

How to have an Organising Conversation

The FBU has many great tools available to aid communication with members and our national comms team is a credit to members. However nothing builds the kind of impactful engagement more with members than officials and activists having direct one-to-one in-person conversations with members on watches.

A Structured Organising Conversation is an advanced form of such vital one-to-one conversations that you should be having in a planned and strategic manner as part of a wider campaign or power building initiative in branches and brigades (see Appendix on Mapping).

What it isn't?

- A Chat
- A Catch up
- A Lecture
- A Sales-Pitch

Whilst certainly there are times you may have to have such kinds of conversations with members and colleagues this is not the style or point of a structured organisation conversation.

What is it?

- Specific
- Focussed

You are having this conversation for a specific purpose and with a focussed aim to get this member or official to take a particular action to further a campaign or initiative.

The 6 Steps to having an Organising Conversation

1) Introduction

Purpose: introduce yourself, set the context for the conversation

“I am here as the FBU Official to talk to you and get your help with XXXX”

2) Issues & Agitation

Purpose: find out what issues are most important to them, *don't assume you know their issues!*

“What do you think about XXXX? How are you finding work at the moment?”

3) Vision & Education

Purpose: communicate the ‘plan to win’ directly connected to the issues they have raised: the only way they can win is by building strength in numbers

“I get it, and I think that’s why its so important we send a really clear message to the service about XXXX and if we do it together they have to listen”.

4) Call the Question

Purpose: Ask them if they are prepared to take action to win the issues they raised in step two, and to take X action

“Will you come to the rally we have coming up/sign the petition/come to the branch meeting/vote in the strike ballot?”

5) Inoculation

Purpose: Ask them how they think the management/government will respond, and warn them about the kinds of things they will hear from them

“Now we know the service is going to be putting loads of pressure on members not to take part and will claim they are on our side as firefighters, this is the reality....”

“If management try to pull you aside and start talking about the dispute just say to come and speak to me and leave the conversation”.

6) Work, Assignment

Purpose: Make a plan and raise expectations

The first step was for you to take the action. The next step is to make sure everyone in your branch takes the action.

“Great you are on board but I am struggling to get hold of the rest of your watch, can you get them to sign up when you speak to them?”

“Lets do this again this time next week to see how many are on board and if we need to do anything else”

Handling Objections

Having an Organising Conversation takes practise and it's a good exercise to get together as officials to practise this skill and plan your answers for various initiatives you are undertaking. However, regardless of how experienced you are in having these conversations you will still likely come across objections from members in taking an action.

The model we use for handling objections is:

Acknowledge – acknowledge their concerns without dismissing them, let the member feel heard and respected.

AND Answer – take the word 'But' out of your vocabulary. As Sean Bean in Game of Thrones famously said “**Everything before the word “but” is horsesh*t.**” Instead replace 'But' with 'And' thereby not dismissing the concerns of members but instead linking their reservations to why it is so important they take the action – see example below.

Redirect – If the objection is still there it is important to offer the member hope. Getting them to imagine a place where they as a member didn't have to work in a service with this issue or they felt as a union member confident enough to take the action.

Example — “I'm afraid that if I do this I'll be targeted.”

- *Acknowledge:* That is a really fair point, and I understand why you feel that, especially because management can be really intimidating.
- *AND Answer:* And that's why its really important we do this together. We won't take this action unless a majority of us do it, which gives us power and protection in numbers. The truth is that if 60% of us do this, management can't target us all because they need us to make the workplace operate.
- *Redirect:* What would work look like for you if we were actually able to win X [Safer Crew Levels, better pay, better training, proper DECON]

One-to-one conversations best practice

- Setting up a time to talk
- Listening – understanding what the issues are

- Agitation – allow them to get angry
- Laying out the plan to win – give them hope.
- Making the ask – give them an action, every member of the FBU is responsible for the success of the union.
- Making a follow up plan
 - Write this down, schedule it, and stick to it!!
 - Get comfortable with silence. Once you've asked something from the member don't feel the need to be the first to speak, thereby giving them a 'get-out' opportunity.