

Making the Most of the Union Bulletin Board

By Michele Nicholas

It is easy for active AFGE representatives to forget that most employees have a very limited exposure to union affairs. Most of our coworkers get their impression of the union's effectiveness not from our national and regional leaders but from their on-site representatives. Much of our best work (such as defending employees in disciplinary or performance issues) is confidential and therefore invisible. If we are to gain members and strength we must make an effort to call attention to the good work we do. The union bulletin board is too good a tool to waste.

Used correctly, it can be one of our best organizing and training tools. Article 12 of the contract makes the Agency provide at least one bulletin board per floor at every work site. The contract guarantees the size—at least 24 inches by 26 inches—but we have to produce the quality ourselves.

Advantages of the Bulletin Board

1. It is larger than a full-page newspaper ad and it does not get thrown out the next day.
2. It costs the union nothing at all.
3. It works all the time, sending out the union message while representatives are busy doing something else.
4. Like the stickers the home security companies put on our windows, it reminds potential wrongdoers that the place is protected.
5. Timorous employees can see what we have to say without the risk of being seen talking to a union representative. The bulletin board allows us to give them the encouragement they need to join AFGE and stand up for their rights.
6. It provides a place where employees know they can always get basic information about union benefits, employee rights, and timely news. They may lose pamphlets and handouts, but the bulletin board stays put.

What Not to Post on the Bulletin Board

Article 12 of the contract lists a few things we may not put on the board:

1. Partisan political matters
2. Attacks upon individuals
3. Propaganda against individuals
4. Anything maligning the character of any federal employee

Good Things to Put on the Bulletin Board

1. Reminders about Weingarten rights and Brookhaven protections. Safeguarding employees and reminding them that AFGE is their chief protector, these reminders are never obsolete and never a waste of space. This book contains Weingarten and Brookhaven notices suitable for bulletin boards.
1. An assortment of Union Privilege fliers. They add color and remind employees of AFGE's many fringe benefits. Employees have been known to join the union for these benefits alone.
2. Notices about proposed or pending legislation.. Although partisan materials are off limits, there is no rule against posting information about legislation of special interest to federal employees. So long as you do not favor any specific party, encouraging political awareness helps us all.
3. Updates on your local's activities.
4. Newsletters, including those from other locals or regions, if they are interesting and available.
5. Information on what the agency is doing: early outs, contracting out, OIG investigations, or new policies affecting employees' welfare.
6. Internet addresses for AFGE web sites and other good sources of labor information.

Looking Good

A bulletin board covered with faded, outdated, carelessly placed notices disappears into the background. If we want employees to take the board seriously, we must do the same. Here are a few suggestions:

- At least once a week, try to look at the board as though you were seeing it for the first time. Is it attractive? Is the material current?
- Throw out every obsolete paper.
- Understand that there is not room for everything. Keep a few vital things up all the time, and rotate the rest. It is better that employees read a few good things than ignore a huge number.
- Take time to arrange the posted materials attractively. Think about the layout of the bulletin board the way you would if you were crafting a newsletter or arranging pictures on a wall. When you surround a picture with a good frame and matting, the picture takes on importance. It looks better and more valuable than the identical print in a cheap frame. The extra time you devote to making the bulletin board look good has the same effect on the notices you post there.
- Continuous, even lines of blank space between the papers not only make the papers more noticeable but also make the board more attractive.
- Try using plain colored paper or fabric for a background.
- Call attention to new and important things with signs or arrows.

- Arrange the material by subject matter. For example, you may want to reserve one corner for Union Privilege benefits such as affordable mortgages, low-interest credit cards, etc.
- Change it frequently. Post new notices and, when you have time, change the layout, so employees know there is a reason to take a new look.