



Marketing Issues

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Relationship Woes

We have talked in the past about the state of the economy and what a challenge it has become for the construction industry. Today we are facing some of the toughest economic conditions we have seen in our lives. Unemployment remains at nearly 10%. In the construction industry it is as high as 35% in some cities, and to make matters worse, wages are not even close to keeping up with the cost of living.

Many of us have had to adjust our standard of living; some have even lost homes. Financial dreams have been turned into mere flashes of fantasy for middle-class workers. We're still struggling, but there will be a turning point; we will rebound from this. Meanwhile, take this time to examine something in your life you can control: your relationships.

“Family” Matters

Sometimes the challenges we face come from the very people we are closest to. Often it is one's very own family that causes a great deal of life's trials. As union members, we are “union brothers and sisters.” We are brothers and sisters to our fellow union roofers, as well as to all the Building and Construction Trades unions. We frequently work with these other trades on the same job site. We rely on them to perform their line of work, just as they rely on us to “dry it in” to protect them from the elements. We occasionally have our differences with other trades, just as we have differences within our very own family; nonetheless, we are still family. Ultimately, we stand together.

Don't Promise the World

One of the most difficult challenges we face is in forming relationships. Every day we create connections, even if we don't even realize it. We do it with new employees, new members, different contractors—even at the local gas station or grocery store. When building these relationships, there is always a need involved, whether it's friendship, political gain, business connections, or any other reason. We need different types of relationships for different parts of our lives.

There are many ways to initiate a relationship, but one of the easiest is to introduce yourself or have someone introduce you to the person with whom you wish to form a bond. Following the introduction, you are responsible for nurturing that relationship. The depth and longevity of the bond depends on what the needs of each person are.

The best way to develop and sustain a long-lasting relationship is to always be honest about what you can bring to the table. Never promise something you can't deliver. Remember the golden rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”? When building a relationship, you must surpass that; you have to treat them better than you would want to be treated.

For an organizing campaign to succeed, we must establish and develop relationships with both the contractor and the employees. Often the contractor does not want to talk to us, let alone build a relationship with us, and the employees are too nervous to get involved. This is when we must be completely truthful and not exaggerate what we can do for them. Only then will we build the trust of the worker. Once we have their trust, they will feel comfortable describing their situation.

Now is the time to start building those relationships that we desperately need when doing an organizing campaign. Nurture them and follow the golden rule, and see what these new relationships can do for you. ■

Rat Joined by Bigger, More Colorful Rats

Local 11, Chicago, IL, has no problem maintaining the small family of rats in front of Bunge Oils in Bradley, IL. Proudly standing the line are Mike Lafferty and Kevin Burch.

