



Talking to Members!

DEVELOPING BETTER LISTENING HABITS

EFFECTIVE LISTENING	THE BAD LISTENER	THE GOOD LISTENER
Find areas of interest	Tunes out dry subjects	Asks "what's in it for me?"
Judge content, not delivery	Tunes out if poor delivery	Judges content over delivery error
Hold your fire	Tends to enter into argument	Doesn't judge until comprehension complete
Listen to ideas	Listen for facts	Listen for central theme
Be flexible	Takes intensive notes using only one system	Takes fewer notes, uses 4-5 different systems depending on speaker
Work at listening	Shows no energy output, attention is faked	Works hard, exhibits active body state

EFFECTIVE LISTENING	THE BAD LISTENER	THE GOOD LISTENER
Resist distractions	Distracted easily	Fights or avoids distractions, tolerates bad habits, know how to concentrate
Exercise your mind	Resists difficult expository material, seeks light recreational mind material	Uses heavier matter as exercise for the mind
Keep your mind open	Reacts to emotional words	Interprets color words; does not get hung up on them
Capitalizes on fact faster than speech	Tends to daydream with slow speakers	Challenges, anticipates, thought is mentally summarized, weighs the evidence, listens between the lines to tone of voice

Ten Rules for Listening

“If we were supposed to talk more than we listen, we would have two tongues and one ear.” –Mark Twain

1. Stop Talking

Don't talk, listen.

When somebody else is talking, listen to what they are saying, do not interrupt, talk over them or finish their sentences for them. Stop, just listen. When the other person has finished talking you may need to clarify to ensure that you have received their message accurately.

2. Prepare Yourself to Listen

Relax.

Focus on the speaker. Put other things out of mind. The human mind is easily distracted by other thoughts – what's for lunch, what time do I need to leave to catch my train, is it going to rain – try to put other thoughts out of mind and concentrate on the messages that are being communicated.

3. Put the Speaker at Ease

Help the speaker to feel free to speak.

Remember their needs and concerns. Nod or use other gestures or words to encourage them to continue. Maintain eye contact but don't stare – show you are listening and understanding what is being said.

4. Remove Distractions

Focus on what is being said.

Don't doodle, shuffle papers, look out the window, pick your fingernails or similar. Avoid unnecessary interruptions. These behaviors disrupt the listening process and send messages to the speaker that you are bored or distracted.

5. Empathize

Try to understand the other person's point of view.

Look at issues from their perspective. Let go of preconceived ideas. By having an open mind we can more fully empathize with the speaker. If the speaker says something that you disagree with then wait and construct an argument to counter what is said but keep an open mind to the views and opinions of others.

6. Be Patient

A pause, even a long pause, does not necessarily mean that the speaker has finished.
Be patient and let the speaker continue in their own time, sometimes it takes time to formulate what to say and how to say it. Never interrupt or finish a sentence for someone.

7. Avoid Personal Prejudice

Try to be impartial.

Don't become irritated and don't let the person's habits or mannerisms distract you from what the speaker is really saying.

Everybody has a different way of speaking - some people are for example more nervous or shy than others, some have regional accents or make excessive arm movements, some people like to pace whilst talking - others like to sit still.

Focus on what is being said and try to ignore styles of delivery.

8. Listen to the Tone

Volume and tone both add to what someone is saying.

A good speaker will use both volume and tone to their advantage to keep an audience attentive; everybody will use pitch, tone and volume of voice in certain situations - let these help you to understand the emphasis of what is being said

9. Listen for Ideas – Not Just Words

You need to get the whole picture, not just isolated bits and pieces.

Maybe one of the most difficult aspects of listening is the ability to link together pieces of information to reveal the ideas of others. With proper concentration, letting go of distractions, and focus this becomes easier.

10. Wait and Watch for Non-Verbal Communication

Gestures, facial expressions, and eye-movements can all be important.

We don't just listen with our ears but also with our eyes - watch and pick up the additional information being transmitted via non-verbal communication.

Dos and Don'ts for One-to-One Conversations

1. Be aware of appearance, hygiene and body language
2. Respect boundaries (When it is ok to talk and when to stop)
3. Introduce yourself and make clear the purpose of the conversation
4. Don't be defensive or apologetic about what you are doing
5. Don't assume anything about a person's level of knowledge, understanding of the issue or the union
6. Know and use the person's name appropriately
7. Pay attention to the person as a person; make a connection as a fellow human being
8. Use probing questions to get the person talking
9. Listen more than talk (75/25 rule)
10. Be prepared to handle common questions and objections
11. Know what you have to say and when it is your chance to say it
12. Make the conversation about collective interest, not the union's needs
13. Call the question
14. Thank them for their time, interest, questions, involvement, service, etc.
15. Open the door for future contact no matter what

Guidelines for Answering Questions/Dealing with Objections

- **Don't panic.** A question or objection is not a personal attack on you.
- **Don't become defensive or confrontational.** Because someone brings you a question or objection doesn't mean they are against the union. You can gain a lot of credibility for the local by acknowledging their objection and trying to answer it or engage them on the question.
- **Keep your composure and confidence.** Maintain eye contact and lean toward the person. Avoid displaying body language that might give the impression that the question or objection is unwelcome or that you are uncomfortable.
- **Watch the total person as he or she asks a question or expresses an objection.** Pay attention to gestures, facial expressions, and body language that give you cues about their feelings or intentions beyond what their words indicate.
- **Listen for the feelings of the person as well.** How intense is the message? When it comes time for you to respond, it will be important for you to recognize those feelings first, before you deal with the content of the question or objection.
- **Listen for the content of the message the member is sending you.** Ask questions to test for understanding or paraphrase back to the person the question or objection you think you heard.
- **Identify the self-interest being communicated to you.** When it comes time to respond, it will be important to address yourself directly to this self interest.
- **Make every effort to respond based on your firsthand knowledge, things you have seen or experienced as a union member.** This will be much more convincing than anything you've gained from secondary sources, things you've read or answers you've memorized.
- **When you are faced with a question or objection that you can't or don't feel comfortable answering, do not feel that you must do so anyway.** It's okay to say you're not sure of the answer but you'll find out and get back to them.
- **End the encounter on the most positive note possible.** Even if the person is not satisfied with how you handled their question or objection, it is important to keep the door open for further contact.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

- Ask them to help
- Match person to task
- Beginning and end to the task
- In person
- Have fun
- Be enthusiastic
- Why each person is important
- Provide training and encourage questions
- Keep person accountable
- Recognize and reward

MODULE 4: DUES & TOUGH QUESTIONS

ANSWERING TOUGH QUESTIONS: AFFIRM-ANSWER-REDIRECT

Questions	Affirm	Answer	Redirect
Futility: "Why should I be involved with the union? The union can't do anything about classroom size."	I can understand your concern. Classroom size can be a challenging issue to address.	In fact, union members have been able to get classroom size language into many of their contracts.	As a union, if we fight together we can have a voice in decisions around classroom size. We deserve to be a part of the process.
Strikes: "My superintendent told me the only weapon the union has to get good agreements is to go on strike."	I can understand why you are concerned. Nobody ever wants to go on strike.	The only time there is a strike is when an overwhelming majority of your co-workers vote to go on strike.	The superintendent understands that you can negotiate good contracts even without a strike. They want to talk about strikes instead of the issues that concern you. (Specify their issue).
Self-Interested: "I have heard that teacher unions care more about themselves than their students. I care about the kids. I'm not selfish."	I can understand your concern.	There have been years of attempts to discredit educators. Human beings sometimes make mistakes, but no teacher got into this profession for the fame or fortune.	Teachers get involved in their unions because they do care and know that their working conditions affect the ability for their students to learn. States and countries with strong unions actually produce higher student achievement results. When educators come together and act as a strong voice for public schools, they are able to push for more school funding, adequate resources for struggling children, and state assessments that measure genuine student progress rather than good test-taking skills.
Too Political/Liberal: "The association should stay out of politics. I'm a Republican, not a Democrat."	That's a completely valid feeling.	Because every decision about public schools is made by elected officials, we do endorse candidates and get involved in many political issues at the federal, state, and local level.	However, these decisions are made by members and any endorsement is based on a candidate's support of public worker's rights, education, and educators.

How To Address the Hard Questions

Members of your bargaining unit may have all sorts of reasons for not wanting to join our union. Some of these reasons might not make sense to you, but always remember that they are real to the person raising the objection. A helpful technique when dealing with objections is A.A.R.:

Affirm – Let them know you are listening, you understand and their feelings are valid.

Answer – Give a truthful, concise answer to the question. Do not be evasive or your entire message will be lost.

Redirect – Bring the conversation back to your message.

EXAMPLES OF ANSWERING HARD QUESTIONS USING A.A.R.

1 Why are dues so high? I'm not sure what I get for my dues and money is really tight for me and my family.

Affirm: I understand times are tough and I know you have two small children at home – that must be difficult!

Answer: The reality is, our union needs resources in order to support our members – from trainings to representation in legal cases, as well as the day-to-day expenses of paying rent, utilities, phone bills, salaries of staff who support our local when we need it, printing literature and more. Our dues are necessary to ensure that we have a strong and organized voice at the local, state and national level.

Redirect: Our member's efforts, supported by our dues dollars, collectively fight to improve our contract. We want to continue that process and we need a strong union to do that. Will you join us?

2 Why does our union only support Democrats for political office?

Affirm: That's a good question. I think it's great when members ask how the union works or makes decisions.

Answer: We don't just support Democrats for office, our members endorse candidates from all political parties whose positions align with our values. NYSUT has a three-day long endorsement process every two years. Local leaders and rank-and-file members first meet locally to debate and discuss all candidates seeking our endorsement. Local recommendations are then referred to a statewide body for more vetting and debate. Finally, our democratically elected Board of Directors considers all recommendations and supports the candidates that are best for public education and our collective bargaining rights. Our endorsements are based solely on who will best represent our voice and our values in government, not what political party someone is affiliated with.

Redirect: No matter who our union endorses for political office, if we don't stand together, we won't be able to fight for public education, collective bargaining and all of the other rights we have won over the years in our union contract.

3 I don't think the union president addresses the concerns of all the members.

(Example: She's just interested in high school issues; we work in the middle school.)

Affirm: I know that relationships can vary within every local. I appreciate your concern about your middle school co-workers.

Answer: I hope you have reached out to your president to express your concerns. The truth is . . . you and I currently have the right to be union members and have a voice within the district and inside our union. I think it's important to exercise that right and I hope you do!

Redirect: Attacks like the Janus decision threaten our right to exercise that voice and exert our power. No union, no power, no voice. It's as simple as that.

Other Common Objections and Answers:

IT COSTS TOO MUCH.

- ❑ What if you lost your job? Think of what THAT would cost you!
— Explain relationship between union/job security.
- ❑ You insure your car and house. This is insurance for your career. You don't know when you're going to need help.
- ❑ You can save money through Member Benefits.
- ❑ Dues are deductible from your state taxes.
- ❑ If you are the victim of a false accusation, don't you want a professional attorney in your corner? Union dues help to make sure that our members have the best defense to support us and back us up.

I GET IT ALL FOR NOTHING!

- ❑ Nothing in life is free. If you choose not to pay your fair share, your co-workers will be the ones footing the bill for you.
- ❑ Only members of our union have a say in how the union is run. If you choose not to join, you'll lose your seat at the table.
- ❑ If you and others are not part of the union, the union could lose its bargaining power and the results could mean lower pay, cuts in benefits and less funding for our schools.
- ❑ It's important that we all pay our dues to keep our union strong and give us the resources we need to support the enforcement of our contract.

NYSUT Member-Only Rights:

- Legal defense and representation services above and beyond that which is defined in the local union's collective bargaining agreement; Such representation provided by NYSUT Legal and Field Services such as for §3020-a, §75, pt. 83, etc.
- Rights to purchase or maintain endorsed member benefit products and services above and beyond the local union's collective bargaining agreement provided by NYSUT Member Benefits Trust, NYSUT Member Benefits Corporation and NYSUT Catastrophe Major Medical Trust.
- Rights to use any Member Benefit services attorney referral program, benefit card, discount programs/purchasing which are not part of the collective bargaining agreement.
- The right to represent co-workers through elected office in the union.
- The right to vote in union elections including officer elections and contract ratification votes.
- Access to discounted Education & Learning Trust (ELT) professional development and training.
- Access to specific union-supported programs such as workshops aimed to help reduce student debt and assist with certification issues.

I DON'T LIKE UNIONS.

- ❑ The union is your voice on issues like health care and wages. Do you think we would have made the progress we've made if we didn't work together on it?
- ❑ Working people have always had to stick together to make progress. Let me tell you how things work in our union...
- ❑ When you belong to our union, you know that someone will be there to protect your rights if you have a problem on the job. I think that peace of mind is important, don't you agree?
- ❑ The dictionary defines union as "joining together for a common cause."
- ❑ Our working conditions are students' learning conditions. The union protects both.

WE DON'T NEED IT THIS YEAR, WE'RE NOT BARGAINING.

- ❑ Union membership provides protection all the time, not just when we're bargaining. Between contracts is when a lot of the work on contract maintenance occurs. Fighting to defend the contract goes on all the time.
- ❑ We're always fighting unfair and arbitrary decisions that impact everybody.
- ❑ We've got to fight to get more funding and protections. We're working to make schools better for students and employees. That's an ongoing job.
- ❑ The school board and Legislature see our membership numbers as a sign of strength or weakness.

I'LL JOIN THE LOCAL, BUT NOT NYSUT, AFT or NEA.

- We're working at all levels to improve schools and advocate for public education.
- When you and your colleagues are union members, it creates the kind of collective power it takes to bargain for decent salaries and benefits on the local level and to lobby for funding in Albany and Washington. It's important that our interests are represented not only at the local level, but also at the state and national level, too.
- NYSUT, AFT and NEA provide professional development, bargaining assistance and legal programs to you through our local. We work as a team.
- Through our democratic process, union members make decisions. It's not top-down. You're represented at all levels by the delegates you elect.
- Most of our local programs wouldn't exist without NYSUT, AFT and NEA.

I'M STILL MAD ABOUT WHEN _____ HAPPENED.

- I understand and respect your feelings. What can we do to improve going forward?
- Nothing can change the past. We can work together to make the future better.
- It might not have been so good in the past. What are you willing to do to change things?

I don't know much about what happened then, but I know what is happening now.

- ☐ We're working to build membership so we can be stronger next year.
- ☐ I like to think positive. Just look at what we've accomplished since then.

THEY SHOULD STAY OUT OF POLITICS.

- ☐ Leadership elected by members make the decisions about which candidates to support.
- ☐ What exactly do you mean when you say "stay out" of politics? Education decisions are political decisions because they're made by elected officials.
- ☐ NYSUT VOTE-COPE supports both Republicans and Democrats that support public education.
- ☐ Wonder why we did or didn't support someone? Let's look at their record on education.
- ☐ Did you know that we have a voluntary fund, separate from your dues, that goes toward funding our political action? Many members choose to make voluntary contributions to a fund called VOTE-COPE above and beyond their annual dues payments.
- ☐ No dues dollars are used to support political candidates or committees, that is VOTE-COPE.

I DON'T LIKE THE PEOPLE WHO RUN THE UNION.

We need people with your views to be a part of things.

We all have equal access to decision-making through our votes.

All our leaders are elected by open nominations.

- ☐ What should we stop or start doing?
- ☐ Have you ever thought about running?
- ☐ What is it that concerns you?
- ☐ How well do you know the current leader?
Let's get together and talk to him/her.

THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT KIDS.

- ☐ We provide protection for you so you can do your best with students, without worry.
- ☐ We're the strongest voice in the state for funding our schools and advocating for students.
- ☐ NYSUT, AFT and NEA provide professional development and resources for educators to be more effective for their students.
- ☐ Student learning conditions and our working conditions are closely linked – our union cares about that.

We advocate for a quality education for every student.

- ☐ NYSUT works collaboratively with the Department of Education and the State Legislature on issues that impact our students, our teachers and our communities.
- ☐ NYSUT provides grants to locals to start their own community service projects. Would you like to get involved in a project like that?



PRACTICE



Create your own responses
to the following excuses given
for not joining the Union.

They weren't able to stop any
of the negative legislation.

You're okay, but I don't like the other people.
I'm Republican and they're Democrats.

They are so negative!

I'm getting out of education next year.

They only protect their members.
They don't care about students.

They don't promote employee quality.
All they do is protect bad employees.

The union did not do anything
about APPR or testing.

The union doesn't support my 2nd Amendment
right to have a gun – it was all over Facebook.

COMMON OBJECTIONS: Higher Ed

The union only cares about full-timers
and I am an adjunct.

I already pay dues at another college.
Why should I pay them here too?

There are fewer full-time faculty than ever and the
union hasn't done anything about that.

I've seen the
union contract proposals and they hardly
include anything important to adjuncts.

I'm only here for one class. I work full-time
somewhere else. I'm really not interested in
getting involved and I don't care
about the money.

I didn't even know there
was a union here. What do they do?

I have tenure, I don't need a union

Common Objections: SRPs
(School-Related Professionals)

The union only cares about teachers
and I am a 1-1 aide.

There are fewer of us doing more of the work
and the union hasn't done anything to help us.

Talking Points for Speaking to Members about the Union

When you speak with members who are not strong supporters of the union, members who are considering dropping their membership or nonmembers, you are likely to encounter a variety of objections, concerns and arguments that question the value of union membership. Getting into a heated argument over these issues is not an effective way to turn non-supporters into supporters. Rather, calm, positive, reasonable responses that gently reveal the inconsistencies, illogic or misinformation in the objector's thinking are called for. Here are some examples of responses that you can give to commonly voiced criticisms of unions. Helping the objector to "find" the truth by posing some of these responses as questions can often be a very effective way of making a point (e.g., instead of asserting that nonmembers weaken the union's ability to protect members, ask "What do you think happens to the union's ability to protect members' contractual rights if members drop their membership?")

If they say ...	You can respond ...
<p>Why should I be a union member when I'll get exactly the same wages and benefits without joining and paying dues?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The union's ability to win better contracts or maintain existing benefits and working conditions depends on the support of the members. If management knows (and they will) that bargaining unit members are dropping their membership, they'll know the union is weak and will be emboldened to reject even our most reasonable demands and insist on more givebacks. • If every member felt as you do there would be no union to bargain for you or represent you. • If you value the benefits and protections your contract provides – and want to keep them – you have to support the union. Those benefits and protections didn't come about through the generosity of your employer. The union (which means the members united) fought for every one of them. • Every non-member strengthens the hand of the employer. You can't say you want better wages, benefits and working conditions and at the same time say you don't want to be a union member. • Your fellow workers need you and you need them. Individuals are voiceless and powerless in confronting the power of employers, governments or aggregated wealth. Individuals gain a voice and power only when they unite. That's what a union is: a group of individuals who unite because they want a voice and power.
<p>I can't afford union membership. I've got a family to support and my paycheck just isn't big enough. Besides, the dues are too high.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The price of anything must be measured against the value you get in return. Looked at that way, union dues are probably the best bargain of anything you buy. Your wages, working conditions and benefits all derive from the efforts of the union. • Every study that's ever been done on the subject demonstrates conclusively that unionized workers have significantly better wages, benefits and working conditions than non-unionized workers. And the value of the improved wages, benefits and working conditions exceeds the cost of union dues many times over. • If you're concerned about supporting your family, you can't afford

	<p>not to be a union member. The question you have to ask yourself is how well would I be able to support my family if I didn't have a union to protect my job and help me get better wages and benefits?</p>
<p>Look, I didn't mind joining the union years ago when we got good contracts, but now our contract settlements stink. I wouldn't pay money for a lousy car. Why should I pay money for a lousy union?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's true that contract settlements have not been as good as in past years. Wage increases have been small and there have been lots of givebacks. But let's remember why this is so. It's not because we have bad unions. An all-out assault by very well financed groups that oppose unions, public institutions and the rights of working people exploited the effects of the recession of 2008 to turn many government leaders and much of the public against public educators, health care professionals and other public servants. This is happening everywhere in the United States. As isolated individuals we cannot possibly overcome the forces of wealth and power that are destroying us. Our only hope of turning things around is to unite as never before with one another and in coalition with community groups. We can only do this through our unions. It is a battle that will not be won quickly or easily, but if we do not fight back things will never get better. Despite the bad settlements, in fact because of the bad settlements, it has never been more important to belong to and support your union.
<p>My employer and others say that workers may have needed unions at one time to protect their rights, but today there are laws to protect workers, so unions aren't necessary any more</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is true that many laws have been passed since the early years of the 20th century to protect workers' rights— most of which were passed because unions fought for them – but have you noticed what's been happening to those laws in the last few years? More and more states have limited or eliminated collective bargaining rights, public employee pensions, tenure and just cause protections, the ability of workers to have a say in workplace and professional issues and many other worker rights. This rollback of employee rights is unprecedented. So, to say that workers don't need unions to protect them anymore is disingenuous at best. Workers need unions more today than at any time in the last 50 years.
<p>I don't believe in unions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you believe in good wages, good benefits, secure pensions and good working conditions, you believe in unions. If you believe in fighting back against phony education "deformers" whose ideas are bad for kids, you believe in unions. If you believe preventing the privatization and corporate takeover of public education of public schools and other public services, you believe in unions. If you believe professionals should have a strong voice in influencing the policies that control their work, you believe in unions. If you think workers are treated better now than they were 100 years ago, you believe in unions. On the other hand, if you believe things are going just fine lately, maybe you don't believe in unions.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All people who want to have the power to advance their interests unite for mutual protection and benefit. Businessmen (Chambers of Commerce), manufacturers (National Association of Manufacturers), lawyers (bar associations), doctors (AMA), fossil fuel companies (US Oil & Gas Association), bankers (American Bankers Association) and numerous other groups unite in associations to increase their power, influence and effectiveness. They do so because they know organizing gives them an advantage. Why should workers, who lack the enormous individual wealth of these other groups, be the only ones not to unite for their mutual betterment? • The media have done their best to portray unions in a bad light. This is hardly surprising when one realizes that the media are largely controlled by the very corporate interests that hate unions. Well financed anti-union interest groups also spend lots of money on ads. Come to our meetings, hear what we're about and then decide if unions are good or bad.
<p>My employer is fair and looks out for my interests. I get along fine with my boss. What does a union do for me that I wouldn't have anyway?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are certainly good employers and good supervisors who try to treat their employees fairly. That doesn't mean, however, that there is no need or role for a union. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Employers change and supervisors change. The fact that you have a good one today doesn't mean that will always be true. ○ Even if things on the job are pretty good right now why shouldn't we work to make them even better? ○ Even in the best employment relationships, the interests of employers and employees sometimes clash. When that happens, isn't it better to have the collective strength of a union behind you? • Really good employers usually don't mind dealing with a union. There are many workplaces where employers and unions work collaboratively for the collective betterment of all. Labor-management relationships do not have to be hostile and adversarial and, when you have a good employer and a good union, often they are not.
<p>I'm only a part-time (or temporary) worker ... or I'm probably not going to continue working here for a long time.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether you're part-time or full-time, a temporary worker or someone who is likely to leave in the not too distant future, as long as you work here you receive the benefits that the union and your fellow workers have achieved. You have an interest in seeing to it that those benefits are maintained and an ethical obligation to your fellow workers to support them as they are supporting you.
<p>Members of my family (a spouse, parents) don't</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chances are your anti-union family members do not object to the good pay, benefits and working conditions that the union has

<p>like unions and would be upset if I joined.</p>	<p>negotiated for you. Let's review some of the many contractual provisions that you value. Without a union most of these would be lost. Does your anti-union family member want to leave it up to your employer to unilaterally decide how much you should be paid or how much you should contribute to your health insurance or how many classes you should teach or whether you should be fired without cause or how long your workday or work year should be?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually when people are "against unions" it's because they object to what they believe to be the union's positions on social issues or its political endorsements. Try to steer the conversation away from social issues and partisan politics and focus on the tangible benefits the union provides to its members.
<p>The union doesn't do anything for me (perhaps a grievance the member had was not settled to his satisfaction) ... or, I don't like or trust the people who run the union.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for specifics about what the union failed to do, obtain the facts and report back to the member. • Union officials are not perfect and don't always handle all problems successfully, but they do the best they can. Being a union official is often a thankless and difficult job ... and it's becoming more difficult every year. Sometimes even when union officials do the right thing the outcome isn't what we would have hoped for. • As with anyone else, it's unfair to have a "you're only as good as your last mistake" attitude about union officials. Many union members take the good things the union does for granted and only think about what it has failed to accomplish. That's unfair. The union has accomplished many good and important things for you – just look at your contract. • John Kennedy famously said, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." He didn't mean that the government should do nothing for citizens; rather he was urging citizens to think about what they need to do to help improve society. The same is true of unions and their members. All too often, members think of the union as a service they hire by paying dues. Of course there are things the union has to do for its members, but members must remember that they are the union and they are responsible for what happens to them. • The more you get involved the more you can change the things you don't like. Sitting on the sideline badmouthing the union doesn't help anyone – including you.
<p>I don't need the union's help. I can take care of myself.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That's true ... until it's not. Anyone can take care of himself when things are going well. That's like the person who says he doesn't need health insurance because he's not sick. But suppose you're falsely accused by a student of a serious offense and are brought up on charges. This can happen to anyone, not just bad teachers. How well do you think you can take care of yourself in that

	<p>situation? What do you think it would cost you to hire a private attorney to represent you? You can bet it would be a lot more than a lifetime of dues, and chances are that attorney wouldn't be as skilled or experienced in handling cases of this kind as a NYSUT attorney. Or what if there were no union rules about seniority and layoff and a school board member wanted you fired so his niece could have your job? Could you take care of yourself then? The situations in which a good employee who's done nothing wrong can need the union's help are potentially limitless.</p>
<p>My religion doesn't permit me to belong to any outside organization.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no recognized religion that bars union membership. In fact, unions work closely with many faith groups to promote social justice (for example, NYSUT is a member of the NYS Labor-Religion Coalition). Unions and religious groups sometimes have different positions on a small number of specific social or political issues (private school vouchers would be one example), but on most issues they generally agree. • If you still think there's a conflict between your faith group and our union, a representative of the union would be glad to meet with you and a leader of your faith group to clear up any misunderstandings.
<p>My employer clearly doesn't like unions and I'm afraid that if I become involved with the union I'll be subject to reprisals. I can't afford to lose my job and I don't want my supervisors to dislike me.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The law, public policy and your contract guarantee your right to join a union and engage in lawful union activities. There may be certain states where public sector union members are subject to reprisals and firings, but New York is not one of them. • No member of this union has ever been punished or fired for belonging to the union. • As for being disliked by your supervisor for belonging to the union, if that actually happens you'll have lots of company because almost everyone is a union member (including your supervisors!). Ultimately, you have to ask yourself this question: Which is more important, being liked by your supervisor or having the power to protect your rights, your economic security, your professional integrity and the survival of high quality public education (or health care).
<p>I don't want anything to do with unions. They're all corrupt.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That's a baseless and false generalization. Of course, there are a few corrupt union officials, just as you will find a few corrupt officials in any field. But your union is honestly and democratically run. Your union strictly complies with all federal laws and regulations governing union operations. There are annual audits of the union's finances. Your union constitution mandates democratic procedures and membership control of the union. The same is true of NYSUT and its national affiliates. • If members choose not to exercise their right to participate or do not run for union positions, that's not the union's fault and it

	doesn't mean the union is undemocratic or corrupt.
I don't know enough about NYSUT or the union movement to make a decision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The officers or representatives of your local will be glad to sit down with you to answer your questions and tell you everything you need to know about NYSUT and its national affiliates so that you can be well informed. Once you have a clearer sense of the history, mission and operation of the union, I'm sure you'll want to be a member.
I'm not interested. I just don't want to join the union.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can't afford not to be interested in the union. What happens between the union and the employer affects you directly as it does all employees. To say that you're not interested in the union is the same as saying you're not interested in your wages, benefits and working conditions, that you're not interested in the future of your profession or your job security. I don't believe that's true because I've yet to meet anyone who "isn't interested" in those things. If you're not interested in the union, you'll have no one to blame but yourself when things don't go the way you wanted them to.
I'm interested in my profession, not union politics. I want help with professional issues so I can do the best job I can.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your union, NYSUT, AFT and NEA fight every day to strengthen the education and healthcare professions and provide countless professional development opportunities through ELT, leadership conferences, Share My Lesson and a wide range of training programs. Your union, NYSUT, AFT and NEA oppose the false promises and false premises of the education "deformers," the corporate profiteers and the political leaders who, like Gov. Cuomo, claim to be advocates for kids but cut funding, exclude practitioners from educational decision-making, divert critically needed funds to private for-profit providers, substitute "testocracy" for true learning and impose junk-science teacher evaluation systems. There is no disagreement between professional excellence and strong unionism. Your union is fighting to give you, the professional practitioner, the voice you deserve in shaping and improving your profession. If you truly care about improving your professional practice and the conditions in which you work, you have to be an active supporter of your union. It's through your union that you and your colleagues gain the voice and the power to oppose false reforms that hurt kids and to support the positive, child-centered changes that advance the profession and lead to quality schools and public institutions for all.