



Organizing Around Bully Bosses

***TAKE BACK
YOUR WORKPLACE***



Organizing Around Bully Bosses

- ▶ Welcome!
- ▶ Workshop Introduction by Nick Sloss

Organizing Around Bully Bosses

Workshop **Goals**

Together, we'll learn from each other:

- **The Language of Organizing: Creating A Glossary for clearer communications.**
- **HOW TO WIN: The critical pieces of a strategy for winning.**
- **What winning looks like.**
- **Claiming Your Victory: Why you always should, and how to go about it.**

Glossary part 1

- ▶ Worksite Organizing: When workers band together around a common issue in order to pressure the boss to address the issue.
- ▶ Collective Action: A collective action is an activity (no matter how small) that all workers participate in at work simultaneously and visibly which shows their co workers and the boss that workers are standing together in their demand for the boss to address a specific issue.
- ▶ Delegation: In a union worksite, a method of communication in which a group of workers approaches their boss together as a group, without an appointment, in order to communicate their demand that the boss address an issue in their workplace.

Glossary part 2

- ▶ LMC: LMC stands for Labor Management Committee.
- ▶ March on The Boss: Another name for a delegation, sometimes implying a more intense level of emotion among workers regarding the worksite issue which prompted the march. Some union members have created other names for this activity.
- ▶ Campaign: A term describing a plan of action which a group intends to carry out in order to create change. In a union worksite specifically, this term refers to an escalating plan of actions devised by workers with help from their field organizer and CET organizer to be implemented over time, intended not to cease until the boss meets workers demand and addresses their issue.

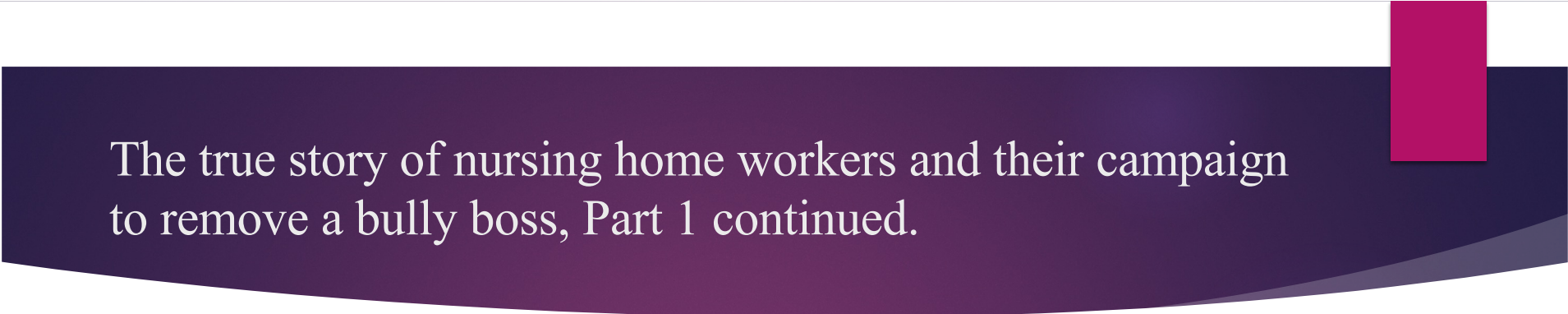
The true story of nursing home workers and their campaign to remove a bully boss.

► Part 1: The Boss

Rebecca, a nursing home administrator (and bully boss) was known for repeatedly interacting with her subordinates in an aggressive, hostile, and demeaning manner. She would yell at staff, threaten them with firing and write ups, and used seemingly straightforward discipline as a tool for retaliating against employees. Over time the organizer and steward were bombarded with complaints from her coworkers regarding her behavior and methods in the workplace, and the ongoing issue was brought up in an LMC with no sign of improvement.

Eventually a grievance was filed in an attempt to correct the behavior. As stewards, often our goals are to help HR help employees correct behavior in the workplace, so using their own tools for corrective action and progressive discipline to better an employee's performance or behaviors. A grievance against any particular boss is supposed to not only highlight adverse actions or contract violations to management, but also offer up solutions (or resolutions) and to highlight that the union and employees are aware of behaviors and will be sure to follow up with more grievances or actions to stop the offending actors in the workplace.

In conversations with HR after the grievance was filed, they had assured us that they had taken care of the problem and that Heather's behavior should see a marked improvement. They asked for the grievance to be put in abeyance (or on hold) to give Rebecca a chance to improve. Her behavior had improved for a short time, but over the next few months, it went right back the way it was, and in some cases, got worse.



The true story of nursing home workers and their campaign to remove a bully boss, Part 1 continued.

- ▶ Oftentimes, if a bully boss sees that the consequences of their actions in the workplace are a mere slap on the wrist, they then become emboldened to act out in a retaliatory fashion as payback for bringing up the complaints in the first place. This is retaliation and a workplace happening that can be hard to prove, but that everyone feels and knows to be true. Sometimes people cry retaliation for frivolous or uninformed reasons, but rarely do people perceive retaliation in ways that is a cut and dried, easy to document “I am retaliating against you in this way because you engaged in the protected activity of bringing up adverse working conditions”, so finding other means to convey the notion to the dummies at HR is crucial to a successful campaign.
- ▶ A second LMC was called about Rebecca, this time with several people in attendance to give testimonials about workplace conditions. These testimonials included stories about people getting written up for minor infractions that could have been resolved with simple conversations, being yelled at or demeaned in front of others, among other subtle and overt ways of treating people without the professional workplace respect that they deserve. The steward (who was a key leader in the facility) got together with the workers who gave testimonials at the LMC, as well as the organizer, to help develop a plan to keep up the pressure and turn the disparate complaints and grievances into a campaign.



Part 2: The Campaign

The organizer, steward and some of the affected employees decided to start with a sticker campaign. They created stickers that said “We Deserve Respect” and agreed upon finding one respected worker in each shift to convince their coworkers to all wear the stickers on the same day. Stickers are great because they’re cheap, often times ride a fine line between uniform policy violations (that come with a built in “I dare you to write me up for demanding respect in the workplace with a simple sticker), and show solidarity when someone can scan a room and see all the workers wearing the same sticker on the same day. They also organized other coworkers to write up statements or testimonials about how much Rebecca sucked.

The Member Resource Center and steward reactivated the grievance, and scheduled a meeting with the Administrator. The day of the meeting 15 people showed up wearing their stickers and 7 people gave testimonials to the workplace conditions that Rebecca was creating. The MRC had been in communication with the corporate office and requested that they have the meeting on Zoom, since the administrator obviously was not going to be objective. On the day of the meeting, we found out the regional coordinator was in the building and instead of being on by zoom, he attended the meeting in person.

Initially, there was a general conversation around what workers had been subjected to and what the effects being yelled at had had on their work. The steward brought up the fact that they had been assured repeatedly that things were going to improve and for awhile things would get better but then they would go back to where they were. Heather responded that members had created the hostile work environment and were always complaining and were rude to her and other management staff.



Part 2: The Campaign, continued...

The regional HR person took this as an opening to whitewash the situation, painting a picture of how the nursing home was a stressful environment and that all parties had to learn patience with one another. The steward interrupted him and stated that members had statements they wanted to read. He said that he would be happy to take them and read them, but the steward insisted that the members be given the opportunity to read them aloud.

Before the meeting, the organizer and steward tried to get two Spanish speaking members to write statements. They refused but they agreed to attend the meeting at the last minute. The pivotal point in the meeting was that everyone witnessed the organizer and steward encouraging them to overcome their fear and tell what had happened to them.

The steward let them know that they were in a safe environment. They finally agreed. They each spoke very softly in Spanish, while the organizer translated. They related that they had been repeatedly yelled at and threatened with being fired and felt terrorized by Heather. After this, you could hear a pin drop and the tone in the room changed dramatically. The MRC organizer stated that this meeting should be considered the first step meeting for the grievance process and management agreed and said they would have a response.

By the end of the day, Heather had been removed.

Part 3: Aspects of the Story Behind the Curtain.

- ▶ Obviously, most workplace bullying situations aren't as clean cut as this. The worksite leaders didn't fall out of the sky, the stickers didn't make themselves, all sorts of people who could have given statements, didn't, for fear of retaliation, and these and many more of these factors played a role in people's participation in the campaign, dedication levels to resolving the problem, and the willingness of people (who are just trying to earn a paycheck) to get involved and stay involved once the campaign has begun.
- ▶ This story contained a few aspects of workplace organizing, from LMC complaints (what I like to call "giving management the ball to either make the free throw or drop the ball" in terms of resolving workplace issues), grievances, seeking out leaders for implementing organizing tactics, solidarity in the simple ask of wearing a sticker and showing up, standing up for yourself in high stress work situations and in high-stakes meetings with administrators, and eventually, the stated goal of removing this bully boss.

Part 3: Aspects of the Story Behind the Curtain, continued

- ▶ -What aspects of this story do you see played out that can either achieve your eventual goal of getting rid of a bully boss, or hinder your effectiveness?
- ▶ How can you see this sort of method working or not working in your workplace?
- ▶ What ways do you think you could replicate this campaign in a worksite or ways that you would want to change it, in order to achieve your goal?

Part 5: The Nuts, Bolts, and Heart of the Matter

#1 A UNIFYING ISSUE

- At the Hillsboro nursing home, did they have a unifying issue?
- How do we know?
- What departments did the workers who gave statements work in?
- Why is it important to have a broad cross section of workers from most (or all) departments, shifts, and/or job classes of workers included in giving statements?
- How do you get departments (other than your own) engaged in the fight against a bully boss?

#1 A UNIFYING ISSUE

- The workers in the story certainly did have a unifying issue.
- We know this by the fact that workers across the facility, in different departments and job classes, had stories to tell about being bullied by the boss and they participated in actions to hold her accountable.
- It's important to have a broad cross section of workers from most (or all) departments, shifts, and/or job classes of workers included in giving statements and taking actions because it is more powerful by better proving the egregious behavior of the bully boss.
- In order to get workers involved from departments other than your own you must get to know them and their issues at work. You must also assess whom among them is well respected and trusted by the others. Then have a conversation with that person about their experience working there. If the unifying issue of the bully boss is felt by them as well then ask that they join the rest of you to take action and bring along their coworkers.

The Nuts, Bolts, and Heart of the Matter

#2 A Communication Structure

Communication Structure: This encompasses communication with your leaders engaging in the campaign, the workers affected by the reason for the campaign, and your escalating communication with management.

- Why is this necessary?
- How /Why is a well-functioning communication structure an important part of a winning strategy?
- Who should be the captains of the structure?
- What if they all work in the same department/ have the same job titles?
- Why is it important who they are?
- How do you know WHO are the correct co-workers to recruit for your communication structure captains?



#2: A Communication Structure, continued.

A well-functioning communication structure among your coworkers is an important part of a winning strategy because you all are virtually unable to carry out collective actions without one. The captains (CATs) should be well respected and trusted coworkers whom others ask for help, advice, etc. This is your first hint that their coworkers will likely follow their lead in stressful situations. It's important that coworkers like these be CATs because they can bring their closest coworkers with them to participate in the actions you devise for your campaign.

If all your captains work in the same department or have the same job titles then you have no one to bring along workers in other departments or job titles, and you will be weaker for it.

The Nuts, Bolts, and Heart of the Matter

#2: A Communication Structure, continued.

Communication with Management at this time is also very important.

- ▶ To be ready to launch your effort to hold a bully boss accountable, what level of management will you communicate with at first? Will you go straight to the top boss right off the bat, or will you beg the offending manager to cease the bullying?
- ▶ Why is it important to have a good idea about which managers will be effective in dealing with the offender per your demands?

The Nuts, Bolts, and Heart of the Matter

#2: A Communication Structure, continued.

- ▶ Will you go directly to the top boss or will you beg the offending manager to cease their bullying? Neither, actually, in most cases. It's usually best to direct your demand for accountability toward the manager who directly supervises your bully boss, assuming one or more of you have attempted to address the issue directly with the bully. Whether or not workers have confronted the bully directly or attempted to set boundaries, a bully boss is scary and highly unlikely to take your feedback seriously. So, go to their immediate supervisor.
- ▶ It's good to have an idea about which managers might be most effective in dealing with the bully also so that you have realistic expectations as you continue your campaign and go up the chain of command. Follow the chain of command upward with your demands, even when you are pretty sure your bully boss' supervisor will not(or cannot) effectively hold your boss accountable. Doing this can expose not only your bad boss but issues with your boss' boss as well. Some workers have succeeded in getting rid of both their boss AND their boss' supervisor!

The Nuts, Bolts, and Heart of the Matter

#3: Commitment

- a. How will you know if your co-workers are truly committed to fighting the bully boss?

- b. The bigger the issue, the more dangerous a lack of commitment can be. How will you know that your coworkers are committed to holding the bully boss accountable?

The Nuts, Bolts, and Heart of the Matter

#3: Comittment, continued

- a. Talk with coworkers to learn if they have been impacted by similar issues. Get their story of how the bully has impacted them and tell them yours. Ask about how the issue makes them feel. It's ok and useful actually for workers to get angry about a bully boss, it's the best motivator if your coworkers are fearful of retaliation. Anger is a natural and appropriate response to unfair and humiliating treatment at work. It's a powerful emotion. Powerful enough to help workers overcome their fear and take action. Then clearly ask them if they will stand together with the rest of you to do something about the bully.
- b. The way you will know that they are committed is by witnessing them participating in actions with you all. Public, visible actions. Your plan to win should include different kinds of actions which must be public, or visible to both coworkers and management. There are many ways to take action such as Purple days, Stickers, petitions, and delegations. There is zero power in secrecy. Fearful coworkers stay fearful if they have no idea that others are committed to standing with them. Visible actions show your commitment. Management will never feel pressure to address the bully boss issue if workers demands for and commitment to making change are kept secret.

The Nuts, Bolts, and Heart of the Matter

- Once you are building a strategy to resolve a UNIFYING ISSUE, and you have some semblance of a COMMUNICATION STRUCTURE, with respected co-workers as captains, and you trust their commitment...

More About Escalating Plans of Action

- ❑ Raise your hand if you and your co-workers have tried taking direct action but after you did an action or two without success your effort just faded away?
- ❑ What does that say about your strength as a union?
- ❑ On the other hand, if yall are prepared to not give up, and your strategy contains escalating actions, It's likely to be another story entirely.

In the story we shared:

- ❑ What was the first step workers took in the story we heard earlier?
- ❑ What was the outcome? Nothing happened.
- ❑ What did workers try next? Re filing the grievance. What was the outcome? Grievances are slow so the issue was not solved quickly by grievance alone. Workers kept up the escalating actions.
- ❑ How many different actions did they take before they won?

The Nuts, Bolts, and Heart of the Matter

- ▶ When worker try an action or two and then give up is sends management a clear message of weakness.
- ▶ First Action? LMC
- ▶ Actions taken: six total
- ▶ 2 LMC's
- ▶ 1 grievance (withdrawn)
- ▶ Stickers
- ▶ Reactivated Grievance
- ▶ Meeting with boss, statements read.
- ▶ What are some other ideas of actions you could take at work?

■ The Nuts, Bolts, and Heart of the Matter

Other possible actions:

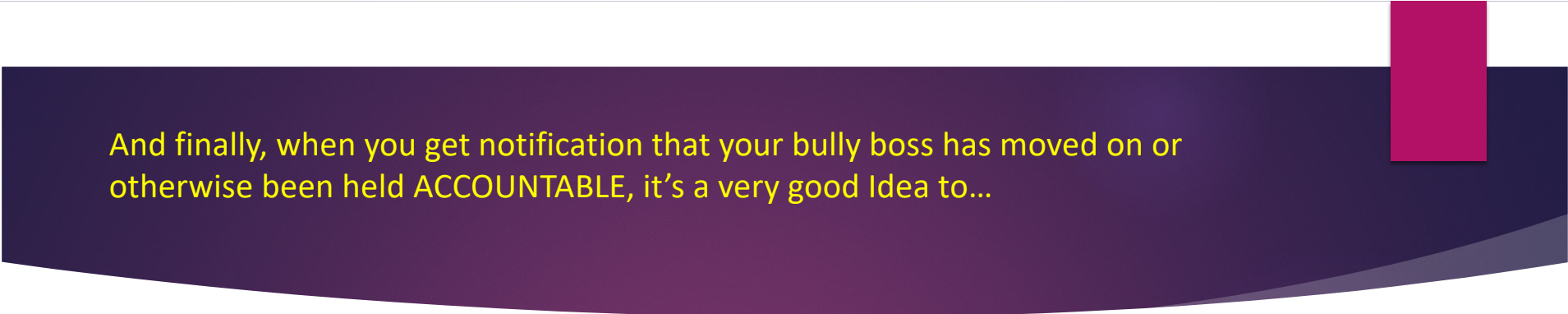
- ❖ A Petition
- ❖ A purple day
- ❖ Sticky notes on the bully's boss' office door

Add more here that you learn from the workshop or other stewards...

The Nuts, Bolts, and Heart of the Matter

A Winning Campaign Should Have The Following...

- A unifying issue
- A structure for successful communications among coworkers.
- “Captains” for your communication structure in each work area, among each work group or job title or shift so ideally all workers have a CAT “Communication Action Team” captain. (During Bargaining also known as “Contract Action Team”)
- Commitment of your coworkers must be shown by publicly visible unified actions at work
- Plan to win which includes an Escalating Plan of actions. Start small and build pressure gradually. If your bully boss has violated the language of your contract DO file a grievance as a step in your plan.
- Know the chain of command (among managers) in your workplace. Know who your supervisor’s boss is. Know (or find out) where the buck stops in your management’s structure. Know who is at the top. Find out if there is someone off site who is even higher up in management than the biggest boss at your worksite.



And finally, when you get notification that your bully boss has moved on or otherwise been held ACCOUNTABLE, it's a very good Idea to...

CLAIM YOUR VICTORY!

1. Why? What happens if you win but nobody talks about it? If you get support from other departments but you don't talk to them about what happened to your bully boss?
2. How can you claim your victory?
3. What about little victories such as an apology from the bully when you all know good behavior won't last? Is the apology a victory you should claim?

The Nuts, Bolts, and Heart of the Matter

- 1. If nobody talks about winning - even little wins - coworkers will be much less inclined to participate in future actions because they likely will feel like either you failed or gave up because they never heard the news that you all won.**
- 2. spread the word via your CATs to as many coworkers as possible. Post victories on the union bulletin board. Into a bowl of candy or snacks in the breakroom place a sign on a stick describing the win. Be creative! At a staff meeting following the victory, slip each other little notes about the victory. Or “SmarTEE “ candies with a note of celebration glued to the box.**
- 3. Yes, the apology is a victory you should claim. No victory is too small to be claimed**



The Nuts, Bolts, and Heart of the Matter

1. When workers march on their boss, that boss sometimes hides so workers cannot confront them. Show of hands: Anybody here ever experienced that? What does that feel like? Does it feel like you are winning?
2. What might doing so mean to the viability of future campaigns?
3. How might we feel about our union when we claim a victory as OURS?

The Nuts, Bolts, and Heart of the Matter

1. No it doesn't feel like winning when the boss hides so we cannot march on them. Think about your goal in general terms however. Your goal is to have an effect upon management's behavior. Specifically and in the long run, you want that bully boss to take their behavior somewhere else. In the short run though, your boss hiding from your march is still evidence of changed behavior, right? Has your boss ever hidden from a group of workers? If your action causes changes in boss behavior even if it's small and not even close to your final goal, that changed behavior indicates a shift in the power dynamic. It's a little victory. CLAIM IT!

2, your coworkers will be more likely to take action together again in the future.

3. We might feel like we are not powerless at work.

Generally, workers that win like this feel their union is strong or getting stronger!

And that really is the whole point, isn't it?



The End

- ▶ Thanks for choosing our workshop.
- ▶ Please remember to fill out an evaluation sheet so we can use your input for improvement and innovations.
- ▶ Grab a sticker by the door as you leave and when folks ask about it tell them “I learned how to beat a bully boss!”