



Guerilla Tactics for When All Else Fails

For the most part, IFPTE Local 17 tries to foster collegial and professional interactions with the employers in which it deals with.

And for the most part, it is usually successful at creating productive and cooperative relationships with employers. However, these relationships can be a delicate balance and can change at any time.

For example, a new manager will get hired, a new politician will get elected, or some other chance event will change the workplace relationship for the worse.

At this point, maybe all attempts with traditional methods of problem solving and cooperation may have failed. When this happens, members are not simply helpless to ride out the new “whims.” Members can fight back. The following list of tactics are examples of the types of activities that have been used successfully in unions to help bring back cooperative and productive workplaces where members feel valued and appreciated. Please note, ALWAYS coordinate with your Union Representative before undertaking any of the following as they can lead to TERMINATION if done incorrectly.

Bypass Them

Remember that your employer has access to everything created on your work computer system and as public employees, most of what is there is subject to public disclosure requests.

If you’re facing a hostile employer, the first thing to make sure of is that your communications are reasonably secure. There are a variety of free webmail services available including those offered by Google, Netscape, MSN, and Yahoo. Use these to set-up email communications between you and your fellow workplace activists on your off-duty time and on your home computer.

Work to Rule

“Work to rule” is any job action in which employees do no more than the minimum

required by the rules of a workplace in order to cause a slowdown. Pull out the office policy manual and see what policies are being ignored and start applying them.

Are you supposed to practice a fire drill once a quarter? Is there an arcane policy regarding how to submit office supply requests? Follow them to the letter.

How can the employer complain about employees following their own rules? Everyone takes every break. Everyone makes sure that every “T” is crossed and every “I” is dotted in each and every document that crosses their desk. This tactic is especially effective at certain workload choke points where slowdowns cause further slowdowns “downstream” in the office system.

Pile the Paperwork

The processing of a grievance requires time and energy to be expended. If the employer is being uncooperative, then grieve each and every violation of the contract.

Bury them in paper, post copies of the grievance on the union bulleting boards and keep members updated on the outcomes. Sometimes just seeing the union fighting will make employees feel safe enough to express themselves in the workplace.

Identify Weak Links

Who is the source of the problem? If it’s a new director who has decided to “show who is boss,” then focus upon the people the director answers to. Make sure that they are BCC’ed (blind carbon copied) on every press release, internal notice, and grievance.

Ensure that the source of the problem is made accountable for his or her actions and don’t be afraid to express to his or her superior your dismay that things went downhill with the arrival of this person. The idea here is to clearly frame the workplace problems as the result of the “source of the problem’s” conduct. — *By Ray Goforth, Local 17 Union Representative*