



The Top Five Reasons You Can't Blame Employees For Joining A Union

Insights

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Why do employees join a union? Following the recent implementation of the National Labor Relations Board's "quickie election" rules, many businesses pointed their fingers at the Labor Board, politicians, and unions. After all, the new rules tipped the scales against employers in a number of ways and made some feel that unionization is all but inevitable.

But that does not have to be the case. While "quickie elections" may benefit unions, employees do not sign a union authorization card because of the new rules. Instead, the primary reason an employee joins a union is because of an employer's bad practices.

Historically, unions are most successful where employers send the message that they don't care about their employees. With that in mind, let's take a look at why employees join unions, and what you might do to convince them otherwise.

Reason Number 5: Ignoring Employee Complaints

You don't like to be ignored. Neither do your employees. When you overlook employee complaints, and especially claims of discrimination and payroll concerns, or fail to resolve them quickly and efficiently, resentment grows. Give employees orders without explanations, or ask them to perform jobs that they are not suited to do, and they begin to feel more like a number as opposed to a valuable member of a productive team.

Unions know this. Indeed, one of the key promises made in every union campaign is to provide employees a "stronger voice on the job." To the underappreciated employee, this can be an attractive selling point.

You need an effective complaint-handling system – one that gives you employee feedback on a regular basis. Periodic group meetings and mini-surveys ([read more here](#)) are good places to start. That way, if a union begins promising employees a "voice" in the workplace, your employees will understand that they already have opportunities to be heard and they'll more likely conclude that they don't need to pay a union representative for that privilege.

Reason Number 4: Lack Of Respect

Nobody likes being disrespected. Disciplining employees in front of others, assigning blame before

reviewing the facts, and generally playing favorites are all factors that can cause employees to turn to a union for help.

To counter this, ensure that your supervisors are well-trained on effectively communicating with employees, especially about sensitive subjects like discipline or job performance. Helping managers become better leaders and advocates for their employees makes the managers better “caretakers” of employees and reduces employee vulnerability to the traditional union sales pitch.

Actually, the Golden Rule about treating others the way you’d like to be treated is a pretty good business model for your supervisors to follow with their employees.

Reason Number 3: Lack Of Concern About Safety

Employees expect to work in a safe environment. They expect safety training, appropriate equipment, and clear guidelines and procedures for responding to and reporting workplace accidents. Too often, employers fail to meet these basic expectations. Not only does this leave employers susceptible to potential OSHA citations, it also opens the door to a union organizing campaign.

Workplace safety has historically been a focal point for unions. Unions promote themselves as being able to secure more safety training, resulting in fewer workplace accidents. They advertise that they are able to walk employees through the sometimes-complicated workers’ compensation procedures. Especially now that unions will soon have more access to employer injury reports (read more [here](#)), this issue is more important than ever.

Employers who address safety issues early on are therefore better suited to counter the inevitable union promise to create a “safer” workplace. This begins with management and supervisor safety training. Remember, safety is not simply a book of rules and regulations, but a culture of smart behavior that needs to be encouraged from the top down.

Reason Number 2: Non-Competitive Pay And Benefits

The bottom line in an organizing drive often comes down to wages and benefits. Unions consistently argue that representation leads to higher wages, better health care, and a secure retirement. The “union advantage,” employees are told, will put more money in their pockets.

Of course, that’s not necessarily true, and in fact is sometimes the opposite. But perception can become reality, and if your employees believe that your organization is easily capable of providing more, but chooses not to, they are easy union targets.

Participate in wage-benefit surveys where you can and make sure you are competitive in your industry and your location. If your position in the community is not at the top of the scale, be prepared to explain why, including the trade-offs of the other non-monetary advantages of working at your company. The more honest you are with your employees, the more likely they are to believe you when you explain that a union is not the answer to their concerns.

The Number One Reason You Can't Blame Employees For Joining A Union: Favoritism

As should be obvious by now, the number one reason employees join a union is because they feel their employer is treating them “unfairly.” That can mean a lot of different things, but nowhere is it more evident than when the employer takes inconsistent disciplinary action. When employees feel that they have been subjected to discipline which they did not deserve, or did not expect, union organizing may not be far off.

The solution here is a simple one: establish clear policies and regulations and then follow them. Too often, employers satisfy the first step, but fail to meet the second. You need to train and update managers and supervisors on employment policies, and ensure that they are being implemented effectively and consistently.

To sum it up: a good pro-employee management style is also a good way to stay union free. Employers who take this approach will prove to employees that their employer cares about them while improving working conditions before the threat of union organizing arises.

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