Practicing What We Preach:

The **National Organizers Alliance** Guide to the Policies and Practices of Justice Organizations

NOA's Mission

To advance progressive organizing for social, economic and environmental justice, and to support, challenge and nurture the people of all ages who do that work.

National Organizers Alliance

715 G Street SE
Washington, DC 20003
Phone: 202-543-6603
Fax: 202-543-2462
www.noacentral.org

Table of Contents

LETTER FROM NOA'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Colleague:

Welcome to the first draft of **Practicing What We Preach**, a look at how we treat each other in our organizations.

Our hope? Dave Beckwith, one of NOA's Steering Committee members, describes it this way: "A movement of organizations where the staff is learning and growing throughout a long career, where we can be whole and healthy persons, where we can follow the pull of our passion for justice, and mentor a next generation that's better than we are."

Practicing What We Preach reflects the contributions of dozens of NOA members around the country who share that vision. And it is a reflection of NOA's mission to advance progressive organizing and support, sustain and challenge the people who do that work.

From NOA's inception, that question of organizer sustenance has been linked to the culture of organizing and how folks are treated on the job. The first issue of The Ark included some of what we learned from our early interviews. One young African-American organizer told us, "I love the chain-smoking nicotine addicts of my past but it's not an appealing lifestyle. Sure we can get a lot done if we work 60 hours a day, but we should be inviting people into a lifestyle that's healthier. If the institution can't transform the lives of its direct members, then how can it really hope to make a difference in anybody else's?"

"It was my first real drive," a Latina organizer told us, "and I was the only Spanish-speaking organizer for a unit that was 70 percent Hispanic. But I felt like I had no ownership of the campaign....I got to spend no time with my husband. It was already hard dealing with all the adaptation problems of immigrants, and this made it more difficult. They didn't care about me as a person, only as an organizer."

From the start, it became apparent that the culture of movement work favored those with other economic or social support systems, people with limited responsibilities, and those willing to place their work above their health or their families. Mirroring our larger society, these factors of privilege and priority generally meant that the field was dominated by white males, even as the "troops" became more diverse.

We finally started **Practicing What We Preach** when, over a three year period, three NOA Steering Committee (women and/or organizers of color) were fired during staff unionization efforts. Both in unions and community organizations, these situations make us queasy, since we generally love and respect the organizations, at the same time as we cannot reconcile the practice.

But it is only one of the uncomfortable situations that propel organizers out of organizations, and into other fields. NOA is frequently a place of first resort for organizations seeking advice on personnel clauses and practices -- and a last resort for organizers on the edge of implosion in their current jobs. Over the years, we have handled these questions and crises on a case-by-case basis, but we began to recognize that there are some common systemic issues and some possible systemic solutions.

This was reinforced by the folks who contributed to this document. In focus groups and interviews, EDs and line organizers alike told us how desperately they want vibrant, healthy organizations. They described the need for much greater support from funders, boards and other organizers to achieve better treatment, pay and training for staffs. They were eloquent about feeling trapped by insufficient

resources, combined with a lack of good models and an absence of supervisory training and staff development.

This report seeks to identify both the written policies and organizational texture between the lines that either encourage or deter longevity and joy on the job. Reading through the comments, I was challenged to reflect on our own organizational practices. I was excited to see the range of experiences and ideas. And I was, as always, awed by the passion and insight that characterize our co-workers in the field.
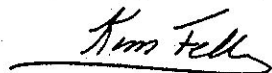
What happens next? That's really up to NOA members and the practitioners in the field. The beauty of the best practices stuff is that it gives us a chance to go to our boards and say, "See, everyone is offering a pension plan these days." Or to go to a funder and say, "No way we're adding another organizer with only $15,000 – give us more!" There are many possible avenues for working together.

We thank Lynne Barbee for coordinating the project and all the members who have provided contracts and policies, taken part in interviews, attended focus groups.

The bottom line is that, as organizers, we love what we do. We feel honored to be able to do this work. Many of us want to do it for a long time, if we can. And we want more people to do it with us.

We hope this project will help get us there.

Onward,

Kim Fellner
Executive Director

INTRODUCTION
by Lynne Barbee

"Lots of corporations critically self examine how they do what they do. Of course, not how it affects people and the world around them, but to achieve their goal – to make more money. Yet, given our mission – justice, equality and creating a better society -- I've not found that capacity in our organizations, and we have something of far greater importance to do than make money. There isn't a deliberate effort to be critical. There isn't a tactical self (organizational) awareness about how we do things. There isn't a systematic way to evaluate what we do internally – there's lots of evaluation of projects and programs, but it is a whole other thing to start examining critically what we do internally."
-Joe Catania, NOA Member

This guide is meant to initiate the conversation about HOW we do our work. We do not seek to strictly define, but rather to offer suggestions about good and bad practices and policies. We want to start asking the questions, to encourage NOA members to take ownership of the process of institutional change.

This guide is a compilation of YOUR ideas. For months, we have listened to NOA members – in person, on the phone and in written communication – talk about their achievements and their problems related to internal policies and practices. Many NOA members have thought a lot about this issue, and are struggling to change the way they work.

Full Disclosure
Personally, I've been an organizer for 30 years. It is how I think. It is my life's work, and I intend to keep doing it for as long as I can. I do have some very strong opinions about good and bad working conditions – I've experienced my share of both. Most of my bad experiences that others of you, too many others, have also experienced are included in this guide. I've also experienced just enough good ones to know they are not aberrations, but the result of clear thinking, commitment and good management. I've also come to agree with long-time activist and Episcopalian minister Churchill Gibson, who reminds us: "Sin being what it is, we've got to have collective bargaining."

It pains me to see good organizers give it up for reasons that were preventable, correctable. I want to have lots more people doing this work for a lifetime, long after my lifetime. So, I came to this project with that goal – if we can figure out how to do this better, we can have more people doing it, and doing it for longer.

Too often, the personnel policies we compose mirror the corporate hierarchies and power structures we denounce. How can we work for human dignity if we do not work in an environment that supports human dignity? If we don't change the way we work, how can we change the way the world works? If we aren't practicing what we preach, how can anyone (even ourselves) believe in our principles?

Methodology
The lists of best and worst are taken directly from interviews – in focus groups, on the phone, email and surveys. The comments are quotes from NOA members and supporters. We made no attempt to create consensus or define priorities and we covered only the issues that people wanted to talk about.

In Boston, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles we conducted focus group meetings of 5 to 15 people each. Each session was taped, but the rule was that the discussions were private: participants were not to take information outside the group --- we all know that movement gossip is very powerful.

The tapes were for notes only and will not be used publicly or transcribed. That's **why the comments** are anonymous. The goal was to create a safe space for an exchange of ideas and experiences. All it took was the simple question, "Give me an example of the best and/or worst policies or practices you've experienced" to start any group on a very long, and -- as you can tell from the quotes -- very honest discussion.

And the safe space concept also mandated that we meet separately with directors (executive directors and program directors) and rank and file organizers. This meant that directors were free to speak without their staff present and organizers were able to share their opinions without worrying how a supervisor might react.

The survey of policy/contract language is the result of topic by topic review of the personnel policies and union contracts on hand, with sample language. Organizations have very different funding, so there is no way to say that everyone should have the same parental leave or training fund. Some topics, however, are based on organizational ideology and structure, such as the discipline/discharge process.

The appendix includes a list of everyone who participated in this project to date — individuals who completed surveys, organizations who contributed policy manuals or staff contracts, the focus group participants in Boston, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. We are only at the beginning. We expect the ranks of participants to grow, and they will be acknowledged.

In the course of preparing this guide, a number of organizations called the NOA office looking for advice on creating policies. We are honored that NOA is able to provide some assistance. We hope to compile a list of NOA members who are willing to act as consultants, both organizers and EDs, who have written and rewritten policies, have acted as facilitators and who care enough about this subject to offer their services to other organizations.

Conclusion
Our goal is to provide a useful tool to analyze the policies and practices of your organization, and to help you make change where and when you can. Some changes in policies and practices will depend on available funding. Many of the major concerns documented here, however, cannot be fixed with more money. It is far more challenging to address issues of power.

Just like we can't, at one moment in time, "fix" fair housing in a community, or "fix" racism in schools, we can't in one meeting "fix" our internal policies and practices. Just as we organize to change conditions in our communities, we can organize to change our working conditions. The process of democratic change can be slow and difficult, but isn't it part of our mission?

We would like to hear what has been helpful to you, what other ideas you have, and, if you have made some internal changes, how you did it. With your input, in a few years we may be able to rewrite this guide and see that we've learned something.

In more than one NOA-friendly site there is posted the quote from Gandhi: "We must become the change we seek to achieve." We hope this guide helps our organizations become the change they seek to achieve. We hope this guide helps us, as organizers become the change we seek to achieve.

A very big THANK YOU to all the NOA members who have contributed their time, energy and thought to this project.

SURVEY OF CONTRACTS AND POLICIES

The following review of policies is based on available staff union contracts and personnel policies. We requested policies from organizations that either declined to share them or organizations where staff said they have never seen a policy manual.

The essential difference between a union contract and a policy manual is that in the contract, the staff has voted to accept the policies and they cannot be changed unilaterally by management.

Most personnel policies state clearly that the conditions can be changed at any time without notice. For example:
> "[The organization] is not bound by the provisions of this document and may make exceptions to its administration where, at the discretion of [the organization], such exceptions are warranted. This document is subject to change at any time by authorized representatives of [the organization], as conditions or circumstances may require, and with or without prior notice."

We have divided this section into ECONOMIC and NON-ECONOMIC ISSUES. Obviously, economic issues are largely governed by the budget of the organization. Non-economic issues may have a minor economic impact, but are more related to organizational ideology and power structure.

Where best practices (as identified by NOA members) were found, they are noted as such. In some cases, the terms low and high refer to standards, in others, actual number of days. Sample contract/personnel policy language is excerpted to illustrate some high standards or best practices.

ECONOMIC ISSUES:
Vacation:
While the number of vacation days is clearly based on budget, policies relating to carry-over and accrual tend to be based more on an organization's intention to ensure that staff USE vacation each year, and the average longevity of staff. Advance notice of vacation use and supervisor approval of timing is very often omitted in policies.

Low: 5-10 days in 0-3 years, maximum 15 days, no carryover, no cash out
Average: 10-15 days first (0-3) years, up to 20 days after 4-6 years, carryover with permission
High: 20 days after 2 years, 25 days after 6 years
Very High: 26 days each year, 44 days after 6 years
European style: "vacation bonus"– additional wages (2.5 to 18 days pay, based on seniority) during vacation

> *Sample:* All full time employees ...shall accrue vacation leave at the rate of 6 hours per pay period, resulting in an annual equivalent based on a seven hour work day of twenty (20) days and four (4) hours. Employees who work less than full-time shall earn vacation leave on a pro-rata basis.... All requests...shall be

1

submitted in writing for approval...consistent with the following: 1. Up to and including 5 days' vacation – as many days' notice as the number of days to be requested off; 2. More than 5 days up to and including 10 days' vacation – no less than 2 weeks notice; 3. Over 10 days' vacation – no less than 4 weeks notice.... A good faith effort shall be made to accommodate requests for vacation leave.... An employee shall be permitted to accrue up to 210 hours of vacation leave, with a pro-rata cap for part-time employees.... Upon separation, employees shall receive earned but unused vacation pay....

> --UNITE Local 66L Union contract with AFSC New England

Parental/maternity leave:

The Family and Medical Leave Act specifies UNPAID leave. More organizations are instituting parental leave, recognizing fathers as equal caregivers. Local laws may require short-term disability insurance that may cover pregnancy.

Low: FMLA standard (12 weeks unpaid) for mother only, insurance not paid
Average: 4 weeks paid for mother, 2 weeks paid for father, 3 month unpaid for mother, insurance paid
High: 6 weeks paid for parent, up to 6 months unpaid for parent, insurance paid
Very High: 12 weeks paid for parent, up to 6 months unpaid for parent, insurance paid
European style: 16 weeks paid for mother, 2 weeks paid for father but work at 2/3 time for full pay for next two weeks, unpaid leave up to child's first birthday
Common: paid leave only after 12 months of service, covers adoption as well as birth, 3 month notice, return to work guarantee
Rare: no guarantee of return to work; amount of paid leave at ED's discretion
Best practice: 6 months paid maternity leave

> **Sample:** *An employee with twelve (12) months or more of service who has worked 1250 hours...during the previous twelve (12) months...shall have the right to 12 weeks of paid leave for parental leave, defined as maternity, paternity and adoption leave. As defined in the FMLA, there must be 30 days notice for the request for leave except for emergencies.*
>
> --SEIU Local 535 contract with the Labor Project for Working Families

Retirement /pension:

In general, there are two kinds of retirement/pension plans: defined benefit (similar to social security), where the benefit is determined according to an established formula covering all participants, (e.g., salary times years of employment); and defined contribution (like a 401k), where each participant has a separate account, its accrued benefit amount is based on contributions and earnings, and all of the investment risk is assumed by the individual.

Most organizations pay into social security. Other options can be set up, some with minimal initial cost. If you have a plan and want an explanation of it, contact your plan administrator. If you are considering establishing one, contact an expert, because this stuff is very complicated. For information on the NOA retirement/pension plan, check the website (www.noacentral.org) or call the NOA plan administrator at 888-662-7367.

Low: no plan; 401(k) plan with no employer contribution (pre-tax savings)
Average: 401(k) plan with employer match of employee contribution of 2-5 %
High: Non-union: 401(k) plan with employer contribution minimum 5%, vesting based on movement employment (NOA plan)
Very High: Union: Defined benefit pension plan with employer contribution of 7-15%, plus 401(k) for employee contributions
Non-union: 401(k) plan with employer contribution of 9%, from date of hire

> **Sample:** *CCC has an approved pension plan to which it contributes nine (9) percent of an employee's regular salary.... An employee has the option of having all or part of CCC's contribution invested in a fixed rate account or mutual funds.... Vestment in the plan is effective from the day of employment.*
> --Center for Community Change Personnel Policies Handbook

> **Sample:** Employers pay at least 5% of each employee's compensation. Employees can make additional, voluntary pre-tax contributions. Each participant can choose how to invest his or her account balance. *Participants can move from one participating Plan employer to another without losing service or vesting credit or incurring penalties.*
> -- National Organizers Alliance Plan for participating groups

Training/professional development:

This topic has both economic and non-economic aspects. Policies and contracts usually cover only the economic side. The non-economic side is the value and encouragement given to training. For example, training new staff may be part of the job duties of a supervisor or lead, but their workload is such that there is little time to train well.

Low: financial support for training, seminars, conferences at ED discretion
Average: specific, limited fund for reimbursing costs, on employee's own time, with ED approval
High: Fixed dollar amount per employee per year available, limited time off for classes, in-service training
Very High: all of above, plus "growth leave" for 1 week per year, professional fees and conferences paid
Best Practice and Rare: sabbatical leave

> **Sample:** GROWTH LEAVE: SEP Employees receive one week paid growth leave per year. The purpose of this leave is to use the time away from regular duties to learn more in order to do a better job for SEP. This time may be used to visit other groups, study and read, attend conference for training sessions, etc. Some minimal costs for this will be paid by SEP. The SEP Board at the recommendation of the Director must approve any expense over $300....
> SABBATICALS: SEP employees are entitled to 20 working days extra paid vacation after five years employment with SEP.... The employee must agree to work for SEP at least one year after the sabbatical. The sabbatical...must be approved six months in advance by the Director. The Director must submit leave request to the chair of the Personnel Committee.
> --Southern Empowerment Project Personnel Policies

Sample: YouthAction is committed to providing opportunities to staff for development of their skills, abilities and knowledge. To this end, we have institutionalized a process for staff to identify staff development needs and goals and devote time and resources, as feasible, to meeting those needs. YouthAction desires to have a well-rounded staff. YouthAction therefore establishes the following policies to encourage its staff to pursue diverse interests and develop personal skills: 1....each new staff member will prepare a list of their own development goals...and include...ideas of ways for the goals to be achieved. Additionally, each staff member should note what particular knowledge or abilities she/he has which could be shared with fellow staff. 2...staff will collectively develop three-month measure of staff development designed to take steps toward meeting everyone's goals.... Every three months, staff will meet to review the previous three month's measures, as well as to set goals for the coming three months. Progress...is also reviewed on a weekly basis at regular staff meetings. 3.Friday Schools...Once a week, staff will come together for some sort of *training*, broadly defined, designed to enhance the skills and knowledge of staff, in line with the goals identified by staff themselves. 4...Each full-time employee shall be allotted $600 per calendar year for staff development... -- YouthAction Organizational and Operations Manual

Insurance (medical, dental, vision, life, disability):

Some policies specify workers compensation coverage, many are silent but state law may mandate it. "Family" may mean only dependents or spouse/domestic partner coverage too. Some policies are very pro-active regarding domestic partner coverage, which can be difficult to acquire, depending on available plans.

COBRA is the federal law that extends access to medical insurance to former employees, at their own cost. In Chicago, a number of organizations have formed a Coop to purchase health insurance.

Low: 90% paid medical for employee, no dental, no family coverage, no life or long-term disability, effective only after probationary period, no COBRA
Average: fully paid medical for employee and dependents, some dental coverage for employee and family, life insurance and long term disability, effective first of month following hire
High: fully paid medical for employee and family (dependents, spouse/partner), full dental and some vision for employee and family, choice of plans, COBRA, effective from date of hire, life, long term and short term disability and accident
Very High: all the above, but if employee declines coverage because covered elsewhere, organization reimburses that coverage or pays employee lump sum/year
Best Practice: coverage as soon as possible (within 30 days) of hire

> *Sample:* All full time employees will be entitled to family Medical and Dental coverage at the time of employment...provided through the Chicago Community Organizing Coop. Options vary from year to year, but currently include an HMO and PPO. If an employee is covered by his/her spouse's health insurance program, the organization will pay up to $2000 a year towards the employee's out-of-pocket medical or dental expenses.
> --National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice Personnel Policy

Sample: District 1199NW/SEIU shall provide and pay for medical, surgical and hospital services coverage for all employees...[and] a dental plan for all permanent employees...who are assigned at least a .5 FTE, and their dependents, spouse and/or domestic partner. --1199NW Staff Union contract with District 1199NW/SEIU

Sick leave:

Parents often take sick days for sick children. The Fair Labor Standards Act is generally interpreted to mean that an exempt (salaried) employee need not take a sick day for a doctor's appointment. Sick leave banks may require a minimum employee deposit.

Low: 6-8 days, no accrual or carryover, personal use only
Average: 12 days, limited carryover or accrual, use for dependent
High: 15 days, unlimited accrual or leave bank, use for family member
Very High: 18 days, unlimited accrual, use for family member, sick leave bank
Rare: Paid Time Off system, combining sick/personal/vacation up to 40+ days; no specified number of sick days, but abuse is subject to discipline; bonus personal days for non-use of sick time

Sample: Sick leave with pay shall be accrued on the basis of one (1) day for each month of continuous service cumulative to sixty (60) working days...credited to an employee's Regular Sick Leave Account. Once an employee has accrued sixty (60) working days of sick leave credits, each additional day of sick leave accrual, up to a maximum of thirty-six (36) days, shall be credited to the employee's Sick Leave Reserve Account...[that] may be used only after an employee has exhausted all sick leave benefits credited in the Regular Sick Leave Account.

Upon termination, an employee shall be paid for twenty percent (20%) of unused sick leave accumulation of the employee's Regular Sick Leave Account. Annually up to five (5) days of accrued sick leave may be converted to personal leave.

--OPEIU Local 8 Union Representatives Collective Bargaining Agreement

Holidays (and personal days):

Additional holidays can be used to compensate for low pay: one organization observes St. Patrick's, May Day, Juneteenth and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn's birthday for this reason.

Low: 7-9 days
Average: 10-12 days
High: 13-15 days, flexibility for other cultural/religious observances
Very High: 16-18 days, flexibility for other cultural/religious observances
Rare: 19-22 days, additional days for other cultural/religious observances
Standard Days: New Years, ML King Jr., Presidents, Memorial, Independence, Labor, Columbus or Veterans, Thanksgiving & day after, Christmas Day; 2-5 "float" holidays or personal days
Best Practice: close office during week between Christmas and New Years

> **Sample:** Make the Road by Walking will grant every full and part time staff member with paid time off for all religious observances. An employee...must request permission ...at least two weeks prior.... A request...shall not be unreasonably withheld.
> —Make the Road by Walking, Inc. Employee Handbook

> **Sample:** Because Thanksgiving and Christmas are not days of celebration for all cultures, an employee may choose to replace these two holidays with other culturally relevant holidays [but]...must notify their supervisor, in writing, of that desire at least one week before...and shall submit a plan of expected work to be completed on the holiday in question.
> —UNITE Local 66L Union contract with AFSC New England

Salary structure:

Union contracts usually specify pay scales; personnel policies rarely do and often are completely silent on salary. Actual dollar amounts are rarely available except for union contracts, and vary dramatically depending upon the organization's budget. The focus here is not how much the salary is but how it is determined.

Low: Salary purely individual, only merit increases, all at ED's discretion or Board discretion for ED
Average: Salary range for position, place on range set at ED discretion, cost of living increases based on budget, steps in union contract, merit in non-union policy
High: Salary range for position, place on range set by objective factors (education, experience), limited annual step increases, cost of living increases negotiated or based on CPI
Very High: all of above, plus more steps, end of year bonus, placement on range grievable
Best Practice: pay based on need, e.g., extra pay for dependents
Best Practice: limited differential between highest paid and lowest paid, e.g., director cannot make more than 2.5 times the salary of new hire
Rare: employee must request pay increase in writing to ED

> **Sample:** Make the Road by Walking staff salary levels generally will be determined according to years of service to the Organization. Each full-time employee will have a salary "point" that will correspond to a salary level. Following the completion of each year of service...each staff member will receive an additional point along with an annual cost of living adjustment equal to the inflation rate for the previous year.... Employees may start work at the organization with additional salary points in order to reflect...prior relevant work experience and/or prior relevant life experience, relevant educational experience, and familial responsibilities.... If a new staff member has to care for children or other family members, they can earn an additional salary point.... Whenever a new staff member is hired, the hiring committee must recommend to the Staff Collective the appropriate number of starting salary points. The Staff Collective will decide....
> —Make the Road by Walking, Inc. Employee Handbook

Sample: [Each] position...will be assigned [a] salary band.... For newly-hired employees, the assigned entry level percentage shall be between 100% and 125% [of the base salary for her/his band], depending upon prior AFSC employment, prior work experience and essential, job-related skills. The AFSC/NERO shall set this percentage...and the Union may challenge the decision...through the grievance-arbitration procedure.... Employees, both full and part-time, shall earn longevity increments within their salary band at the rate of 1% per fiscal year.... In addition, it is agreed that it is the goal of the parties that increases in the base salary should equal the increase in the cost of living.... At minimum, the annual increase in the base salary shall be the following [in 2000 at least 3%, in 2001 at least 2.5%, in 2002 at least 2.5%].... In addition, each year as part of the budget and priorities processes, the AFSC/NERO will discuss with the Union in the Joint Council additional percentage increases in the base salary, or some other adjustment.... If, in any year, either party desires to propose that the total monies available for the annual increases and/or other adjustments (but not the seniority increment) be reallocated in such a way as to give the lower paid employees a higher percentage increase (tilting), then that party may bring the matter to the Joint Council....

--UNITE Local 66L contract with AFSC New England Regional Office

Childcare:

Far more policies/contracts covered automobile costs than childcare costs. Is that just a sign that more organizers have cars than kids? Flexible spending accounts allow employees a pre-tax deduction to place in an account for such things as childcare or medical costs. If the money is not spent, it is forfeited, but for workers with fixed childcare costs, it lowers their tax (instead of paying tax on $25,000, you deduct $2,000 in childcare costs, and pay tax on an income of $23,000).

Low: no policy or contract language
Average: Flexible spending plans
High: Minimal reimbursement of extra costs due to work schedule
Very High: employer support for affordable childcare, flexible schedules for childcare
Rare: onsite childcare or emergency drop-in centers
Best Practice: Additional pay for dependents (see salary structure)

Sample: YouthAction considers childcare to be a right of employees, just as health care or disability insurance is.... The employer and employee will make a GOOD FAITH EFFORT to find the most affordable, quality childcare provisions. For example, with several staff with children, staff could rotate childcare days and work 4 day weeks with longer hours...The employer and employee will each commit to attempt to be FLEXIBLE and CREATIVE to assure childcare for children of employees.... YouthAction will reimburse an employee for 100% of childcare costs resulting from work-related activities.... The Personnel and Board Committee may authorize payment of monthly childcare assistance up to the maximum amount established...based on need, taking into account other resources of the employee and considering creative means of safely decreasing these costs....

--YouthAction Organizational and Operations Manual

NON-ECONOMIC ISSUES:

Performance evaluations

Evaluations that focus on goals and training needs are generally appreciated by organizers. Evaluations that focus on discipline and performance problems are generally dreaded by supervisors. The challenge is to find the most productive evaluation process.

Low: no policy or contract language
Average: evaluation in probationary period, annual evaluation by ED
High: evaluation in probationary period, annually by supervisor/ED, grievable but not to arbitration
Very High: team or peer and self-evaluations, evaluation of supervisor/ED, grievable
Rare: evaluations every 6 months
Best Practice: reciprocal evaluations of employee and supervisor

> *Sample:* The intent of the evaluation process and its outcome is, in addition to providing the basis for making personnel decisions, to also serve as a learning tool to develop goals for further staff development.... All employees are evaluated by the end of their probationary period and at least annually thereafter.... The evaluation process must include: (1) a self-evaluation completed by the employee; (2) a written evaluation by the supervisor; (3) where and when applicable, an opportunity for peer or team evaluation; (4) a meeting between the employee and the supervisor.... Employees will have the opportunity annually to evaluate the director. The purpose of this evaluation is to provide input for consideration by the director. This procedure will not infringe upon the right of a board/owner(s) to evaluate management.
> --Childcare Guild/SEIU 925 contract with Association of Childcare Employees

> *Sample:* Written evaluations are done at the end of probation and, thereafter, annually during June. The director and staff member will discuss the evaluation after the staff member has had a chance to review it. Evaluations should focus on achievement and areas for improvement. Plans for improvement and defining of future goals should be covered. Staff members must also evaluate the director using the appropriate form and the same process. Directors and staff are encouraged to conduct ongoing conversations about their work together and progress in meeting goals.
> --LAANE Organization Policy Manual

Discipline/discharge:

Progressive discipline requires a several step process, usually including verbal and written warnings and corrective action plans. The US Supreme Court recently ruled that even non-union employees have the right to a witness in any disciplinary meeting ("Winegarten right")— as a right under the National Labor Relations Act.

"Just cause" means that the employer must show cause why the person is being disciplined or terminated. "At will" means that an employee may be disciplined or terminated at the will of the employer, without proven cause.

Low: Non-union: at will employee, **ED discretion** for discipline and termination
Average: Union: Just cause termination, **progressive** discipline including corrective action plan, Winegarten rights, grievable
Non-union: progressive discipline, ED reports to Board subcommittee
High: Non-union: just cause, progressive discipline, with corrective action plan
Very High: Non-union: just cause, progressive discipline, Winegarten right
Rare: collective must vote on discipline or discharge
Best Practice: just cause termination

> **Sample:** VOP maintains a "just cause" philosophy regarding disciplinary action. This means that VOP... employees will be notified about employment problems and given a chance to correct them; that allegations of employment misconduct will be investigated and that the investigation will be fair; that disciplinary action will be based on proof of misconduct; that policies and procedures will be enforced fairly; and that any disciplinary action will be appropriate to the misconduct.
> The Executive Director will abide by the following procedures.... Step 1. Verbal warnings.... Step 2. Written warnings.... Step 3. The Executive Director and the employee may involve a third party (another person) that is mutually agreed upon in a meeting to try to resolve the situation.... Step 4. The Executive Director and employee may meet with the full staff to seek assistance with resolution to the problem.... Step 5. Probation: The probation plan...will...include a timetable, and a summary of the review meetings shall be given to the employee and the Executive Committee.... Step 6. Termination....
> The probation plan may be appealed to the Executive Committee [which] may exercise one of the following options: 1. Mediate the dispute; 2. Sustain the probation plan; 3. Cancel the probation plan; 4. Suspend the employee for a specified amount of time, with or without pay; or, 5. Immediately terminate the employment of an employee.
> --Virginia Organizing Project, Inc. Personnel Policies

> **Sample:** Early and open communication between the supervisor and employee helps to identify and resolve difficulties, and is encouraged. If such communication is not possible of successful the AFSC/NERO agrees with the concept of progressive discipline with the following normal steps prior to discharge: oral warning, written warning, period of close supervision, final written warning.
> In some cases, paid or unpaid suspension may be appropriate. Which steps the AFSC/NERO chooses to utilize, skip, repeat or merge, and the amount of time between the steps utilized, will depend upon the circumstances of each...[that] may include, but expressly are not limited to, the seriousness of the misconduct or deficient performance, the employees length of service the length of time since the last incident involving this employee and other relevant and/or mitigating circumstances. However, except in cases where serious misconduct has been alleged, normally two written warning will be given before a period of closer supervision [which shall not exceed six months]...The AFSC/NERO agrees that no disciplinary action will be taken without just cause. Union representation will be available to employees if they wish at any point in a process of discipline....
> --UNITE Local 66L Union contract with AFSC New England

9

Sexual harassment:

Many of the policies and most of the union contracts had no specific sexual harassment language at all. Does it have to happen to prompt a policy?

Low: policy/contract silent
Average: non-harassment as part of non-discrimination policy
High: sexual harassment clearly defined, fully investigated and cause for termination
Very High: all of above plus more extensive language defining, informal and formal procedure, and included "hostile work environment" covering non-employees

> *Sample:* The CARECEN Administrative/Personnel Manual has 8 pages of thorough and extensive policy. Obviously, it is too long to reproduce here. The policy includes the following: 1. who is covered (everyone), mutual intimate relationships not covered; 2. definition including "quid pro quo," hostile environment, verbal sexual, physical sexual, visual sexual, unwelcome conduct, working environment; 3. procedure: designated ombudsman, consultation procedure, informal complaints, informal procedure, formal complaints, formal procedure; 4. confidentiality; 5. remedies and disciplinary action; 6. harassment by different parties: by an employee; by a client or potential client of the office; by a pro bono attorney, by a member of a community group with whom CARECEN associates, by a consultant/contractor or potential consultant/contractor of CARECEN, by a member of the Board of Directors; 7. retaliation; 8. education about sexual harassment policy.

Grievance procedure:

Standard in union contracts is a grievance procedure through binding arbitration, with cost split between employer and union. Some personnel policies state that the Executive Director may choose to bypass the grievance process.

Low: Non-union policy has no grievance procedure
Average: Union: 2-3 step procedure then binding arbitration
Non-union: to ED, appeal to subcommittee of Board
High: Union: mediation as well as binding arbitration
Non-union: appeal to full Board after subcommittee of Board and ED
Very High: Non-union: ombudsperson or outside mediation or staff collective decision

> *Sample:* First Step: Any grievance shall be filed within 15 days of the alleged event or when the employee knew or should have known about the alleged event. The grievance will be taken up by the Executive Director within 10 days. The Executive Director shall respond within 10 days.
> Second Step: If the grievance is not settled under the first step, it shall be taken up with the Board of Directors or a committee designed by the Board within two weeks...[which] shall then respond within two weeks.
> Third Step: If the grievance is not settled under the second step, the grievance may be referred to a third party mutually agreed upon by the Employer and the Union within 30 days. The decision of the third party shall be final and binding. The parties are encouraged to seek an arbitrated bench decision within 48 hours. Every effort shall be made to find an acceptable party

on a pro-bono basis. Failing that, any costs associated with the process shall be borne equally by the parties.

> --SEIU Local 535 contract with the Labor Project for Working Families

Affirmative action:

Policies on affirmative action are generally related to hiring opportunity and don't address promotion and opportunities once hired; many are silent on ADA.

Low: General non-discrimination clause and statement of equal opportunity employment
Average: Affirmative action clause, active recruitment of women, people of color
High: Extensive language of affirmative action, recruitment and training, ADA language
Very high: policy includes EEO for those with "life-threatening disease", specific standards for women, people of color, GLBT, Viet Nam war veterans
Rare: Board review of EEO standard, affirmative action clause includes training to combat bigotry, staff must reflect composition of constituency

> *Sample:* WCA believes that equal opportunity for all staffers is important for the continuing success of our organization and promotes the full realization of this policy through a positive, continuing program of affirmative action.
> In accordance with state and federal law, WCA provides equal employment opportunity and will not discriminate against a staffer or applicant for employment because of race, disability, color, creed, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, national origin, ancestry, veteran status, or non-job related factors in personnel matters such as hiring, promotion, demotion, training, benefits, transfers, layoffs, termination, recommendation, rates of pay or other forms of compensation. Opportunity is provided to all staffers based on qualifications and job requirements.
> We will attempt to achieve and maintain a diverse work force. These steps may include, but are not limited to, the following: Pursuing an affirmative action program, with regular review by the Board of Directors; Ensuring that WCA's policy regarding equal employment opportunity is communicated to all staffers; Ensuring that hiring, promotion and salary administration practices are fair and consistent with the policy of WCA; Reporting to the Board of Directors on all activities and efforts to implement WCA's policy of equal employment opportunities.
> **ADA Compliance:** WCA welcomes applications from people with disabilities and complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. Steps include, but are not limited to: Considering all applicants with disabilities for employment using the same criteria as are used for the employment of persons without disabilities; Considering staffers with disabilities for promotions using the same criteria that are used for the promotion of staffers without disabilities; Taking steps to make its facilities barrier-free and accessible according to appropriate federal and state statues; Making schedule and other adjustments to reasonably accommodate staffers with disabilities; Educating staffers to the fact that individuals with disabilities are employed by WCA and should not be discriminated against; Posting notices explaining he provisions of ADA and staff rights under the law. -- Washington Citizen Action Personnel Policies Manual

Probation period:

Probationary employees can generally be terminated without cause. Where employment is "at will," everyone can be terminated without cause, even after the probationary period. Where "just cause" is the policy, post-probationary employees cannot be terminated, except with cause.

The principle is to create a trial period to determine if the employee is capable of performing the job as defined, whether a new hire or a promotional position. Also, it is a period to test if the employee is a good "fit" for the organization. How long does it take to figure out these two conditions?

Low: no specified period
Average: 3 months, with evaluation(s) midway and at end, not grievable
High: 6 months, 3 months with extension of 3 months, midway evaluation, promotional probation for 1-3 months
Very High: 6 months with 3 month extension
Rare: one year
Common: policy without "just cause" termination repeats "at will" status in probationary language

> *Sample:* The probationary period for [non-exempt or clerical] Employees shall be sixty-six (66) paid working days [with written evaluation by immediate supervisor at 33 and 66 paid working days].... The probationary period for [exempt or professional] Employees shall be one hundred thirty-two (132) paid working days [with written evaluation by immediate supervisor at 66 and 132 paid working days].... Upon successful completion of the probationary period, Employees shall be permanent. Probationary period for [non-exempt] employees may be extended for a period not to exceed twenty-two (22) working days by mutual agreement between the Employee and his/her immediate supervisor with written notification to SPCA and further extension must be agreed to by SPCA.
> --Staff Professional and Clerical Association (SPCA) contract
> with California Nurses Association

NOA MEMBERS DEFINE BEST & WORST

The definitions of best and worst policies/practices come directly from NOA members and supporters. Generally they are elaborated in the comments that are extracted from taped conversations. We promised confidentiality, so names are withheld.

Topics include staff development & training; management/supervision & evaluations; structure, decision-making & planning; pay & benefits; discipline & accountability; hours of work; racism/sexism & other oppression. Policies and practices cover other important issues, but these are the topics people chose to focus on during the interviews and focus groups.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING

"Usually we talk about organizational growth in terms of new projects or new funding circles. But we need DEPTH of growth, to develop staff, give them training."

Among organizers, this topic was the one of the most widely discussed. In every focus group meeting, lack of training and development came up as a major concern. Even where it is recognized as a need, funding is rarely available to support it. Blaming funders doesn't let us off the hook....

Best
❖ One-on-one mentoring/training by senior staff/supervisor
❖ New organizers paired with experienced staff for initial training period
❖ Experienced organizers have wide range of flexibility in work
❖ Work plans done by all staff, and posted on internal email system
❖ Staff pitch in/are assigned to help others on a difficult project
❖ Sabbaticals
❖ Learning from peers
❖ Having room to grow in the organization
❖ Being given a lot of independence to prioritize work
❖ Woman of color as mentor
❖ Take turns chairing meetings to get experience

Worst
▪ Staff get little or no training
▪ Lip service to leadership development
▪ Have to pay for and take vacation time to get training

Comments

"I was lucky to have a good one-on-one relationship with my supervisor who focused on developing my skills, helping me identify my strengths and weaknesses and challenging me."

"When I first started organizing I'd had some political experience and was a bit older, so they thought I didn't need training – not that anyone gets it anyway. So I took vacation time, paid my own money to get training, and I found mentors in other organizations."

"We have to teach people to think. Whatever style of organizing you have, you can fit it in as long as you can think through what's being presented. That's where our organizations are failing. We bring in lots of active, left, great progressive people who want to think through things, and then when they start to question it's seen as a challenge to authority."

"There is not just one way to organize. Each organizer has his or her own style, and the organization has to be open to diverse styles."

"After 3 years in one organization I could pretty much pick and choose my own projects. I had proved my skills and that I was invested in the organization, so I was allowed to flourish, and my talents were recognized."

MANAGEMENT/SUPERVISION & EVALUATIONS

"Supervising organizers is particularly challenging, because if they are doing their work you can't see them. They are out there and you are in the office. There has to be complete trust, because if you don't trust them you start questioning them and then you start building this snowball of mistrust."

This topic was the source of considerable frustration among both directors and organizers. In many organizations it is a major challenge, primarily due to lack of training of supervisors and time/energy spent on supervision.

Best
- New organizers have close supervision, frequent contact with supervisor
- Do not supervise more than 4 people
- Co-directors
- Executive coaches
- Executive Director support group – within network or local area
- Twice a month "reflections" with director to maintain balance of professional and personal goals
- Evaluations with input from team
- Staff collective discussion of poor evaluations
- Formal evaluations of supervisor
- Self evaluations discussed with supervisor
- Every six months (bi-annual) evaluations
- Annual evaluations by supervisor
- Supervisor asks for feedback on her/his performance, how to improve supervision
- Don't try to be best friends with the people you supervise
- Don't hire your friends
- 10 week supervisor training
- Reciprocal evaluations

Worst
- Supervision comes with years of service, but no training
- Senior staff expected to train new staff, without accommodation for rest of workload
- Evaluations only when work performance problems
- No evaluations
- Having a supervisor who is not an organizer

Comments

"There is a pattern of promotion and advancement through organizational positions. We begin at or somewhere near the bottom of the organizational chart, come in as front line organizers or some entry level position, and for all kinds of reasons, skills, competence, delivery of good work, tenacity, maturation, need for more money, we move up. Some of us move up to positions of Executive Director, and we get there sometimes without ever having any training in budget, personnel management, decision-making. We need more attention to professional development and skills building. We need management training for those of us who are staying with the work but not in the same positions, who are now in supervisory positions, managing budgets, making decisions. We need help."

"My biggest management issue is getting them to do staff reports. They lack the ability to manage time. They tell me they want to have more one on ones but they don't have the time. Like you want to be a dentist but not do fillings. So I have to meet with them individually, open up agendas, I show them my agenda, the outline of the week, help them make schedules."

"Senior or experienced staff (after 3 years with the organization) should have wide flexibility in deciding how to accomplish work, and hours of work, decisions about organizational strategy and what projects to implement or adopt, very loose supervision."

"Union leaders don't want to think of themselves as managers because management is the "enemy". So, often we end up with no one managing effectively."

"There is no substitute for experience. A lot of younger organizers never did anything else. Organizers used to be leaders or had other lives or had been in the for-profit world. More often now, this is the extent of what they've done and they assume they can make demands. It's enticing to pull someone out of a radical social justice arm who has a capacity to be angry. You may get that, but that sense of entitlement carries over to an attitude of 'you're not here to tell me what to do, but to help me do what I want to do'. It is frustrating to deal with this new set of values. I'm an old school puritan ethic type, coming into a new school of tolerance and self-discovery as central values.... Organizing is an industrial structure to me. We're in this great point of transition and I don't know where it is going."

"In the labor movement, we take a good organizer and make her the supervisor of organizers; we take a good researcher and make him the manager of researchers. But

organizing skills are not the same as supervising skills. Research expertise is not management expertise. We don't train our own."

"I can put up with more BS from my boss if we are 'winning'. If not, all the rest of the stuff becomes more important."

STRUCTURE, DECISION-MAKING & PLANNING

"The dynamics of power and privilege are so pervasive as to even permeate the work we are doing from the inside."

We should probably call this "Power" because as a movement we understand that analyzing power is one of our responsibilities. Union contracts and policy manuals rarely include an outline of the decision-making process, unless the organization functions by consensus or as a collective. Rank & file organizers often feel left out, especially in strategic planning discussions. Related comments appear under other categories, particularly "Discipline & Accountability," "Management/Supervision & Evaluations," and "Racism/Sexism & Other Oppression"

Best
❖ Collective
❖ Consensus
❖ Staff union
❖ Democratic decision making
❖ Teams with leaders who have equal power, just delegate work
❖ Stable leadership
❖ Board participate in fundraising
❖ Strategic planning to realize mission
❖ Organizers sit at management table
❖ Funders monitor internal standards for sustainability (training, diversity)

Worst
▪ Staff not involved in organizational decisions (finances, policy, long-term planning)
▪ Limited staff involvement in decisions about projects
▪ No staff involvement in hiring process
▪ EDs with unaccountable power
▪ Boards that are out of touch or support unaccountable power of ED
▪ Contradiction between stated principle and actual practice
▪ Fundraiser has too much power
▪ Board composition not reflect constituency
▪ Board intervening in personnel problems when it's not their role
▪ ED does all the fundraising
▪ Crisis management-style planning

Comments

"We've brought in a consultant twice a year, but the ED doesn't take her recommendations seriously. She gets defensive, doesn't want to change."

"Sometimes you have wartime rules. The organization was almost dead. As ED, you do what you have to do to make the organization survive and then you have to go. It was wartime rules – the board did what I wanted – because they had looked in to the abyss of destruction and didn't want to go there and didn't know how to get back. I said this is how we're gong to do this, and they said right. I made arbitrary decisions, changed things. There were terrible moments, enormous crises, really bad times. But it was a victory, because the organization had been dead. And we resurrected it. I had to leave. I absolutely had to leave. It took a toll on me. I made a conscious decision not to take an organizing job for a year or two. I was emotionally, spiritually, physically exhausted. In the last few months, I was incapable of relating to people like you need to relate to people in organizing. Sometimes in an organization when you reach this crisis, you may have to leave to let someone else lead."

"In larger organizations, organizers do not always want to be involved in every decision, especially where director/managers are doing their job well. Organizers want to be left alone to work on projects, not spend lots of time in organizational/internal discussions."

"The further an organization progresses with development on all levels the further away decision-makers get from the actual community."

"Power on a non-profit board is kind of the same way you have family power. If there are battles on the board – if the vote is 6 to 5 -- it doesn't function. You need 9 to 1, where we'll all talk to that one person afterwards and bring them along and understand their vision get them in a position where they can achieve some kind of victory. The best power for a board is to do a ton of one to ones and crying and lunches to get people to the same page where we understand and create a common vision. I don't think you can have a non-profit board, with real people on the board (as opposed to a museum board), where you can allow a power battle to go out and assume the organization will survive. There has to be some way to move it to a supermajority – that's the goal."

"Staff unions are the best way to avoid some of the worst practices."

"The ED's organizing job is to empower the board, to inform them in order for them to make good decisions. Sometimes you want to organize them to make a particular decision."

"Most functional organizations want the Board to actively participate in broad questions of strategy. I know of only one organization where that happens. In most organizations, the ED is able to do that with one, two or maybe as many as three board members who have enough ownership of organization to fill that role. They sort of act as sort of stewards for the rest of the board – and talk as peers in a way that the ED can't do – to get them to understand – like a kitchen cabinet."

PAY & BENEFITS

"People need to be covered on health benefits as soon as possible, no later than the first day of the month following date of hire. There shouldn't be a waiting period, like passing a 3-month probation. Organizations can withhold something else – give staff a raise after 3 months. Everyone needs access to health care from the very beginning."

Most members spent very little time discussing pay and benefits. When prompted to the issue, however, they had clear ideas on it. In general, staff in community-based groups have very limited expectations on economic issues because they know in advance that there is only a small pie to distribute. Equity in pay and benefits is more of an issue than actual amounts. Benefits include all economic fringes – from health insurance to cell phones.

Best
❖ Wages based on experience/education and all factors pertinent to job
❖ Wage scale by job description, available for all to see
❖ Expenses paid out in advance (for travel, meeting costs)
❖ Total pay range (ED to lowest paid) is very constricted e.g., top pay is no more than 2.5 times lowest pay
❖ Paid cell phones
❖ Full benefits for part time staff
❖ Sabbaticals
❖ Pay based on need – additional pay for people with children
❖ "Pot" of money for benefit of employee's choice (e.g., tuition, child/elder care)
❖ Domestic partner coverage
❖ 8 weeks paid parental leave
❖ 6 months paid maternity leave
❖ Health insurance for family (spouse/partner and dependents)
❖ Childcare costs reimbursed

Worst
▪ Insurance costs reimbursed after fact – organizer become short-term lender
▪ Fundraisers are paid way too much
▪ Merit pay
▪ "Contract" employee with no benefits
▪ No benefits till after probation period
▪ No benefits for part time staff
▪ Low pay
▪ Huge differential in pay between lowest and highest paid
▪ Parents use up all sick leave for sick children, don't have sick time for self

Comments

"Organizers should be paid more and work less."

"Staff will always tell each other what they make. So there is an inherent problem – as you hire new people you want the scale to go up. But everyone else is going to want that extra money if there is a disparity in the initial starting pay."

"I work full time, but I don't have any health insurance."

"We have a salary schedule based on achievement as opposed to time in the organization. It is based on what you accomplish, so some may move up quickly, other slowly. Plus cost of living increases."

"When God does the evaluations, then we can have merit pay based on evaluations."

"I had to pay my own health insurance, so each month I'd write a check for $250. But I wouldn't get reimbursed till the end of the month, by which time I'd already written a new check for $250. I was paying out $500 that I certainly didn't have, given my salary."

DISCIPLINE & ACCOUNTABILITY

"How can you call yourself a justice organization if you don't have a just cause termination policy?"

While personnel policies and contracts often spell out disciplinary procedures, the issue of accountability is frequently an unstated practice, relating to use of power as well as job performance. Accountability can be very broadly interpreted: to the community/members, to the organization, to co-workers.

Best
❖ Progressive discipline process
❖ Collective or team decision about discipline
❖ Just cause termination
❖ Grievance procedure with appeal to neutral party
❖ Staff make individual work plans, and share it with all other staff

Worst
▪ Fired for trying to organize staff union
▪ Staff not held accountable for failure to do work, creates unfair workload
▪ ED makes all decisions, Board just rubber stamps
▪ Hiring for just one campaign – temp work
▪ Board interferes with EDs management responsibilities
▪ ED determines merit pay increases and bonuses

Comments

"It is unfair, and leads to bad morale, when staff are not held accountable by management – if an organizer doesn't show up for a community meeting, but nothing is ever said to him or her."

"The ED was completely unaccountable – she would not go through the hiring committee, and she'd hire whoever she wanted."

"Accountability is a problem. When I think back, organizers were business people, it had a business sense to it. Now, there is a real challenge to power, and the dynamics of hierarchy versus teamwork, versus righteous. It is very hard to manage that."

"As an ED, I'm the one who is constantly changing my style, to get them motivated to work. Because I find it no longer works to say: Do your damn job because you get paid for it. I'm in a position where I have to change as a manager to motivate the majority on staff."

"They hire people for short term projects – temps. Then when you won't make a 2-year commitment to the organization they won't hire you for a permanent position. Most organizers don't even last 2 years."

"I really inherently believe in consensus, local control and true democracy. I will spend hours talking to people in order to achieve it. But it is a constant struggle, because sometimes you want to say "this is the real world, you cannot do this anywhere else, what makes you think you can do it here.""

"How do we get rid of EDs with huge egos who have no accountability in their power? Do we have to kill them? Just kidding."

"You create management positions to train people to be managers, but they pick and choose what aspects of that they want to participate in and the aspects they find onerous they simply won't do. Certain things you can hold them accountable for, like you have to write this proposal, that's a finite job. But everything else, board development, staff development – these are ephemeral – they are processes not actions so it's hard to hold them accountable for it."

"When they keep moving people around from project to project, or hire someone for just one project, it means that management doesn't understand that there are relationships. Unless you are just mobilizing and not organizing or doing community development – that's when one organization gives others a bad name."

HOURS OF WORK

"There's an assumption that those people who end up putting in more hours will be willing to keep on putting in more hours – so they get taken advantage of. I came to resent that. I feel that you get more respect if you draw limits, so now I draw more limits. I used to be crazier, but as I get older I get less crazy. There are lots of other things in life I want to do that are social justice work as well."

It is often a combination of long hours PLUS bad practices that lead to burn out. While the nature of organizing means that our work is never "done," as organizers and directors we often have ourselves to blame for exceeding our own reasonable limits, omitting getting a "life" from our priorities. However, organizational policies and practices affect individual choices.

Best

❖ Flexible hours
❖ Paid Overtime
❖ Limited hours over 40
❖ Limited evening and weekend time
❖ ED encourages comp time
❖ Comp time
❖ Job Share
❖ Work from home
❖ Sabbaticals

Worst

▪ No overtime
▪ No comp time
▪ Assumption of 60+ hour work week
▪ Commitment to work is judged by number of hours worked
▪ Expectation of "volunteer" time

Comments

"The great thing about organizing is that it is all about producing results, you can make your own hours as long as you get the job done."

"It is difficult for young and part time staff to work 60 hours. When we interview them we tell them we're going to 'ask' them for 'volunteer time'. That's not fair. It should really be volunteer."

"I don't mind the hours. I'm happy doing what I do. But I'm crazy. Every organizer should experience burn out just once, to know your limits. Before I got burned out -- sleep, what's that? No one could tell me anything. When you are laid up in bed, you really have to think – wow, I was messing up. Ever since I experienced burn out I've been careful about my sleep – because the end result is something I don't want: taking me out of action for a while."

"We exclude a huge portion of the population from doing this work. Because, for example, if you are a single mom and they say the only way to be an organizer is to work 80 hours a week, you can't do it. So we're preventing people from contributing in whatever way they can."

"You know how at staff meetings they ask someone to volunteer? I used to volunteer a lot, but not any more. I'm trying to manage my time better, and one way is to not say yes to everything."

"I don't mind working 80 hours when I choose to. But it should not be an organizational expectation. It is an organizational issue, not just a question of an individual's time management."

"It's funny that we spend all our time asking people to volunteer, and yet we don't set up our own lives so that we can volunteer. I love volunteering – for organizations other than the one I work for."

"I have flextime – I can come in as early as I want and leave as late as I want."

RACISM/SEXISM/DISABILITY & OTHER OPPRESSION

"We can't let the power structure of our organizations mirror the power structure of society. We have to pay attention to power, gender, class and race in a really important way. It's not enough to say, 'women and people of color encouraged to apply'; women and people of color must be encouraged to get developed on the job and move up."

This section is not called "diversity" because, as one NOA member pointed out, "There is a silence around this. We are afraid to name things. We talk about diversity not racism or white supremacy or patriarchy."

Best
❖ Co-directors of one man, one woman
❖ Young people make decisions, run trainings
❖ Dismantling oppression training
❖ Non-discrimination policy that includes disability
❖ Flexibility to do things differently

Worst
▪ Board diversity lag behind staff diversity
▪ Despite diverse staff, power still in hands of white males
▪ Sexual harassment covered up
▪ Failure to name issue – talk about diversity not racism & patriarchy
▪ Staff of color not trained to take leadership
▪ Disability rights groups not cross cultural
▪ Staff of color trained to lead, but have to leave organization to do it
▪ White/male/privileged leaders don't believe staff of color have capacity for leadership
▪ No diversity allowed in style of organizing – white culture imposes style
▪ Lip service to accommodation of disabilities

Comments

"Too often the senior staff are still white men."

"Groups have to have a non-discrimination policy that includes disability. Most organizations do not. They don't even ask about disability. It is not even on their radar screen. It wasn't even on the national census."

"The two things that break organizations apart are racism and sexism. We have to ask who sets the agenda, who really has power? Even with 99% of the staff being

people of color, the organization's agenda and culture can be defined by someone else – white males. But there is silence around this stuff -- we're afraid to talk about it – embarrassed that funders may find out."

"Organizations have a policy that 'we're going to accommodate everybody' but when it actually comes down to it, there is a lot of lip service paid and it doesn't really happen. They'll have ramps into the building, but there are no other access issues considered."

"There is this fundamental idea, especially among white male EDs, that "sure we want a diverse, representative workplace, but we have to get the work done" and women and people of color just don't have the capacity to run an organization. The front line staff isn't educated enough, can't raise money or write a report. So in practice we get "we'll work on it, but we've got to get this work done right now so we're gong to keep the well educated middle class white guys running stuff." Administration tends to have a more corporate style, rather than the more democratic and participatory style we want in our organizations. No matter what their theoretical politics, if the person running the organization believes (based on white supremacy or patriarchy) that most staff or members can't do it, don't have the capacity, then you're never going to change the way things work."

"Organizations include diverse groups in participation, but never leadership."

"You think, do I want to educate this person or not? You face that every day. You get tired of educating people, tired of having to explain why you need accommodation to a group of progressive people, who should just by nature get it and don't. You have to educate someone who you are already thinking should be an ally. No, this is too much, I'm tired, they should know this stuff. It is very frustrating, which is why people with disabilities work in disabled rights groups."

INTERNAL TRANSFORMATION

Analyzing and Creating Policies
Some factors to consider

> What do we believe is the best policy, given our commitment to economic & social justice -- e.g., should leave be parental (for fathers) not just maternity?

> What can the organization afford, given the current budget?

> Do we need to change the budget to do what we consider is best?

> Is there a community standard – for our city, our religion, our constituency?

> If the policy involves leave time (parental leave, vacation, disability leave, sabbatical leave), how will that person's work get done while she/he is gone, or do we leave the work undone (back burner it, suspend meetings on that project, etc.)?

> How does the policy, when applied to one staff, affect other staff?

> What is the balance between individual responsibility and organizational responsibility – e.g., if I want a 3 month sabbatical, how much advance notice do I have to give the organization and do I have to commit to continuing work at the organization for a period of time afterwards?

> Can the same policy apply to all staff or do different positions require different rules – e.g., do administrative support staff get flex time and car allowance; does the executive director have to report to work at 9 am and take a half hour unpaid lunch?

> What are federal, state, city laws – do they automatically apply (e.g., minimum or living wage, workers compensation), are they good so they should apply anyway (e.g., family medical leave act, fair labor standards act, national labor relations act)?

> Were we a different organization when we wrote this policy – smaller, poorer, less diverse?

> Would member activists leave their current jobs to work with us full time given our policies?

> Policies should not be written for one employee or position or occasion.

> How do we ensure fairness for all and consistent application of policies?

> Review policies periodically, including Board committee members who may have responsibility for enforcement.

Organizing to Change Policies and Practices

> Get help – facilitators, mediators
> Do one-on-ones
> Create committees or task forces
> Be systematic, make a plan and clear goals
> Objective analysis of power issues
> Cost out budget impact of change
> The best leaders are not necessarily the most angry people
> Staff union option
> Everyone takes responsibility for process
> Assume good faith
> Be brave enough to consider all options
> Be realistic-- letting go of power is difficult, feels very personal

➢ Create a "safe" space to do it – no one gets disciplined/fired for what they say
➢ Create time lines
➢ Allow enough time to make change – it doesn't happen in a week or month
➢ Keep doing the work of the organization so internal process is not all-consuming

Comments

"One of the difficulties of doing an internal evaluation is that not everyone in the organization shares the same goals and politics. I've never worked in an organization where everyone shares the same politics and discusses them. If you don't have shared politics, how can you agree on your evaluation?"

"The organization had almost disappeared, we had no money and could not function. The staff took the initiative, but we had to get help from outside. We had to revisit the mission, the organizational structure. People didn't leave. They stuck it out to help the organization get through this. But we had an advantage – we were a collective."

"The director wants to go part time, so we got a consultant and began talking about internal change -- moving from a pure hierarchy to a more collective or mixed collective and hierarchy. "

"It is hard to find funders who will pay for you to bring in outside help, consultants."

"Funders need to pay closer attention – be ready to examine the internal dynamics of an organization they fund."

APPENDIX

Individual Participants

John Adler
Rosalinda Aguirre
Franciso Arguelles
Gary Arnold
Debra Askanase
Drew Astolfi
Courtney Balok
Lynne Barbee
Ana Bedard
Leslie Belay
Pam Bender
Ilana Berger
Kelly Blake
Shannon Bode
Alison Bowens
Moira Bowman
Cheryl Brown
Joe Catania
Tina Cincotti
Chuck Collins
Rich Cowan
Nancy Cross
Joyce Cunha
Kathy Cunningham
Tamara Czyzyk
Renee DeLapp
Debra Donnell
Jordan Estevao
Kim Fellner
Lisa Figueroa
Lew Finfer
Andrew Friedman
Carolina Gaete
Ron Garcia-Fogarty
John Gaudette
Dorothy Gibson

Daniel Giloth
Brian Gladstein
Gabe Gonzalez
Alyce Gowdy-Wright
Christopher Graeber
Denise Hanna
Keith Harvey
Sue Hyde
Madeline Janis-Aparicio
Giev Kashkooli
Julie Kelly
Laura Lassiter
Alex Leader
Roz Lee
Hyun Lee
Cameron Levin
Juan Leyton
Ann Long
Nancy Lorence
Meizhu Lui
Sarah Luthens
Kathy Mannelly
Nancy Marks
Terry Marshall
Maurice Martin
Patrick Masterson
Lissa McLeod
Steve Meacham
Liz Mestres
Cal Montgomery
Nikki Morse
James Mumm
Sherry Nelson
Pat Nixon
Omar Osiris

Mayron Payes
Maggie Perales
Idida Perez
Suzanne Pharr
Kelly J. Pierce
Jeff Pinzino
Steven Ramirez
Gloria Ramos
Jeffrey Richardson
Jennifer Ritter
David Rogers
Linda Romero
Wanda Salaman
Angelica Salas
Roshani Saraiya
Helen Schaub
Carin Schiewe
Dara Slverman
Graciela Suarez
Carol Thompson
Tam Tocher
Magalis Toncoso
Sarah Triano
Ourania Tserotas
Enrique Velasquez
Cynthia Ward
Tom Waters
Joan Weiss
Kevin Whalen
Andrew Wiesenfeld
Verlene Wilder
Brenda Williams
Susan Winning
Michael Yellin
Guadalupe Zamudio

Organizational Policy Manuals and Union Contracts

American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) contract with the Washington-Baltimore Newspaper Guild/ Communications Workers of America (CWA)Local 32035

American Friends Service Committee, New England Regional Office, contract with Union of Needletrades Industry, Textile Employees Local 66L

California Nurses Association contract with the Staff Professional and Clerical Association

Center for Community Change Personnel Policies Handbook

Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN) Administrative Manual

Childcare Guild of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) 925 with the Association of Childcare Employees

CWA Local 1032 contract with Teamsters Union Local No. 115

CWA Local 1034 contract with Union Employees Union

District 1199 NW/SEIU contract with 1199 NW Staff Union
Independent television Service, Inc. Employee Handbook and Personnel Policies

Innovative Resources Management Policies and Procedures Manual

International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers Local 17 contract with Field Staff

International Union of Food, Agriculture, Hotel-Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) with the Federation Suisse des Travailleurs du Commerce, des Transports et de L'alimentation

L.A. Alliance for a New Economy Organization Policy Manual

Labor Project for Working Families contract with SEIU Local 535

Make the Road by Walking, Inc. Employee Handbook

Mothers on the Move, Inc., Personnel Handbook

National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice Personnel Policy

National Organizers Alliance Personnel Policy

NE Action Personnel Policy Template

North East Action Staff Union Contract

Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 8 contract with Union Representatives

Oregon Public Employees Union/SEIU Local 503 contract with the Public Employees Representative Union/CWA Local 7901

Organization of the NorthEast Employee Handbook and Personnel Policy

People United for a Better Oakland Operations Manual

Public School Employees of Washington (PSE) contract with the PSE Staff Organization

Rural Organizing Project Personnel Policy

SEIU District 925 contract with the Union of Union Representatives

SEIU Local 6 contract with Local 6 Staff Union

Southern Empowerment Project Personnel Policies

United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1001 contract with the Pacific Northwest Newspaper Guild/CWA Local 82

University Professional & Technical Employees/CWA Local 9119 contract with Staff Union

Utica Neighborhood Housing Service, Inc. Personnel Policy

Virginia Organizing Project, Inc. Personnel Policies

Washington Citizen Action Personnel Policies Manual

Washington Education Association (WEA) contract with the WEA Staff Organization

Washington Federation of State Employees (WFSE)/American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Council 28 contract with the WFSE Staff Union

YouthAction Organizational and Operations Manual

Secure the Future of Social Justice:
Invest in the NOA Retirement Pension Plan

The NOA Retirement Pension Plan was specially designed for organizations dedicated to the struggle for social, economic, environmental and racial justice. As of January 2002, the NOA Plan had 70 signatories (organizations) on board with more than 450 people covered by the Plan and nearly $2,000,000 in Plan assets.

The Plan is structured to make sure that those who toil for justice can have dignified and secure elder-hoods. Credit is given for movement service, rather than just service with one employer; which permits broad participation and vesting in a sector where many are quite mobile. It mandates a 5% employer contribution for all participants, which means that everyone who has worked in the movement since 1985 will have something set aside for retirement.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company is the NOA Retirement Pension Plan investment carrier. MetLife currently offers 43 investment options to participants, including two socially screened Calvert Funds. In addition, the NOA Retirement Pension Plan Trustees contracts with Carday Associates to handle the administration of the Plan -- tracking contributions, vesting, etc. Carday Vice President Judy Hendrickson coordinates the NOA account. Denise Hanna, NOA's National Benefits Coordinator, is based in the NOA office and facilitates smooth interactions between Plan participants, Carday Associates and MetLife, and works to grow the Plan.

SUMMARY OF FEATURES

Open to employers who:

- Are organizational members of NOA
- Have at least one individual NOA member on staff
- Agree to contribute at least 5% of wages
- Agree to terms of NOA participation agreement
- Agree to contribute on an equivalent basis for all eligible employees

Contributions to Plan are:

- At least 5% of each employee's compensation (an employer may agree to a higher amount, as specified in its participation agreement)
- Each employee may voluntarily elect to defer an additional, pre-tax amount from his or her wages
- The employer may agree to match each employee's voluntary wage deferral, in the amount specified in its participation agreement

Account Balances:

- A separate account is maintained for each participant in the plan
- All plan assets are held in trust and managed by Metropolitan Life

- Each participant can choose how his or her account balance is invested, and can choose from a wide variety of professionally managed stock, bond and money market funds, including socially conscious investment funds

Retirement:

- A participant is entitled to the balance of his or her individual account (including all contributions and earnings) at retirement
- Normal Retirement Age is age 65
- Can retire at any age because of disability
- Benefit payable to designated beneficiary upon death
- A participant may elect an annuity or a lump sum payment on retirement
- A participant who is not married may elect a Joint and Survivor Annuity (i.e., an annuity that will continue to be paid to the designated beneficiary following the participant's death) payable to his or her domestic partner
- A participant who is married will receive a Joint and Survivor Annuity in favor of his or her spouse upon retirement, unless both the participant and the spouse agree to elect a different benefit form

Plan Loans:

- A participant may borrow up to up to the lesser of $50,000 or the 1/2 of his or her vested account balance
- Loans are repaid by payroll deduction
- The participant must pay market interest rates on the loan balance
- All interest payments are made *to* the participant's account

Portability:

- The NOA Pension Plan is a national plan, designed to cover the entire progressive movement
- Service for any participating employer is service for all purposes under the Plan
- Participants may move among participating employers without penalty

Hearts on Fire:
How Do We Keep Them From Burning Out?
By Kim Fellner

I have always thought of my movement work as a demanding, aggravating and irresistible lover – one it's impossible to marry, or to leave. I know it has an air of pathology, but I am not alone. For most of us, the passion precedes the paycheck. Sift through the ashes of organizer burn-out, and you'll likely discover a saga of love and hope, betrayal and loss. That quality of lover-ship sets the tone and intensity of our commitments, break-ups and flame-outs.

Here's a recent tale from the trenches. A talented young community activist with several years of work experience takes a job in a union, inspired by a vision of justice and the opportunity to make a tangible difference. She's given minimal training and soon finds herself working close to 24/7. She's moved around the region at whim, often for weeks or even months at a time. She has a home, but lives out of a suitcase. She loves the members and the mission, but she has too few supportive colleagues and no time to make friends.

The last straw is when her male supervisor hits on the staff women, uses sex as part of the promotion and punishment structure, and implies that this organizer wouldn't understand because she's a lesbian. "I just couldn't stand it any longer," she explains, "and I don't know what I think about working for the labor movement again. In fact, I'm sick, I'm exhausted, and I have no idea what to do." By the end of the recitation, she's weeping. It takes her months to recover.

Another local union has just fired a terrific organizer of color for supporting her co-workers' rights to organize a staff union. Now, in the tradition of union-busting employers everywhere, the local is fighting her unemployment claim. Every week, the National Organizers Alliance fields calls like these from practitioners on the edge. Sometimes it's blatant workplace injustice, made unbearable by the contradiction between what we espouse every day and the way we ourselves are treated on the job. Sometimes it's isolation. Most often it's just too much work over too long a time. Add to that the fear of failure, guilt that you mightn't be dedicated enough, standards of machismo and martyrdom – and you've got the components for burn-out.

Every case is a bit different, but here are situations that recur with alarming frequency:

Don't Stop 'Til You Drop

Rather than seeing the health of the organization as tied to the health of its organizers (or leaders), we often act as if it depended instead on working organizers to death. One frequent habit is to hire a lot of young organizers, pay them next to nothing, and work them until they're too exhausted or pissed off to stay, assuming the few who remain are the ones we want.

As in so many lover-ships, guilt and martyrdom are rampant. We exhort organizers that, "the other side never stops, the other side never sleeps." And since we're suckers for tough odds, and eager to make the defining difference, we're all too ready to be convinced that those extra hours we put in are all that stand between us good guys and Armageddon.

My friend once had to choose between a union election and her parents' fortieth wedding anniversary. "We were right down to the final days," she told me, "and my mentor said, 'Look, it's your choice. You just have to figure out how you're going to feel if we lose the election because you were away and didn't get to make those extra house calls. You're going to have to live with that down the road.' So I opted not to go. Well, my father died shortly after that. There was never a forty-fifth. And I live with that instead."

There is also a class, gender and race cut on the question of time. Parents, especially women, especially single moms, need to have time for their children. Sure, I know some two-organizer families with nannies, but expecting all organizers to have them would clearly be class barrier to who could afford to be an organizer.

Too Much Too Soon

Many of the problems we have in progressive organizations, especially small ones, boil down to Not Enough Money. That means too few staff people to do the work, not enough training, no transition time between one director or lead organizer and the next. Never mind that you have only six months of job experience and have never worked in a rural community before -- you can run this show!

So we try. And surprisingly often, we -- and the organizations -- survive. But the stress and exhaustion that accompany the effort take their toll. After a few years of such constant pressure, a dog-walking service or a pottery studio in Santa Fe look pretty damn good.

Too Little Too Late

The flip side of too much too soon often happens when you have a director or a board unwilling to relinquish any power. Frequently, "field hands" are so desperately needed in the roles they currently hold that we are unwilling to promote them out of those slots. Yet, to keep people in slots they've outgrown is a sure route to disaster. And we don't even think about how to provide adequate elder and mentor roles for our experienced practitioners -- many of whom cannot afford to take time off between jobs, much less retire.

Paradoxically, while we suffer from too much turn-over at the bottom, many organizations have directors who seem to be there for life. That also makes it hard for the next people in the chain to move up, or achieve the recognition that encourages peole to endure.

All Skilled Up and No Place to Go

There are some good reasons that directors don't want to give up their positions. The number of wonderful movement jobs paying a living wage is actually quite small, not to mention part time work for organizing moms, or jobs for highly skilled people who don't like administration. Frequently our organizations are just too small and too poor to add another job slot to the mix. Eventually, this lack of opportunity yields to malaise, and the fire dims.

The Alone Star State

A new union organizing director was picking my brains about what organizers really need. I suggested that organizers needed to work at least in pairs, so that they didn't get too tired or lonely, and so they had a safe person with whom to debrief at the end of the day. "You must be kidding," he scoffed, "we don't have the money do that."

Being alone is a major factor in premature burn-out. Sometimes it's the organizer or director in the one-person office. Other times, it's the person sent to a distant regional office as the sole organizer in someone else's operation.

Then there is the isolation of being the only woman, only woman supervisor, only person of color, only person under 30, only gay person in your organization or office, with no one else who shares your cultural stress points. To make things worse, you are often expected to represent all others in your category.

Machismo

My husband defines this as, "frequently wrong, never in doubt." Often it boils down to "don't ask, don't tell." Don't ask for help. Don't admit uncertainties. Never take a vacation, never go home before 8 p.m. Don't be a wimp. Too often, this means we let ourselves and our co-workers ignore serious problems, like alcoholism, depression, illness. A long-time organizing mentor hangs himself, and it turns out everyone knew for years that he was an alcoholic on the edge. Another colleague is diagnosed with diabetes and refuses to take appropriate steps until he's seriously ill.

Race to the Bottom

While racial diversity is near the top of progressive organizational rhetoric, it frequently falls to the bottom of the real organizational agendas. When push comes to shove, many organizations will abandon affirmative action hiring rather than keep a job open until they find the right staffer of color.

We frequently hear colleagues wailing about how they couldn't find any qualified candidates for the job, or that the staffer of color they hired just didn't stay long enough to rise through the ranks. The consequences are obvious: organizations have staffers of color in the clerical and entry level jobs – and painfully few lead organizers and directors of color. Or staffers of color are promoted without training or support and then held accountable for failing to meet unrealistic organizational expectations.

Not surprisingly, women of color experience burn-out disproportionately. Mid-career women of color are in high demand on the job market, but are frequently burning out from being over-displayed and under-valued, without enough colleague-ship, support and/or real power to define organizational agendas.

This is not a pretty cycle. Where there are few lead staffers of color, there are fewer mentors of color, and the organizational culture remains white-dominated. These situations are not merely personal, but systemic. If we are serious about diversity, we've got to be serious about defining, and then creating, the conditions that enable workplace diversity to flourish.

Si se puede

So what can we do to make our organizations just and joyful, fueling both movement fire and personal commitment for the long haul?

1. Consistency between the values we preach and the values we practice may be the biggest life-saver of all. If we say we believe in unions, we shouldn't fight the development of staff unions. If we say we believe in pay equity, our pay scales should reflect that. If we preach family-friendly policies, we should offer child care assistance and parental leave.

YouthAction, based in Albuquerque, New Mexico developed personnel policies that reflect this spirit. For example, "Because Youth Action is committed to the health and welfare of its staff and believes in placing realistic expectations, compensatory time off from work will be earned by staff working beyond the normal work week..." Or "[YouthAction] will reimburse an employee for 100% of childcare costs resulting from work-related activities, such as travel and meetings."

2. Save demands for heroism and martyrdom for the times that require them – and learn to tell the difference between the urgent and the critical. Encourage co-workers to take vacation time, and keep your eyes open for signs of exhaustion and spiritual implosion. Don't force colleagues to choose between work and health or work and family. Remember, even organizers who are unmarried, un-partnered and/or childless have parents, homes and hobbies.

3. Share power, and know when to turn it over. Make room for new leadership. "I have always taught that the first job of a leader is to identify and train their successor. That applies to staff leaders too," says John Ruoff, (a white man) who turned over the directorship of South Carolina Fair Share to Lenora Bush Reese (an African-American woman).

"When we started Fair Share in 1986-87, my being the executive director was a matter of default," Ruoff continues. "I was the only staff person. As we were looking for a second staff person in 1992, I knew I was hiring my replacement – even if she didn't. There was a conscious (if sneaky) training process for three years. When I went on sabbatical, it was the perfect time to implement my scheme to switch jobs with Lenora, and after some initial skepticism, she agreed she was ready. The central issue is trust, in both directions. It's not just, 'Will this person be undermining me?' but also, "Will this person give/accept supervision?' I knew we had successfully transitioned when Lenora started supervising me."

4. Develop depth as well as breadth of skills and representation. To the best of your organization's ability, try to make sure that particular people are not the sole repository of critical skills (organizing, computing, fundraising, training). Overlapping talent provides exciting chances for brainstorming and companionability – and relieves the pressure of having too large a piece of the world on one pair of shoulders.

This principle also works for diversity. One of the things NOA has done well, although our first efforts were intuitive rather than strategic, is to build a board where there is depth of racial and generational representation. More than a third of our steering committee is under 30, more than half are organizers of color. To do this required a larger (and more costly) board than common wisdom might dictate for a smallish organization – but it's worked well for us.

5. Take time to mentor. Take time to learn. We usually think of mentoring from the top down – and that sharing of experience and wisdom is critical. But we also have much to learn from our peers, and from our colleagues who are just starting out. The recent WTO, IMF and World Bank actions in Seattle and DC illuminated the lessons to be passed up from a new generation, including a new cultural spin on collective decision making and an awesome savvy at web-based organizing.

6. Fight cynicism. Laugh. Exercise trust. Celebrate often. Build community. Eat chocolate. The culture of longevity lies not merely in the rules and the written but in the culture that emerges between the lines. It is hard to let culture mutate, rather than inflicting the existing norms on new staffers. But it is periodic reassessment, collective ownership and validation of the rules and norms that provide a basis for both clarity and comfort. And it is the times we share together, hard at work, in the lull between storms, at meetings and at meals, that make the relationships that make the movement.

7. Leave Room to Grow. I'm actually writing this story as I return from a three-month sabbatical – the first time I've had that much time off in roughly 15 years. I finally had the opportunity to think about my work away from the press of day-to-day minutia, and also to not think about work at all. In the process, I've been forced to draw some new distinctions between the consuming exhaustion and disappointment that characterize burnout and the healthy need to change our lives and our vantage points as we grow up in the movement.

Our co-workers do not cease to be our compañeros when they leave our organization for another, or when they reconfigure their lives to accommodate children, health, age or new interests. So long as we share the fight for justice, and the commitment to progressive change, we can afford to let each other change. That way, we can become a growing, diverse cadre of innovative practitioners rather than a shrinking pool of exhausted purists.

8. It Takes a Movement. To address burn-out and change requires not just an organization, but a movement approach. NOA has concluded that providing pension plans, health care and sabbaticals can fully succeed only when they become movement practice; the same is true for all the above conditions that deter or forestall burn-out.

Let's keep our passions and our co-workers alive – and set the world on fire!

Kim Fellner is NOA's founding director. Before NOA, she worked with several labor unions, including SEIU, the Screen Actor's Guild and the National Writer's Union. She lives in Washington, DC.

The Most Challenging Campaign?
Organizing Balance in Our Lives
By Cathy Howell

Recently, a friend described one of our mutual friends as the most workaholic person she knows. She offhandedly added that, of course, I would have made that list a couple of years ago. The rather backhanded compliment made me proud. Then yesterday, my massage therapist called and I told her I was on overload. "And that's something unusual?" she asked in one of those knowing tones. I *have* changed –at least I have a massage therapist – but I clearly need to clean up my act to be credible on this issue to anyone outside of the movement, or with anyone who has the time to notice. So, in the best NOA tradition, this article reflects on how to make some progress in achieving a more balanced life while staying deeply committed to organizing work, based on my own experience and conversations with organizers I respect.

I decided to explore my questions about these issues by interviewing a dozen organizers living and working in North Carolina at the local or state level. As a long-term organizer and current North Carolina Field Director for the AFL-CIO, my day-to-day effort to stay on track, make a difference with my life and work, and also take care of myself has become critically important. Though I still get overloaded, I've gotten clearer in the past few years on the difference between what I *need* to do and what I *want* to do, and I have made headway in gaining more balance in my life.

Yet, as I sit here at my computer, I'm once again a victim of my overloaded life. I'm down to the wire after postponing this article from my first deadline, then getting three extensions on this one. I could blame it on the heavy involvement of the AFL-CIO in the never-ending 2000 election and my unexpected days in Florida, or the fact that I'm playing catch up with everything that got postponed to November 8th, then December 8th, then into January. But, that would be foolish. There is always something unexpected I have to do for my organizing job, or some related activity I chose to take on that fills my life to the brim and then spills over.

In my new job, I'm not in the position to travel or participate in meetings and conferences with my old networks on work time. I live in a small North Carolina coastal city with less than a handful of paid organizers. Yet, I have a commitment to anti-racist work and to my own political development. How do I squeeze all of that in when my job takes up so much of my time? And how do I protect time and energy for family and friends, take care of my physical and emotional health, and still have unstructured time to relax and enjoy the beach, a new CD or an afternoon nap – which I increasingly long for as I've reached my 50's.

An Unsupported and Unappreciated Path

Organizers in North Carolina are outside the urban centers of mainstream progressive culture in our country. There are few resources for organizing and only a couple of dozen full-time organizers on the ground in the state. Our communities lack a positive historical memory or culture of organizing. Angie Newsome is a twenty-eight year-old unemployed organizer. She grew up in Davie County and now lives in Swannanoa in western North Carolina. "I went to Chicago recently and there was a mural in the public library about organizing. It really struck me – organizing is <u>public</u> there – not something that is in a back room or underground. It's part of the culture. It was great to know it's not like North Carolina everywhere."

Chip Roth came to North Carolina from Pittsburgh in 1993 to work for IBT Local 391. He echoes Angie's sense of the lack of public and community support for organizing. His union local represents drivers in North Carolina's movie industry. "One night in 1998 I was going to talk to some drivers working a science fiction movie shoot in a rural North Carolina county. It was 2:30 in the morning. Folks were freely walking and driving up and down this rural two-lane highway where the shoot was taking place, with a sheriff's deputy waving them through. As I walked up to him, he asked me who I was and what my business was. When I told him I was with the union, he told me I couldn't go any farther. I was floored. This was a public highway. He told me that the road had been privatized for the duration of the shoot and they had sanction through the NC Department of Transportation to do it. I argued that federal law gave me the right to have reasonable access to employees. He said, 'That's fine son, but if you cross that line, I'm going arrest you.' And he did stop me for that night." Chip adds that this is typical of the attitudes he experiences in organizing around the state. "To the labor movement's credit, we were able to get the governor's office on the phone the next day and get this dealt with. But, there is constant harassment."

The oppositional nature of our organizing work means that we lack cultural and institutional support in a profession that demands our self-awareness and political development as workers. To be effective organizers, we must stay in touch with a broad movement and a diverse array of issues and events. We deal with people constantly. We need to work on our own "isms" and heal from the abuse we've experienced and the internalized oppression we carry. We need to know when to draw the line in meeting other folks' needs. Organizing work, especially in the labor movement, often demands extensive travel away from home. We work when other people are off – weekend conferences, evening meetings, checking in with a leader over breakfast.

Ernie Boyd, who now does volunteer organizing in Asheville with Just Economics, a local membership group, suggests, "It's a mistake to lay all of this overwork at the door of organizing. It's also about what kind of people we are. Some people will be that way no matter where they are. In movement jobs, we have to build and maintain a world that isn't based on overwork."

The Call of the Open Road

Some of the organizers I spoke with made difficult choices in confronting the competing demands of work and family life. Travel and long hours are a constant issue. Laura Gordon described a conversation she had as part of an oral history project. "We interviewed a bunch of middle-aged and retired male union organizers and activists who talked about their long hours and days on the road. Afterwards the wives were talking. They didn't like it. These guys were always gone, never home. Their wives had to raise their kids alone. Most women don't have partners willing to do all of that. And most women wouldn't be willing to be away from their kids that much. I have a passion for this work – I feel compelled to do it. Often I've had to put a lot of my personal needs on hold to be able to – especially as a single mother."

Road life is hard on a lot of organizers. "Some people thrive, rather than suffer, on the road. But for me, it was much easier to maintain some personal rituals when I had jobs that didn't require much travel, even when they did require long hours." Says Ernie Boyd. Laura Gordon adds that the constant travel that unions demand of organizers makes it almost impossible for anyone with on-going parental responsibilities to take most of the jobs available in our region. "Most labor movement jobs are okay for really young women or older women whose kids have left home," she laments.

Steve Jones is an organizer with IBT Local 391 in Greensboro. He began his organizing career by coming out of a textile shop in Virginia and joining the staff of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union. "My first organizing jobs were tied to a road life. I attended lots of conferences and extra meetings of allies like the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, A. Phillip Randolph Institute, the NAACP and other groups. After my first marriage fell apart and I remarried, I looked for a job as close to home as I could find, but it was in Baltimore. I was torn between work demands and home life and not feeling good about the job I was doing on either. Now I've made the decision to stay home and work out of a local union. I've also let go of going to extra meetings and rely on contact with friends and the Internet to stay in touch. It's hampered me professionally in some ways, yet I now have a semblance of a personal life. I play a more supportive role to my wife and six year old son."

Finding Your Place

There is a tension between place and work for many organizers. It's hard to build connections and have a sense of community when you are following organizing work. Some organizers have a connection that roots them geographically and yet limits their employment potential. Others find connection in an organization that keeps them on the road or moving from place to place.

Angie's lack of employment in organizing reflects one of these tensions. "I have to think about how I'm going to do this work for the long term. I don't think it's a reality that I'm going to make it a career living here. I've felt terrible guilt

about not doing organizing. Other people have literally died doing this work. And I've had the luxury of being employed to do it. I've done enough so I've developed a sense of what I will and won't do. My 'will do' list is very small. An organization I work with has to have a sense of building a movement, a strategy for the issues it's taking on, and be building a community base. So I'm not even considering most of what has come my way. If I don't want to create the whole organization there is no place for me to be employed to do organizing here."

Very few local unions in North Carolina have full-time organizers and most of the jobs that do exist are regional in nature. In the past, Laura Gordon was able to keep her hand in local organizing with her former union, AFSCME. Now she does part-time organizing work around the western part of the state with IBT Local 61 and supports other organizing in her role as president of the Western NC Central Labor Council.

Laura struggles with the isolation of living in a small city in a mainly rural part of our state. "It takes discussion with other people doing this work to stay in touch with trends, to gain perspective. It's harder to do in a rural area. I'm on a national advisory board for the AFL-CIO with people from big cities, in the center of activity. I'm often coming into the middle of a conversation they have been having and feel pretty out of it. It's hard too, when other people get to sit in meetings up in DC and hatch up ideas that we in the field have to carry out." She also searches out connections with other organizers around North Carolina. "In the labor movement, theoretical discussion often isn't seen as a priority. But, that discussion is what keeps me afloat."

I have been extremely lucky to work and live in a wide variety of places. I know that some of my most critical political consciousness was formed by experiences far from my own home. I was able to do this because I didn't have children, and for many years found my community in the organizing world, rather than in a geographic place.

Supporting the Next Generation

For organizers with children at home, the lack of a local community takes on other dimensions. Naomi Swinton, a southern region organizer working with Grassroots Leadership just cut back her hours to half time after the birth of her son, Broadus, a year ago. She is on the road less and now works to build a local organization in Wilmington with her remaining work hours. Still there are issues. "In our country, people move around a lot. It makes it hard to have an easy and convenient support system. I have good friends in my neighborhood, but it's still so much easier to trust that I could leave my son with my mom on a moment's notice if she lived right down the street. Most of us are just too far from family to have that kind of support system."

Steve Bader, an organizer with UE 150, works with employees on university campuses around the state. He credits his three-year-old son, Elijah, with

organizing him to slow down and be home more. "I hear him saying 'get off the phone Dad'. With him, I *have to* play."

Dothula Baron directs the Dispute Resolution Center in Duplin County. In addition to providing training and mediation services, they are organizing an anti-racist project in their four county area. "When I was a single mom with two boys at home, I wasn't as smart as I am now. I was a crazy woman. I had my kids involved in everything and I said yes to anything I was asked to do. One thing that saved me during that period was meditation. After my first son was born, I took a yoga class and I starting meditating. Then I taught it to my kids. Over the years it's helped me stay centered."

Prioritizing Number One

Most of the organizers I talked with acknowledged their struggle to get enough time for themselves. "F, F, F," Steve Bader says with a laugh when I asked him about this, "That's my grade. I need more regular contact with myself. I do know that I have to keep the pilot burning on things I want to do, even though I don't have time right now. Like exercise once a month – just to have a vision that it's possible to do it more." Angie's frustrated too. "I never got a good method down for that ever. It just felt like all or nothing." Steve's co-worker Saladin Muhammid echoes this. "I need more practice in balancing." George Hines, who organizes with the Sheet Metal Workers, Local 5, says that frequently "everything else just has to be put on hold" while he's in the middle of a campaign.

Inside Struggles

Another set of stresses for organizers arises from the lack of commitment to dealing with internal issues – on the part of our organizations and the individuals within them. Jesse Wimberley, who is recently unemployed after a dozen years working as a local organizer in Moore County, notes, "Organizations trying to hide their problems create a lot of stress for staff." His organization changed direction and he's now working as a carpenter while he tries to figure out his next organizing step.

Kim Diehl, the new co-director of Southerners on New Ground reflects on the internal struggle. "Our day to day work and issues are tactical. But it is a spiritual battle, and we have to see it in simple ways and do our own healing so we don't continue the cycles of oppression. It's tough and also incredibly gratifying. I can see victories much easier when I'm not bogged down by oppression. I can see my mistakes easier too. If I don't do this – take the time – I lose why I'm doing this work. I'm asking, 'Where is Kim Diehl in this?'"

Robin Ellis, a UE 150 organizer, addresses her own role. "One major struggle is to figure out both how I deal with my own privilege within a movement and what to do when the ways in which I'm oppressed are totally unacknowledged by that same movement. One thing I have learned about the need to change organizational culture to make it better for me is that nobody is going to do it

for me. I just can't sit around and complain. I have to see it like a campaign on an issue and I have to find other people. I can't organize by myself – even internally. It's frustrating when the people who need to do the most work aren't doing it though. It really pisses me off."

Four key things that help these organizers work effectively, develop politically, get support, and take care of themselves emerged from these conversations:

1) A strong network of friends, colleagues and mentors. Everyone I talked to mentioned this in regard to one aspect or another of this quest to do good organizing and take care of self. Naomi takes time out to have a larger political discussion with colleagues and mentors two or three times a year. "I have to do it. It keeps me going for another three or four months." Saladin adds, "Staying in touch with a national and international network of labor and social justice activists helps a great deal. The internet and e-mail have been key for me."

A tool I've used since beginning my job at the AFL-CIO is to set times to regularly check-in with colleagues outside my day-to-day work. We each get time to talk about what's happened over the past few months – what goals we met, what holes we fell into and what we are trying to do in our lives – not just our jobs or other political work. This gives me support for saying no and for getting trusted perspectives on where my life is heading.

2) Have systematic ways to pick up new information about what is happening outside our own day-to-day sphere.

Ernie picks up a lot of his current information locally. "I tend to be more informed by who is part of my day-to-day casual contact. In Camden, I was more on top of prison issues. In Asheville, it's environment." Robin Ellis notes, "Most of my friends are political. I hear things from them." Steve says car rides with co-worker Robin and other staff and leaders are a "great way to reconnect, learn about other issues, and teach what he knows." Angie makes a point of getting out and seeing how other organizations work. "I really enjoy visiting other organizations. It's fun and inspiring. And building informal ties helps advance the work."

Written resources also provide useful information about organizing and political developments. Everyone mentioned the Internet as a tool they now use – to search out information on websites or to be part of list serves from organizations that provide daily or weekly articles. The Black Radical Congress, the Carolina Socialist Forum, Leslie Feinberg's www.workers.org and various issue, labor, and student based list serves were mentioned. Progressive publications like *Third World Resurgence, The Ark, Labor Notes, In These Times, Dollars and Sense, Colorlines* and *Southern Exposure* are key, as are newsletters from allied groups. Ernie squeezes in reading while supper cooks. "We don't have a microwave," he laughs. Kim Diehl says she tries to do "multi-issue reading – things and issues I don't have to read about – all the different pieces

of the movement. It keeps me fresh, keeps my finger on the pulse so I don't get too kooky from being in my own little world."

Conferences and retreats also provide organizers with both connection and information. Last year I helped organize a retreat with a bunch of women organizer/activist types in our region. No funding, no big advertising. A couple of us just put out the word via email to women we know and we ended up with a diverse group of sixteen, ranging from age 25 to 50. We spent a weekend hanging out together at the beach, talking about our lives, and how feminism does or doesn't get integrated into what we do day to day.

Jesse Wimberley cites the NOA Gatherings as a model for how to have fun while working and building community. Laura agrees. "It's a lifesaver for me that somewhere these issues are being taken up in a serious way." Saladin sees periodic meetings that bring organizers together to review and analyze past work as crucial. Robin adds, "I think women need to get together. We are more often trying to create new organizational culture. I don't need a perfect organization. But I do need to be with people who are trying to figure out new things."

3) Take time for yourself and target your energy. Robin has a few solutions to overload. "I tend to ignore some of the internal politics within my union and miss most of the big protests. I'm not really into mobilization without strategy. I'd rather use my energy on my organizing. I've gotten pretty good at taking time for myself. I play soccer, have friends, and am part of a white anti-racist group."
Taking time off is key. It helps you break the illusion that you are indispensable. And, if it's not an illusion, your organization is in trouble. It protects your sanity, helps you deal with ego issues, and forces you to build structures that work without dependence on any one individual. "I still have to remind myself to take time off before other people have to remind me. When I don't do it, I get off balance and too rigid in my thinking," says Dothula Barron.

Jesse Wimberly explains how he keeps perspective. "I have to see my work as part of a larger effort and connected to many other things. It can't be tied to winning, but to doing the right thing with the right intention. If we sell out to win – even sell out our own sanity – it will come back to bite us. I've never tried to change the world," he says, "I've just tried to do my piece and be part of what is happening."

Get some time alone with yourself regularly. "Every single self-help book is right. If I don't pay attention to my physical and emotional needs and health, I'm in trouble. And when I do, I'm more reliable as a person." says Naomi. Make sure that healthcare, massage, exercise and relaxation are part of your routine. A regimen that includes massage, acupuncture and regular medical check-ups has helped keep me on track. And last fall, I helped organize a silent retreat to give myself and other organizers a chance to just be quiet and mindful for a couple of days – which helped to get back in touch with ourselves and nature.

Kim Diehl argues for "radical relaxation" – taking intentional breaks from day-to-day organizational work. "I play tennis and it's a great physical release of frustration. I have a wonderful community of black tennis players that I can be out with. I can be competitive within myself and develop a craft that I enjoy. And it's amazing to do this with other black people in the south." She adds, "One last thing – I watch TV! I apply my analysis and talk back to it. And I love it when our world occasionally pops up in popular culture! Of course, it's a reality check too."

4) Organizers continue to work because of a spirit of optimism and faith.

"The hardest part for me is to keep a positive attitude when we are fighting on fronts with people who are supposed to be on our side. Sometimes it's overwhelming," says George, who fits his organizing in around his other job responsibilities, "My only real advice is 'Keep the faith.'" Steve Jones adds that he would tell any younger organizer, "If you are out there looking for a high I can't imagine more of one than helping transfer power to the have-nots. It's a natural high." Likewise, when I asked what keeps Chip Roth going, he replied, "Faith that by virtue of our efforts people's lives will improve. We face extraordinary pressures in the south and that faith helps me get out of bed in the morning."

Rituals are important -lighting a candle, weekly coffee with a friend, a weekend meditation retreat. Steve Bader doesn't formally practice his Jewish faith, but maintains some rituals at home. "I'm away from the Jewish community I grew up with and I don't have one here that shares my politics." But, he adds, "As a family, we light candles and spend a few minutes talking about our week, appreciating each other, saying prayers." Kim Diehl is purposeful about it. "I call it spiritual guerilla warfare. It's done through kindness – a mischievous revolution through love. We can't survive long enough on rage," she argues. Robin is more philosophical. "Working on figuring all of this out *is* the path. There is no end goal. I have to figure out how to enjoy the learning. I want to be happy *and* to be part of a movement. I can either be strung out or I can learn to enjoy the lifelong struggle. I have to balance being patient with the sense of urgency I feel." And, as Jesse Wimberley sums up, "I need to have some fun while I'm doing this since this is my life. Some of us aren't planning on doing something else. This isn't a stepping-stone, *this is it.*"

Cathy Howell has been an organizer for almost 30 years. She joined the staff of ACORN in Arkansas in 1973. She has also worked for Oregon Fair Share, Oregon Affiliate of National Abortion Rights Action League and then NARAL. She became the director of Carolina Community Project in 1982, was the founding organizer of NC Fair Share, and then joined the staff of Grassroots Leadership in 1986, and worked in NC and SC until 1995. She has also traveled to Nicaragua and Bolivia, worked on joint projects with the Center for Third World Organizing, and joined a network of anti-racist organizers and trainers. She was one of the founding members of NOA and served 3 terms as a Steering Committee member from 1994-1999. She served on the training staff of the Western States Center in Portland, OR for 2 years before she became the NC State Director for National AFL-CIO in 1997. She resides in Wilmington, North Carolina.

ACCOMMODATING JUSTICE:
Disability Culture Tackles Culture of Organizing
By Ann Long

Several years ago, a sister trade unionist told me this story:

Two young organizers who were going to a new city to organize approached Cesar Chavez and asked him,

"Cesar, how do you organize?"

"You find a place to sleep, a place to go to the bathroom and a place to get something to eat," he replied.

"But Cesar," the organizers persisted, "How do you organize?"

"You find a place to sleep, a place to go to the bathroom and a place to get something to eat," he replied.

In other words, you must first take care of yourself and the basics in your life. So what if you have a disability?

How do you organize if the bed you've been provided for a three-day meeting is up a flight of stairs you can't climb? ,

How do you organize if you are in a wheelchair that won't fit through the door of the bathroom?

How do you organize if the only places to eat are filled with smoke that triggers life-threatening asthma?

Workplace Rights and Disability

With passage in 1990 of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), employers with 15 or more employees are now required to make "reasonable accommodation" for people with disabilities, so long as the disability meets the ADA's definition as being substantial and limiting to major life activities. What's radical about the ADA is that it requires covered employers to own a piece of the accommodations process. Disabled workers have responsibilities under ADA, of course, such as informing the employer of their limitations, and being involved in the accommodations process. But the employer cannot leave the problem in the hands of the disabled worker alone: employers have legal responsibility for making accommodations so long as they are reasonable and do not pose undue hardship.

While it's a great leap forward perhaps, the Americans with Disabilities Act is no panacea. We know from all sorts of struggles that legislation alone does not social change make, and the ADA is no exception. [See the sidebar for sources

with more information about the ADA, including limitations of the law and how disability, undue hardship and other important terms are defined; anti-discrimination laws covering federal workers (who are not covered under ADA); and organizing resources.]

But the ADA provides a process, and it clarifies that, like others locked out because of discrimination, people with disabilities belong in the workforce and in public life. We have the right to be reasonably accommodated so we can participate in society – making a living, having access to the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and engaging in work for the kind of society we want.

Often locked out of employment – indeed locked out of society – people with disabilities are often low-income, lack necessities such as healthcare and are otherwise marginalized. All of the recent advances of disability activism – from ADA to greater awareness in general about disability rights – are laudable. And they're in keeping with progressive visions amongst organizers and organizing groups everywhere.

But what would be different if organizing were a vocation more accessible to people with disabilities?

The culture of organizing – the values we share about work, the determination we carry with us from job to job to fight for what's right and win no matter what, the constant struggle around garnering enough resources to do our work – affects the way we view the organizer's role and our ability to accommodate organizers with disabilities.

Janet Robideau of Montana People's Action is a 10-year veteran organizer who has developed disabling arthritis. She points out that accommodations sometimes go beyond one's own organization – conferences for organizers, for example, are often planned on the assumption that we can all work 12 hour days – an assumption that doesn't fit with many disabilities.

Problems with accommodations can often be in the details. Janet explains: "I've found the hardest things are the basic things, like when people who put together conferences don't take into account the issue of people who are handicapped. They have events where there are steps and they house you in a place and say 'Well it's only two blocks to the site,' when you can't walk two blocks. Or 'It's only four steps to wherever,' and I walk with a cane so walking up and down steps, especially when I have a flare-up, is extremely painful."

Since organizing is often about reaching beyond your organization – working in coalition, attending endless meetings and conferences – getting accommodations is often about educating and negotiating with a larger group. It's an organizing process in itself.

Making Accommodations

For some organizations, making accommodations is a clear choice. "We wouldn't have moved to this building if the accommodations hadn't been made," explains LeeAnn Hall, Executive Director of Northwest Federation of Community Organizations, about wheelchair accessibility in the group's office space. The organization has experience with disabled organizers on staff. LeeAnn points out that a lot of the group's work is around issues that affect people with disabilities and that another organization in the same building works on disability rights issues, so the group has an awareness of disability accommodations.

Jack Flippence, on the board of the Northwest Federation of Community Organizations and of ICAN, became disabled as a result of having polio as a child. An organization's commitment to accommodations matters, he says.

"When I have to go to board meetings, my organization sends my wife or son with me so I'm able to get situated," he explains.

But for groups that haven't grappled with disability accommodation before, the process can be difficult, time-consuming, and stressful. The appropriateness of an accommodation depends on the disability and the barriers that must be addressed, and whether or not it is 'reasonable' and does not cause undue hardship for the employer.

If you can only work 20 hours a week, for example, does that mean you can't organize? Part-time work can be a critical accommodation tool for people disabled with illnesses that sap their strength, such as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Some other general tools to consider for disability accommodation include changing a job design and/or workstation design to meet the staff person's needs and limitations, and allowing a flexible work schedule.

Questioning the Status Quo

How does that work with organizing, especially during campaigns, when it's usually an all-hands-on-deck approach? How do colleagues feel and respond when reminded of someone's limitations?

The issue begs another question: what would happen if we all had negotiated, reasonable job descriptions and we followed them? How would the culture of organizing change if more organizers took their vacation time, for example, or stayed home sick when they needed to?

Would people who need more flexibility and more control over their time, such as parents of small children, find greater support if more people with disabilities were organizers?

- A flexible, adaptive approach to tasks; a creativity stimulated by limited resources and experience with untraditional modes of operation.

All these qualities aren't found only in the disability community, of course, but imagine your own organization for a moment: how would it change if infused with a wealth of these qualities?

Barriers to Change

Accepting differences such as disability and examining our reactions to them allows us to hold a mirror up to ourselves: Why do we do things the way we do? Is a 12-hour workday really necessary to accomplish our goals?

If a group has $25,000 in uncommitted general operating funds for an entire year, how will it decide if it's going to spend a portion to make the bathroom wheelchair accessible for potential staff members or members of the organization? And how will it weigh that choice against other pressing needs?

We don't pay organizers a lot – we'd rather spend that money on our core mission, and our funders don't always see staff development as a fundable budget item.

And Janet Robideau says that, while money matters, so does organizing culture. "It's about money in a sense, but we have this tenet that this is how we live as organizers. We don't want to appear too well-to-do," she says.

And another barrier can be about the difficulties of asking for help. Asking for help can feel humiliating, especially if those you're asking aren't educated about their responsibilities or the issues surrounding disability and respond poorly to your request, or don't respond at all. Jack Flippence talks about the role of pride. "Asking for help can be hard," he says. "Sometimes it's a false pride that takes over, but pride is essential. It helps me to stand tall and do what I need to get done."

Indeed, awareness of the issues is critical. Social change organizations put high priority on doing the right thing. But reasonably accommodating a disability is not only about doing the 'right thing.' For employers covered under ADA, it's understanding and abiding by a complicated anti-discrimination law. An affirmative process, where the organization already has some awareness of the issues and has worked through its commitment to accommodation, can make requests for accommodation go more smoothly.

Finally, there's the question of how the community of social change organizations values organizers – not just currently disabled ones, but all of us who someday may find that we're not able to produce as much as we once did.

"As organizers we really do sacrifice a lot to do this work. I'm not complaining but there comes a time when if I'm still able to do the work, there should be something in place for organizers like us who are handicapped. What

happens?" Janet asks. "Are we put out to pasture because we're too expensive now?"

Connecting Communities

Not only are we not tapping a sector of the organizing labor pool when we don't accommodate disabilities, but we don't connect as much as we could to the disability community in general. While plenty of groups organize around disability rights and access issues, either directly or tangentially, we could strengthen those connections.

"People with disabilities are doing organizing now. Typically it has been around single issues, such as public transit accessibility, non-institutional living options, or technology access," says Kelly, adding that "The question is...'how do we deepen and broaden this activity?'"

"Most leaders [in the disability community] don't accept or understand the linkage between the disability rights movement and other social, labor, and justice movements in the past," says Kelly. "Few leaders understand exactly what organizing is and how it and other forms of social change (service, advocacy, community development, and activism) are unique and different from each other. Learning the paths that others have taken to freedom will go a long way for people with disabilities to build the bridge to the other side."

Perhaps with more disabled organizers among us, we would have a greater, more organic connection. But to have more disabled organizers among us, we'll likely need to examine the culture of organizing, the ever-present funding and resource issues, and the awareness organizations have about accommodations. And we'll need to develop stronger processes for people to ask for – and receive – the accommodations they need. As we work these issues out, perhaps the day will come when we make greater connections between the disability community and the organizing community.

And as another good outcome, perhaps disabled organizers will have a place to sleep, a place to go to the bathroom and a place to get something to eat.

Ann Long was an organizer for ten years. After exposure to chemicals in a cleaning product, she developed multiple chemical sensitivity -- the inability to tolerate even low levels of common chemicals found in cleaning products, fragranced personal care products, and a host of other consumer goods. She eventually became disabled. She now lives and works in a controlled indoor environment and no longer organizes, but writes for non-profit and for-profit organizations.

On Leaving Well
By Ellen Ryan

I started organizing in 1976, and have changed jobs eight times since. Sometimes I've left well, other times not so well. Looking back, I wish I'd had more help learning to know when it's time to leave and how to do it in a constructive way.

Most of us have heard about destructive leave-takings. The organization blows up over a personnel dispute. The board, members, and staff get embroiled in turmoil. Funders get involved. Pretty soon people who have no direct experience of what took place are gossiping about it, smearing reputations and offering opinions about what the organization should have done.

This article offers organizers a way to assess their situations and leave, if needed, more constructively. Those of us who fight injustice are unavoidably caught up in the injustices we try to change. Our organizations are far from perfect. Some things have changed since I started working in 1976, but many remain the same:

Some things haven't changed

1. Good organizers are hard to find.

People who can listen to other people, connect them with more people, and move them into action are rare. Anyone who is able to do this can find an organizing job, so if you are good at organizing and want to leave your organization, there are plenty of opportunities beyond the job you have now. If you're not good at organizing, find something you're good at and do that instead.

2. Organizing styles and strategies vary.

Organizing is a craft, not a science. Eric Clapton and Tracy Chapman both play the guitar, but they take the music in different directions. So too with good organizers. If you're an Eric Clapton playing in a Tracy Chapman organization, of course you're unhappy. Find or build an Eric Clapton organization instead of trying to turn your organization into something it isn't. You don't have to run your organization's reputation into the ground to justify leaving for an organization that suits you better.

3. Our organizations don't owe us a living.

Long hours and low pay can make us feel we're entitled to slack off, justifying it with the extraordinary effort we've already put in. Some fatigue is normal, but coasting while we feel unmotivated or complaining about grievances is dishonest. Don't linger collecting a paycheck just because you worked hard until a few months ago.

3. Having a boss doesn't have to mean being oppressed.

If your boss is incompetent, racist, addicted, or old-fashioned, find another one, in a different organization. You may not want a boss at all. It's fair to want an egalitarian work environment, but if your organization shows little interest in changing, look for an organization that has a culture and structure you can thrive in.

Organizers often want more direction than they get. Not all directors are good mentors. Decide what you need to learn and whether it's possible to learn it in your organization. Fighting for what you need makes sense only if the organization has the capacity to provide it.

4. You need to own your own stuff.

Addicts who aren't recovering just aren't organizers. If you're using drugs, drinking, rolling, gambling, or stealing, get help or expect to be fired. Resign before that happens if you can. Also own your own desires and personal needs. If you want changes in how things are done, be specific, follow the process, and give it some time. But don't blow things out of proportion if you don't get what you want. Our organizations aren't set up to meet all our needs.

5. If you want to be the boss, be prepared.

If you want to run an organization, find a mentor. Get experience in the things you'll need to know – fundraising, supervision, board relations, tax and employment law, networks, public speaking. Make sure your writing skills are good – spend time writing and ask good writers for feedback. Then apply for open positions. Meanwhile, do the job you have well or leave.

6. Avoid turning a bad job situation into an organizational psycho-drama.

Any dispute that drags on for more than a month is a sign to find another job. Don't let the dispute spill over in side conversations with co-workers, board members, and people from other organizations. It starts the gossip mill and is destructive for everyone.

7. Many workplaces may be worse than the one you're in.

Check out other organizations carefully. Some may operate in the ways you're looking for, but not many. Almost every organization is coping with changes in the workforce, funding world, and legal expectations of non-profits. You may find your organization is average or better.

Interview assertively and be clear about what you want. Use your probationary period to check things out. If the organization doesn't have a probationary period, ask for one – three to six months to check things out. If things check out, stay. If they don't, leave without prejudice.

The best time to read an organization's personnel policies and grievance procedure is before you take a job. Imagine that you're angry. Under stress, would you think the policies fair? Would you be able to follow the procedures? Are the important issues covered? If you answer no to any of these questions, don't take the job, or accept that if you run into problems, it might be better to find another job than fight your way through an inadequate or unfair procedure.

8. Organizing isn't all that romantic.

Don't confuse the vision, mission, and demands about justice in your organization for how it operates internally. Organizations that focus on workers' rights aren't necessarily perfect workplaces. Environmental organizations generally use electricity from the local power plant. Society is tied up in injustice, and that includes our organizations. Racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism exist within our organizations. If you are subjected to racism, sexism, classism, or heterosexism, bring it up with your boss and define a way to improve the situation. Give it your best effort, but if you don't see improvements quickly, find an organization that takes responsibility for dealing with oppression inside its walls.

Other things have changed

1. Our organizations do owe us fair treatment

This idea rarely came up twenty years ago. It's fair to expect a forty-hour week, flex or comp time, paid vacation and holidays, raises, promotions, sick leave, family leave, child care subsidies, unemployment, disability and health insurance, pensions, good supervision and feedback. We also deserve fair personnel policies and grievance procedures. Keep in mind that many organizations can't provide all these things. If your organization can't provide what you really need, look for one that can.

2. There is much greater diversity among organizers, both within and across organizations.

Most organizing staffs in the mid-1970's were characterized by a youth culture – lots of young single people, often white and/or male, who didn't trust anyone over 30 and worked sixty hours a week at less than minimum wage. The issues and targets were external; anyone who complained about inadequate supervision, training, pay, benefits, or internal group dynamics was labeled a wimp. Complaints about racist, sexist, or classist attitudes were often dismissed as wimpy, too, and most gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered organizers stayed in the closet. Balancing work and family life was a low priority because few organizers had primary responsibility for raising children.

Greater diversity today creates multiple challenges in working toward mutual agreement about how to run an organization. Instead of a limited argument about the right way to do things among three or four major organizing networks

dominated by white men, the arguments have multiplied, not only across a vast array of organizations, but within organizations as well.

The assumptions and interpretations of people from many races, classes, cultures, genders, age groups, sexual orientations, and family structures are on the table within our organizations in a way that they never have been before. More organizers have a personal stake in the issues they work on. Understanding one another across our differences, and working through them, are major parts of our work. Often, the biggest crises on our staffs are not about personnel matters per se, but about power, and the struggle to assert one's analysis and do something about it.

If your analysis is significantly different from your organization's, and there is no way to work through the differences in a constructive way, look for another job.

Suggestions for New Organizers

It helps to work for a number of organizations over a few years in order to get a sense of the types of organizing out there and learn as much as possible. Anyone who works as an organizer for a few years with a good reputation can find a better job. Organizers with histories of firings and blowing up organizations have a harder time. Refrain from trashing your organization both before and after you leave. If you need to talk to someone about your options, be prudent about whom you talk to. Talking to one person with a perspective on the range of what's available and the integrity to keep a confidence is a lot better than bad-mouthing you organization to a wide range of audiences.

Suggestions for Old Organizers

If you're a director and the staff is turning over every few years, consider moving out or moving over. Mentor existing staff to take over some or all of your job to reduce the exodus of organizers who move on in search of more challenging work. Share your funding contacts, access to leadership, and connections to other organizations. If there's no career path within your organization, organizers will go elsewhere. Take a sabbatical for a few months. If the organization gets along well without you, you've done well and are free to go. If things fall apart, you'll know you need to be a better mentor. Some old organizers make lateral moves within their organizations rather than move on completely. Break your job into three parts, then train and promote two people to share the work.

For organizers who feel stuck

For organizers who are rooted in places with no other organizations that meet their needs better than the ones they're in, the choice is hard. You're faced with taking or keeping a job you don't want in order to stay in one place, or moving because you can't find work that meets your needs where you are.

Sometimes there is just no way around making a hard choice. But making a decision and acting on it, even if it's hard, is better than making no decision at all, and much better than blaming your organization for not being a good match for you.

When You Leave, Do It with Class

The documentary Fundi: The Ella Baker Story recounts Ms. Baker's work as a civil rights organizer over forty years. At one point, she quit her job with the NAACP and took a job with the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee. Rank-and-file NAACP members urged her to speak at the national convention, giving her a platform to air her grievances with the organization. But she refused, and years later said only that the NAACP was pursuing legal strategies at the time, and she wanted to be closer to the grassroots action with young people. Her boss, interviewed for the documentary, said that Ella's assertiveness as a woman, especially one who was not ordained, rubbed the board, composed of male ministers, the wrong way. Ella Baker knew she had a contribution to make and found a place where she could make it. There was no need to continue to put up with sexist treatment, or trash the organization on the way out, either.

Once you decide to leave, set a specific date. Tell the director, put your files in order, and turn over all organizational property, including your computer files, keys, and any supplies the organization provided. Ask for an exit interview to go over the pros and cons of your experience with the organization. Get a clear agreement on any pay or benefits issues, such as unused vacation time, outstanding expense reimbursements, or unemployment benefits. Ask your Director to put the agreement in writing. If you are fired, follow the same procedure, although your employer will set the date of termination.

Say good-bye to the people you have worked with, but focus your reasons for leaving on what you want to do after you leave rather than grievances or dissatisfaction that led to your decision to move on. You can talk about what attracts you to what you're going to do next without rehashing all the things that were wrong with the organization. You have not just decided to leave, but hopefully to move on to the next chapter in your life.

Organizations do well to make leaving a natural part of organizational life. Except in cases of firings for extreme misconduct, a farewell party, or even a pizza break at the last staff meeting a departing organizer attends, helps create a culture in the organization that acknowledges that people leave, and are capable of leaving well.

Instead of gossip, let's learn from our mistakes.

Our organizations are glass houses, so instead of throwing stones, we need to work to improve our organizations. Seek constructive ways to tackle racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression within your organization. Practice patience and courage in wading through the challenges

diverse experiences and viewpoints bring. Make sure you're not addicted to work, substance abuse, or an ideological ivory tower, since these things, unhealthy in themselves, also cloud our judgement and trigger blow-ups. Work on clear and fair personnel policies and grievance procedures. In spite of our differences, we're all human. We can learn from our mistakes.