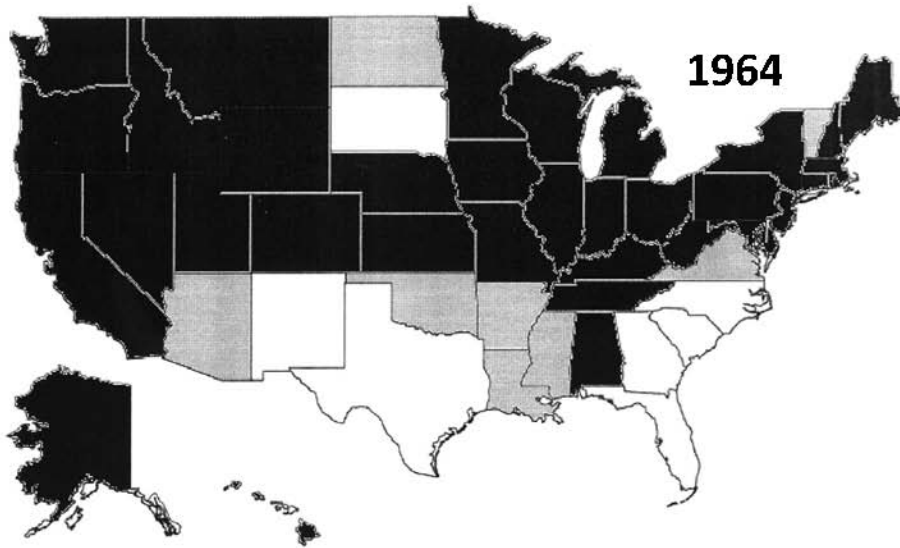


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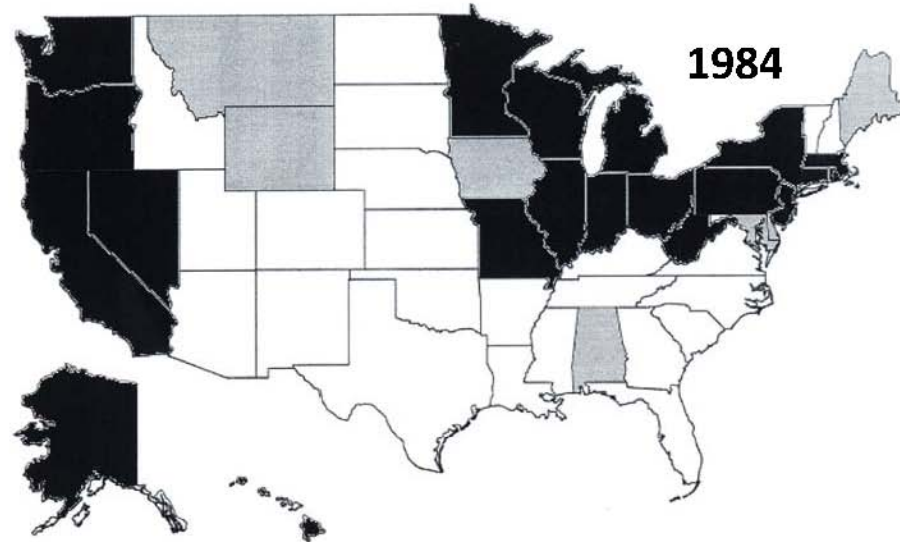
E-MAIL: [info@faireconomy.org](mailto:info@faireconomy.org)  
WEB: [www.faireconomy.org](http://www.faireconomy.org)

# UNION DENSITY IN THE UNITED STATES

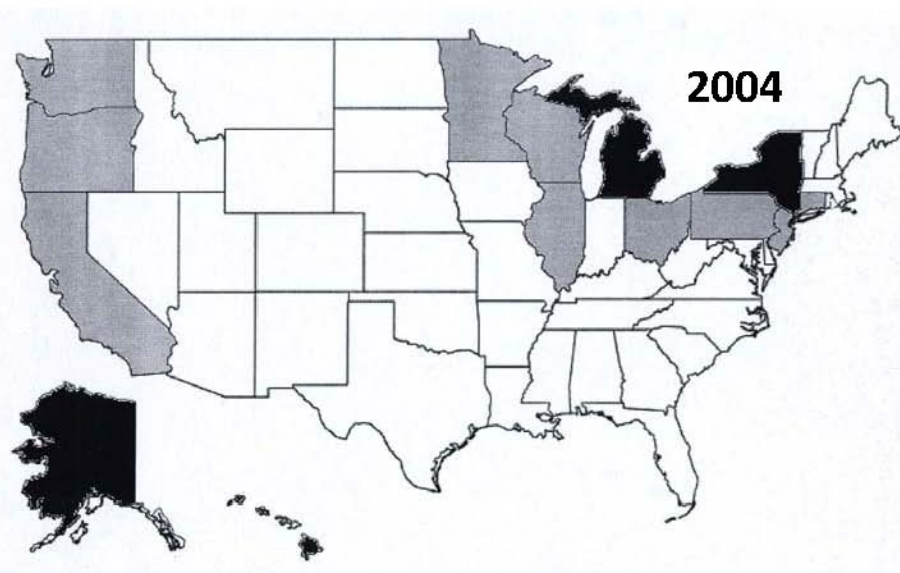


**BLACK**  
State with 20% or greater union density

**GRAY**  
State with 15-19% union density



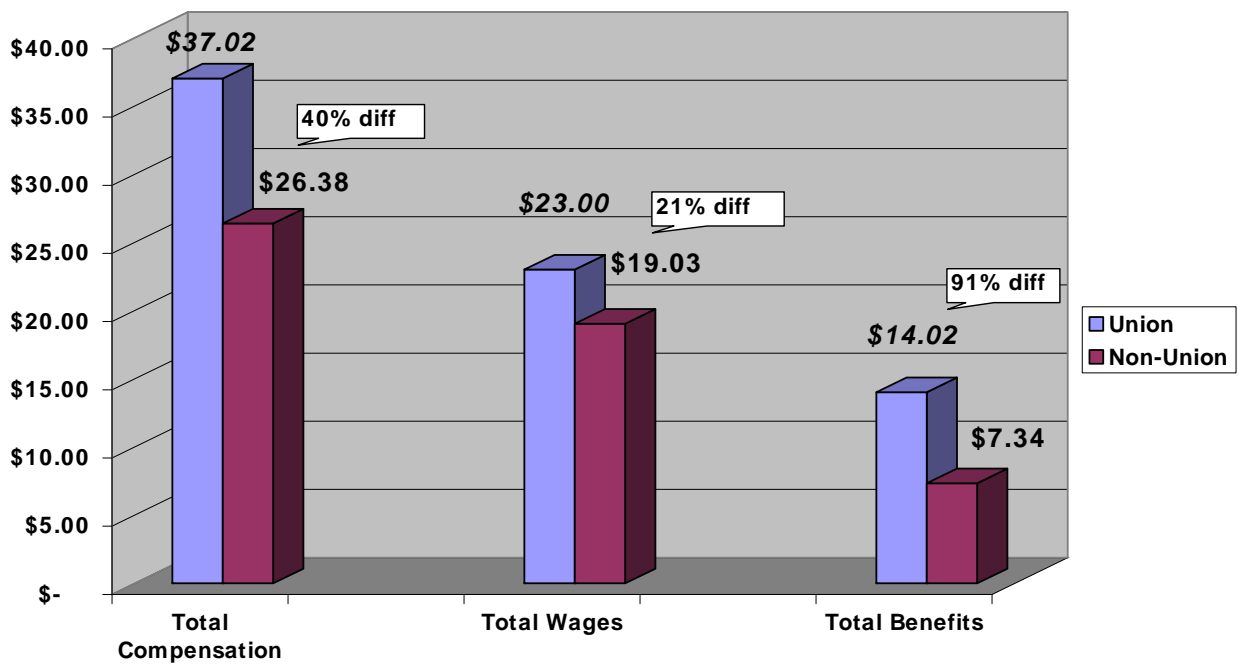
**WHITE**  
State with 14% or less union density



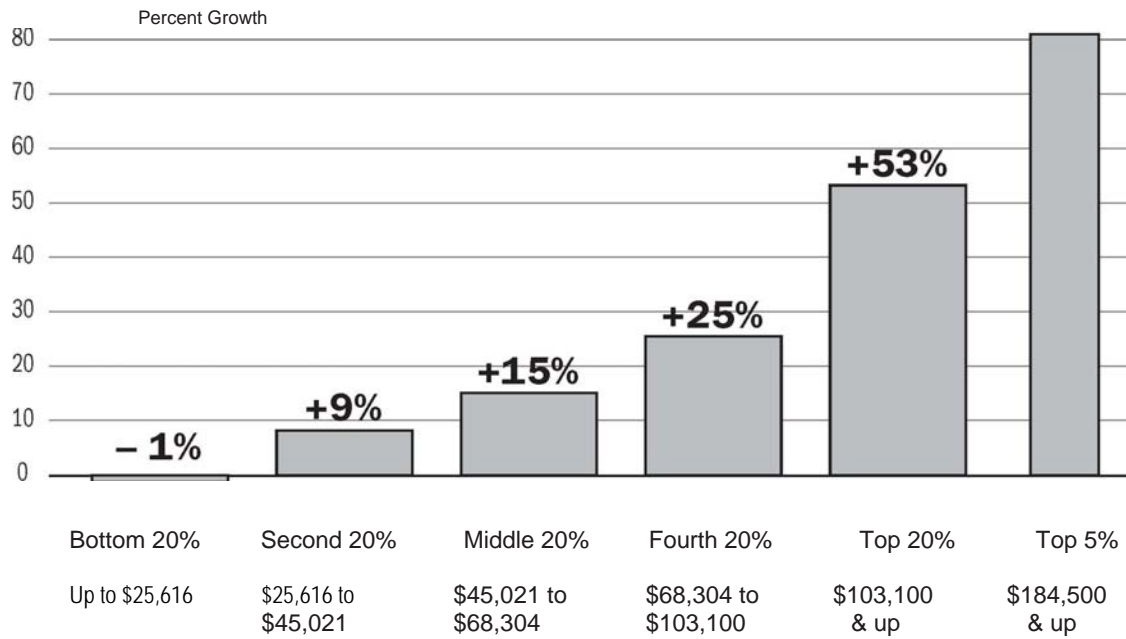
## 2. Collective Bargaining Outcomes

Union wages are typically higher than nonunion wages. The union wage advantage has been measured as anywhere between 11% and 33%, but if we consider the real cost of living, wages have stagnated over the past thirty years. How would you rate collective bargaining outcomes?

**Average Wage & Benefit Cost  
Union and Non Union  
Private Industry Workers, Sept 2009**



## Family Income Growth by Quintile & Top 5%: 1979 - 2005



**Source:** U.S. Census Bureau, Historical Income Tables, Table F-1. Income ranges in 2005 dollars.

## Additional considerations:

In addition to making gains in collective bargaining, we also need to enforce the contract.

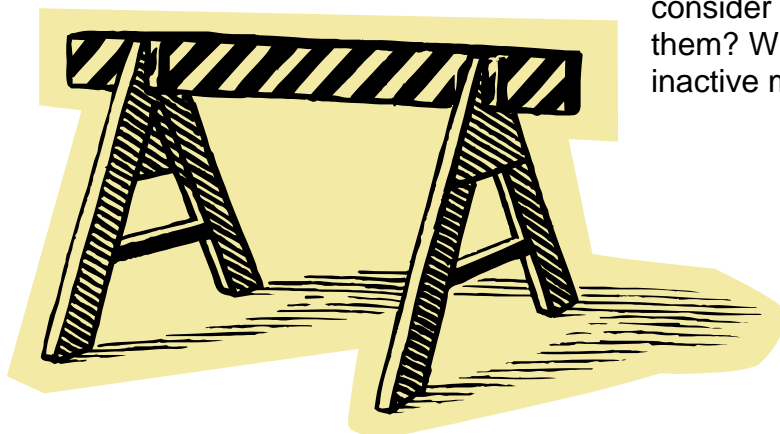
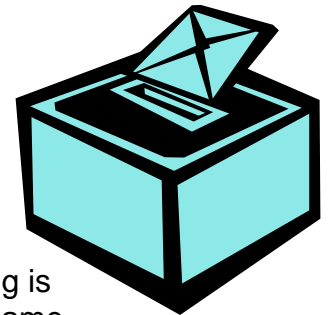
### 1. Members' Expectations

Collective bargaining outcomes also go beyond whether unions improve wages, benefits and working conditions. What is also important is the relationship between people's needs and expectations and the gains achieved. So, it is important to make gains, but gains must be in the "right" areas, as judged by the members – and members will have a variety of opinions and priorities. Union effectiveness, therefore, also depends on the union's ability to assess people's needs and to meet them.



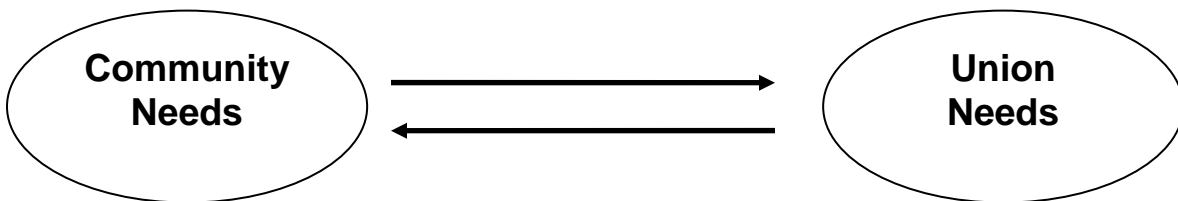
### 2. Union Democracy

Clark also notes the importance of union democracy. "It is also argued that democratic practices help to mobilize members, 'unearth' and train potential leaders, and check corruption and incompetence (Strauss, 1999; Summers, 1999)". How democratic are our unions? Could being more inclusive "unearth" potential leaders? How welcoming is our union? How inclusive? Are we missing opportunities by doing the same things in the same ways? What **barriers** do new or inactive members experience if they consider getting involved? Have we asked them? What do we tend to assume about inactive members?



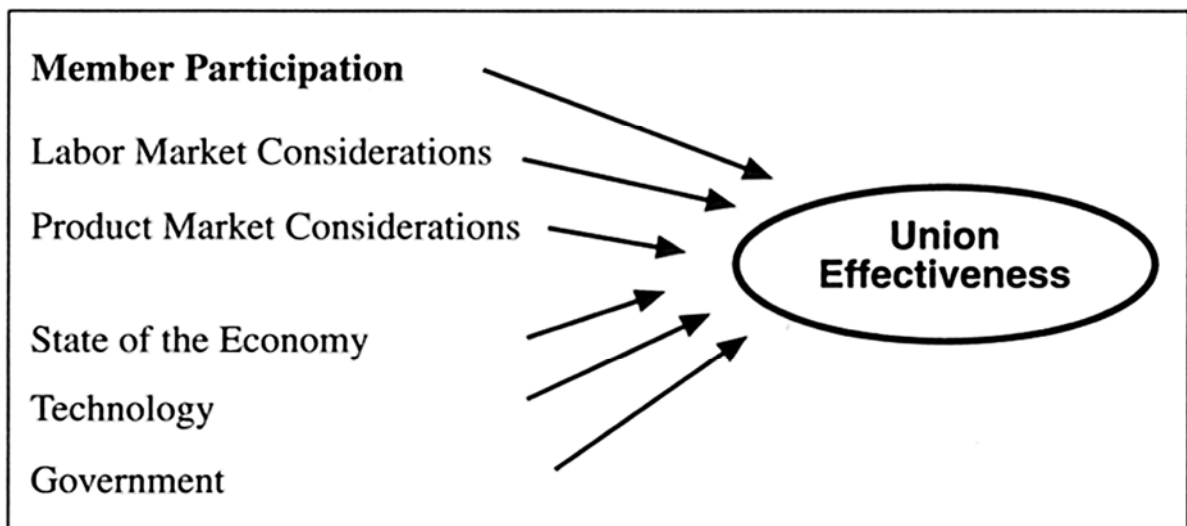
### 3. Union's Impact on Society

What is the union's ability to influence society in ways that help the union achieve its goals? For example, how effective have we been in ensuring an environment that is supportive of collective bargaining, organizing, and workers' rights? And, how successful have we been in mobilizing members to support community goals? Notice the interdependency between the union and the community. Many union members are extremely active in the community, but often not in their union identities so that the union contribution is invisible. This makes it difficult to get community support on some of labor's issues and feeds the erroneous notion that unions are a "special interest group" and not part of the larger community.



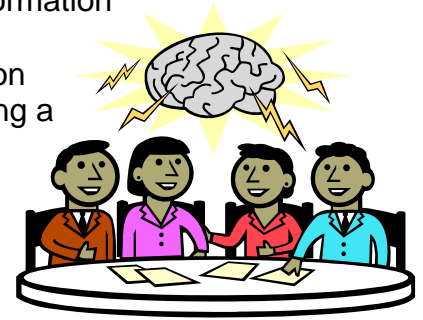
If we consider the factors influencing union effectiveness, where can we have the most direct impact?

**Figure 1.2** Factors Influencing Union Effectiveness



# ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

A *focus group* is a group discussion about a particular issue. It is usually used to gather information from a variety of people with diverse opinions. The information generated is very rich because people respond to a specific set of questions and to each others' comments. In addition, the discussion itself gives people a chance to talk together about an issue, creating a common understanding of the issue and building collaboration to address it. It is worthwhile to gather people together, seeking their input. For many, participation can be a powerful first step towards engagement and activism. The discussion is informal and is aided by a facilitator to keep the conversation on track.



Recently, the following questions were used in focus groups with labor leaders in Wisconsin. In addition to the discussion, participants were asked to actively search out potential new union leaders and mentors in a dynamic effort to identify and train the next generation of labor leaders.

## Focus Groups: Training and Succession Planning

### Discussion Questions

1. What leadership needs do you see in your union local over the next five years? (Think of retirements and the need for succession planning, diversity -- or the lack of diversity -- in leadership.)
2. How can you imagine the future needs of your local being different than past needs or even current needs?
  - What is changing and how do you need to respond?
  - What does this mean for future union leaders?
3. What training do potential union leaders need in your local? What skills or knowledge do new leaders need? What is your local doing to prepare new leaders?
4. What needs to happen to support the development of new union leaders?
  - Does your organization (local union or national union) need to do anything or change anything to support new union leaders and leadership development?
5. Does the leadership in your local reflect the membership? Are *all* voices represented and heard? Could you be more *inclusive*?

## Why Do People Join Organizations?

### 1. *They believe in the organization's goals.*

They are true believers. The organization stands for values they agree with and think are important. They're committed for the long haul, not just for the short-term payoff.



### 2. *They are attracted to individuals in the organization.*

The leaders or the more visible members of the group are charismatic, attractive people that seem to draw new members to the organization.

### 3. *The organization provides services or benefits.*

People join the "Y" because they like to use the pool. People join the Automobile Club because they want the services. People join A.A.R.P. because they like the discounts.

### 4. *They enjoy socializing with other members.*

Although the organization supposedly exists to fulfill some greater purpose, the real reason it keeps going is because it gives people the opportunity to get together once a month.

### 5. *The organization satisfies "secondary" goals.*

The organization may give members the opportunity to develop leadership skills or to use other talents. Or, simply belonging to the organization may give the member status or recognition.

## What Motivates People?

A motive is an emotion, desire, physiological need, or similar impulse acting as an incitement to action. It can be an internal or external force that might influence or cause a person to act. In our complex lives, there are often competing motives. Ultimately, the strongest combination wins.

To motivate someone else (or even ourselves), we need to identify and develop forces that will encourage persistent effort toward the attainment of goals *and* identify and reduce forces that discourage the attainment of goals.

Some of the factors that commonly motivate people are:

- **Achievement** – doing something you can take pride in, making a worthwhile contribution, desire to do one's best



- **Acquisition** – money or other tangible rewards

- **Affiliation** – being with other people, feeling accepted by the group, close interpersonal relationships

- **Creativity** – the opportunity to use talents in new and useful ways

- **Power** -- the ability to influence people and events, to control resources

- **Recognition** – receiving praise or attention from others



- **Service** – desire to help others

Different people are motivated by different combinations of these factors. What motivates one won't be the same as what motivates another. For people motivated by achievement or service, it's important to tell them why what they are doing is important. People who are motivated by power might be put in charge of one part of the project. People who are motivated by creativity should be given an interesting problem to solve.