

Fifteen Tricks that teacher unions play on school boards

Whether union pressure tactics are dirty tricks or bargaining savvy probably depends on the side of the picket line from which you see them. From our side, they look downright nasty.

But they also look familiar. Teacher unions realize school-leader turnover makes even well-worn tricks wroth trying. Consequently, many of their tactics are trotted out for use on unsuspecting school people in one district after another. Knowing some of the unions' favorite pressure ploys could help immeasurably when next the teachers put the squeeze on you.

So here, as they might be seen by a crafty labor boss, are 15 of the pressure tactics unions love to use on school negotiators, board members, and administrators--in other words, the ones to look out for:

1. The Crisis Center Caper--Use the word "crisis" and put every member of the management team into a tizzy. "We're getting ready to open a crisis center" is a promising remark to drop; or, "We've got to report to our crisis committee after this meeting." If this doesn't do the trick, rent a nearby building, call it a crisis center, install some telephones, put some signs on the windows, and have a bunch of teachers mill around--and wait for the school board to cave in.

2. The Information march Maneuver--Start with an "informational" picket line. March in front of the school building before and after classes. Come and go en masse. The board, the administration and the public will be convinced you're deadly serious. The board may capitulate at once. If you can march as close to the top administrator's office window as possible, he may feel sympathy for your cause--especially if it's snowing.

Better still, he may become so nervous that he'll get out of town or will beg the school board to buy your latest offer.

3. The Marathon Meeting Tactic--Call for round-the-clock bargaining. Publicize the demand. Two reasons: (A) The public will think you're willing to work long and hard for settlement, and (B) the school board's negotiators probably will reject the idea, since many of them are unpaid and must keep regular business hours. If they refuse to meet continuously, play that up and make management look as though it's retarding progress. If management accepts, you'll be in great shape to wear its negotiating team down until its members crumble from sheer exhaustion.

4. The Business Boycott Scheme--If any school board members have local businesses used by teachers, intimate that you'll take your business elsewhere. Threats of this kind have been known to bring board members around in a hurry.

5. The Blast the Boss Barnboozle--Attack the chief school administrator. Many times, a superintendent is a strong personality, in whom the school board has great faith. Hit him with charges of poor management, sweatshop working conditions, lousy personnel relations. He might be removed from negotiations entirely, giving you a clear shot at the school board.

6. The Nail the Negotiator Trick--Put out the word to school board and administrators that their negotiator is the one holding up the works. If management yanks him, you may be able to deal directly with the school board, and your chances for a favorable settlement may improve. Even if they leave him in, board members probably will begin

to doubt his ability, and they definitely will question his tactics. From that point on, you've got him.

7. The Improper Practice Play--Charge the school board with refusal to bargain in good faith or with some other easily manufactured grievance. The Public Employee Relations Board may throw it out, but your purpose will have been served. The public may buy it. The process surely will hold up bargaining, which is important if time is on your side. Teachers undoubtedly will think the board members are a bunch of louts, and this should rally your people to your cause. Some board members who don't realize that improper practice charges are virtually meaningless these days may give way to nervous jitters. Once the charge is filed, you can offer to drop it in return for a favorable settlement.

8. The Misdirection Play--Cloud the real bargaining issues. Tell board members the teachers are enraged about everything but money and benefits. Scream that the roof leaks and that working conditions are miserable. If you make it all sound ghastly enough, the board might offer you more money and benefits just to avoid publicity about your secondary gripes.

9. The Lams to Slaughter Strategy--Get the board members to come to the bargaining table personally. Demand it publicly. The hard line held by their negotiator might go out the window when you bring board members to a face-to-face confrontation. Once they're at the table, try to turn them against one another.

10. The Misdemeanor Your Members Move--Send letters to all the members of the local after negotiations begin. Report the board's opening offer, and don't

mention that this was merely a management strategy. Many of the teachers don't understand the bargaining process. They'll think you're reporting the board's final offer, and they'll be outraged--a great way to strengthen teacher support.

11. The Lazy Day Device--Institute a "work-to-rule" job action. Tell teachers to do nothing beyond the letter of your current contract: Don't attend meetings called by the administration; don't give special help to students ... But be careful. Some boards are familiar with this one, and they may hit you with a labor practice complaint if you go too far. Still, many school systems find this maneuver hard to cope with, and it may win you a quick settlement on your terms.

12. The Desperate School Board Scenario--Tell everyone that the board is dying to reach an agreement. Sell school board members on the notion that a speedy settlement is what they need. A surprising number of school boards fail to realize it's the union that needs the quick contract. In the meantime, keep harping about "working without a contract."

13. The Neighborhood Nuisance Number--Picket the homes of school board members (if not all their homes, at least the board president's); stay on public property, of course. Imagine the chagrin you'll cause outstanding members of the community by creating a disruption in their neighborhoods. Think of the reactions this will elicit from neighbors, the children, the spouse. Creating pressure from within is one of the quickest ways to beat a board member.

14. The Telephone Seduction Subterfuge--Get these teachers on

the telephone, calling individual school board members. Send this message: "You've got to help us make the board see reason. This thing has gone on long enough, and you're the only one who can help everyone come to terms. Do it for the children. We know you're not getting the full picture from your negotiating team ..." If you can get some of the board members' friends to make such calls, all the better.

15. The Strike Threat Gambit--Whether bellowed to the world or whispered in the right ears, the threat of a teacher strike is sometimes surprisingly effective. It often scares the fight out of school board members and administrators and can lead to a rapid settlement on your terms. It often scares the fight out of school board members and administrators and can lead to a rapid settlement on your terms. It often scares the fight out of school board members and administrators and can lead to a rapid settlement on your terms.

This story is based principally on material supplied by the Madison-Oneida counties, Sole supervisory District, Multi-Boces Labor Relations Office, Verona, N.Y.

