

New Approaches to Organizing Women and Young Workers

Social Media &
Work Family
Issues



Labor Project for Working Families

Cornell ILR Labor Programs

UC Berkeley Labor Center

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Special thanks to our Advisory Committee:

- *Larry Bertoluzzi, 1199SEIU-UHE*
- *Denise Dowell, Civil Service Employees Association, AFSCME Local 1000*
- *Jocelyn Mazurkiewicz, New York Union Child Care Coalition*
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- *Maggie Priebe, Working America*
- *Margaret Shelleda, California Federation of Teachers*
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Executive Summary

Perhaps the most significant demographic change in the workforce in the past 50 years is the presence of women, who very soon will outnumber men among those who work outside the home. Another significant demographic change in the workforce is the presence of young workers. Over 70 percent of those ages 16-34 are part of the civilian labor force, but only 8.2 percent of them belong to unions. The future of the labor movement depends upon fresh approaches to organizing, and some of the most exciting and innovative strategies and tools are being developed by young organizers using new technology and social media. We interviewed 23 young organizers to understand how they use social media to organize, and whether they have focused on work and family issues in these efforts.

Social Media

Our interviews showed that organizers use internet websites to provide information and credibility to organizations, Facebook and MySpace to help workers to connect with each other and express opinions, and Twitter and texts to remind workers to take action. However organizers who have used these tools also caution that new technology and social media should not be substituted for personal contact, and precautions should be put in place to ensure security and privacy for the workers we organize.

The use of social media and new technology for organizing has been particularly effective among young workers, many of whom have grown up with computers and the internet their whole lives. Statistics show that young workers who join unions have substantially better wages and benefits, but young workers are less likely to be in unions. Therefore much more needs to be done to reach out to them and make their concerns union priorities. To be effective, unions also need to make unions appealing to young workers through a cultural shift and promoting young workers and young staff to leadership positions.

How social media is used:

- an on-line presence enables workers to **check out** the union for themselves
- social media helps younger workers see the union as **hip**
- YouTube or blast texts got people talking about the union by creating a "**buzz** around the campaign"
- unions should now ask for **cell phone and email** information on union authorization cards; **home phone numbers are practically useless** for contacting young workers
- organizing committees **communicate** through Facebook or blogs and/or texts

- social media and the internet allow people to communicate in *flexible* time, which helps people with family responsibilities
- social networking helps people connect across geography and jurisdictions

Users Need Union Support

- labor movement must become *skilled* in using these ways of communicating
- organizers need *technical support* from their unions
- frontline organizers need *authority* to respond rapidly

Work Family Issues

Not only women are concerned about work family issues today. Young workers are also concerned about work family balance, and rate the importance of this issue even higher than their older counterparts. Organizers told us that members' concerns were not necessarily expressed as work and family issues. Rather caregiving responsibilities were often the real reason why workers wanted jobs security, health benefits, less overtime, knowing their schedules well in advance, and other traditional bargaining topics. This speaks to the need to consider whether work and family issues should be framed differently.

- Members needed more support for paid family and medical leave, childcare assistance, flexible hours, etc.
- Work and family issues were major causes of stress for the women they are organizing, whether or not they were framed as work and family issues.
- Mandatory overtime made it impossible to pick children up from childcare, which indicated disrespect and insensitivity to family demands.
- Retail workers need to know their schedules far in advance so they can plan childcare and school.
- The need for paid time off was frequently mentioned in the context of the need to spend more time with family.
- For low wage workers, inadequate health insurance was a family concern.
- For single parents job security is a family issue because not having a job means there is no way to pay bills and put food on the table.

Recommendations

We hope that this research will be the first step in bringing attention to the need to organize women and young workers through use of social media and work and family issues. Organizers are using new technology and social media successfully. The immediate challenge for unions will be how to provide

organizers with these tools, the skills to use them and the budget to maintain them. The longer range challenge will be how unions use these tools strategically and create a new union culture that is attractive to young workers.

Work and family issues are highly important to women workers and young workers today are even more concerned about work/life balance than previous generations, however they are not priorities at most bargaining tables. Issues like job security, health benefits, work scheduling and other commonly recognized core union topics actually relate to work and family issues. Therefore an effort should be made to reframe work and family issues as core labor issues. We recommend **that unions and funders advance the dialogue around work and family issues and young workers; unions begin to include work and family and young workers' issues in their campaign plans; unions experiment with the use of social media through pilot projects that are planned, implemented and evaluated; and that young workers in unions be engaged, supported, mentored, and given opportunities to lead.**