



WHAT TO DO

IF YOUR UNIONIZED EMPLOYEES REALIZE YOUR OFFER SUCKS AND THEY GO ON STRIKE

1 - Don't panic

Remain calm.

2 - Make a game plan

You're dealing with a highly-organized work force with access to realtime information via the internet, the media and email. Try strategies such as:

- **Pretend everything is okey-dokey at the office.**

Even if your replacement workers can't figure out how to find the washroom, let alone answer the phones, file documents and do other necessary duties, let your striking workers know that everything is "business as usual". Tell everyone that the strike has no impact on business -- the last thing you want is for your striking workers to smell your fear. Or your investors, for that matter.

- **Beg your striking employees to return to work.**

Tell them you'll welcome them back with open arms and no repercussions. Be sure your last contract offer doesn't mention different wage structures depending on performance evaluations, though, or the workers will see right through this.

- **Fudge the details of your last contract offer.**

Use lots of numbers, but make sure they're vague enough so that nobody can tell what you really mean. If you admit that some employees will be paid more and some less under the new deal, do not contradict yourself later by telling them your deal is fair for everyone.

- **Invent a new definition of "fair".**

Want to take away earned days off for some employees so that nobody can have them? Tell them you're only being "fair" to everyone.

3 - Divide and conquer

Suggest to your striking workers that they'll run out of money before you will. Tell them their union can't do anything to prevent them from scabbing and that they can't collect on any fines, even if the union has written constitutional language to the contrary (if your employees are able to check on this fact, you might want to skip this one).

One of the best things you can do is to drive a wedge between employees so they no longer trust each other or their union. Do what you can to appear trustworthy and friendly. Use words like “fair” and “flexible.” Smile at all press conferences. Wear lots of anti-perspirant during press conferences so you don’t have tell-tale signs that you’re freaked out.

4 - Contact your employees

Implement your game plan. In your communications with your striking workers, consistently tell them your last offer is actually rather good and that other non-unionized workers like it just fine. Provide toll-free numbers for your employees to use if they have questions. Pray that this number isn’t accidentally confused with an adult dating line or you will be deluged with calls from perverts.

5 - Check your own contract to ensure your severance provisions are healthy in case things don’t work out

Pray that your employees don’t know your salaries, severance packages and other perks are listed online at www.sedar.com -- they’d have to know to search for “company circular” documents, anyway.

Pray that your shareholders are similarly web-challenged. Because if they see what you’re being paid and compare it to the last offer you made, things may get dicey.

6 - See who blinks first

If your striking workers are really angry at you and have access to a large strike fund, they’re probably not going to fall for the messages you send them.

If you have a good severance provision, pull the pin before the workers are back at their desks. If you don’t, make sure your new contract offer is much better than the old one.

Continue to wear lots of anti-perspirant so you don’t have tell-tale signs that you’re freaked out.

7 - Good luck!

Other articles available in The Manager’s Guide to Coping with Business Emergencies:

- What to do if you’ve spent too much on a takeover bid
- What to do if your unionized employees realize your offer sucks and they go on strike
- What to do if your share price falls below \$1
- What to do if a reporter asks you about your EBITDA
- What to do if someone sees you nod off in a board meeting
- What to do if the cleaning staff have left and you discover you’re locked in your office