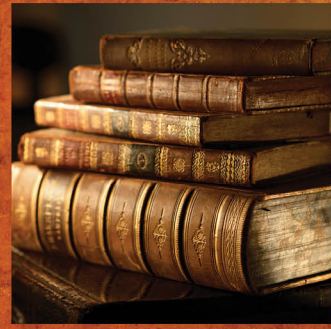




Articles

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"WE SHOULD BE UNIONIZED!"

This cry from one or more employees will drive senior leaders to the edge. If the organization has a history of remaining union-free, then the slightest thought of movement in a union direction can have seismic consequences in the boardroom. Too often leaders panic and immediately call their labour lawyers/attorneys. *Wrong move!* No laws have been broken, no unfair labour practices have been issued, and no notice of certification has been granted.

Don't jump to conclusions until you can answer the following questions:

- ☒ Who made the statement?
- ☒ How reliable is the employee or supervisor who brought the comment forward?
- ☒ In what context was the statement made?
- ☒ What else was being said at the same time?
- ☒ Was the employee speaking for him/herself or for others?

Getting the answers to your questions and facts straight can range from a discussion with the supervisor, a departmental focus group meeting (or one that involves multiple departments), or an employee opinion survey.

Before they hired me, some of my clients have called the employee into a senior leader's office to ask the question "Do you want a union around here?" Current labour legislation ensures an employee's right of free association, so this is

not a good move; it's a short-term strategy at best.

Once, I uncovered a pro-union employee who was taping the whole conversation with his Director of Operations. The Director was completely unaware. Although the tape was not likely to be admissible in court, it played well at the union hall!

Let's look at why an employee might indicate they want a union in their workplace:

The number 1 reason for unionization is the behaviour of the supervisor (whether supervisor, team leader or manager).

In the eyes of all employees, supervisors represent the organization. What they do and say to your employees is taken as the spirit of the organization. Keep in mind that the supervisor interacts with your employees during the

hiring and orientation process, during job instruction, while providing feedback, when probationary decisions are given, and when recognition happens.

Your supervisor connects with his or her employees at every meaningful occasion during the work day, but most supervisors are not adequately trained to fit this role.

Despite influencing 25+ employees, your supervisors may not be sensitive communicators. While they address production, quality, and customers' concerns, they also need to deal with a variety of human resources tasks, which can be asking a lot of a supervisor, regardless of their level of training.

When pro-union concerns come to your attention, consider the following points:

There may be roots in actions that appear to be unfair, favouritism, nepotism, etc. If one person or group is getting preferential treatment (e.g. more overtime opportunities), then there may be the perception or reality of unfair treatment.

One-way communications fuel many employees with dissatisfaction. One-way communications is, by definition, ineffective, as there is no listening and no dialogue. Employees who feel their supervisors do not listen often feel that the organization does not care about them or their opinions.

Lack of respect and recognition is a cornerstone issue for pro-union employees. Respect is not just saying "hello" in the morning or "good night" at the end of the day.

Respect means that a supervisor and employee are a team. They treat each other with understanding; they begin by assuming the best from each other.

In a respectful environment, knowledge is always shared – it is never a point of power; recognition for contribution and achievement is a two-way street; and communication is a conversation and not a "directive from on high." *Respect is a set of behaviours and a mind-set.*

To achieve this type of relationship between leaders and employees is the result of a culture – *Positive Employee Relations*® -- that begins with the candidate recruitment process and doesn't necessarily stop even when one of the parties leaves the organization. This requires training and coaching of not only the leaders but also the employees.

"We should be unionized!" may be a wake-up call for your organization. Make sure you are living your values and communicating your culture more effectively!

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