



AN ORGANIZING CONVERSATION

Here are some guidelines for a fruitful conversation (or a series of conversations) with a co-worker about politics and the cuts to our communities in Ontario and the challenges facing working people and the public services they rely on, because of the Doug Ford government.

Nobody should follow a script mechanically. Talk with people like human beings! But think of this outline as a tool. The steps can help you move toward a goal, so your co-worker isn't left feeling like their time's been wasted with a spiel or a gripe session. Done right, an organizing conversation leads to action.

Your job is mostly to ask questions. You want your co-worker to realize:

- They care about a problem.
- There's a decision-maker who has the power to fix this problem.
- The decision-maker won't fix it until someone pushes them to.
- If your co-worker really wants this problem fixed, they have to join you, other co-workers and community allies in taking action.

But just telling them all this wouldn't be very effective. Instead, you want to ask the right questions that get them to say it themselves. We tend to remember what we said, not what the other person said.

1. DISCOVER THE ISSUES

Begin by asking questions—and listening to the answers—to learn what your co-worker cares about. Make your questions open-ended, especially when you're getting to know someone.

How's your day going?

What do you think of the Ford Government?

There's been a lot of change since the last provincial election. What do you think about it?

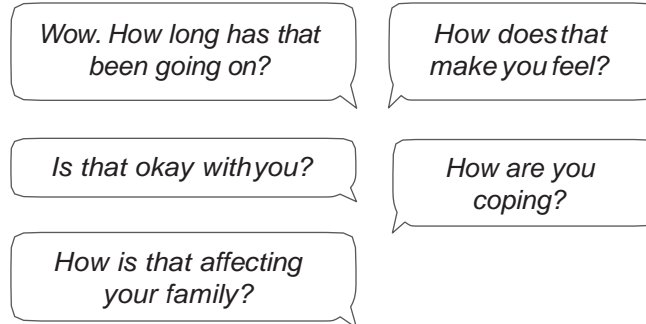
When you're organizing around a specific issue, your questions might get more pointed. Still, even if you have a petition about stopping the privatization of healthcare, don't leap straight into "Will you sign this?" Instead, ask:

How do you think the Ford government's proposal to allow for more privatization of healthcare will impact you?

The point is for your co-worker to remind themselves how they feel about this problem, before you ask them to act. If you've discussed this issue before, you can still ask how a recent development will affect them or share someone else's story and get their reaction.

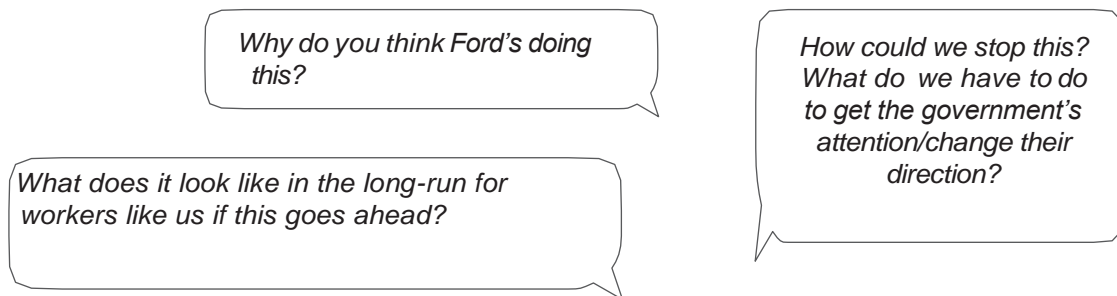
2. AGITATE

React to what they tell you and ask follow-up questions. By reacting, the organizer can help the other person feel that they have permission to be angry:



3. CALL THE QUESTION

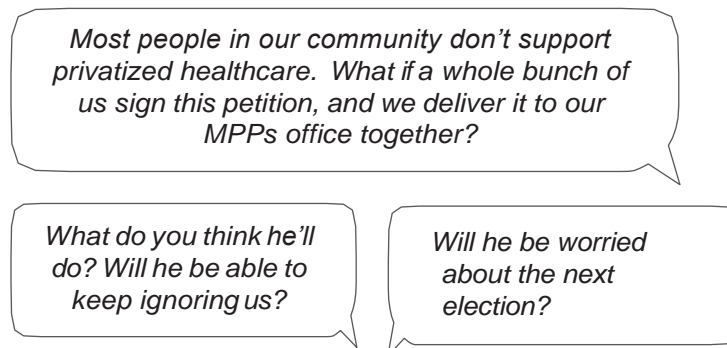
Get them talking about who's responsible.



For too long, workers' have been told that public service cuts and privatization are just "the way things are." Realizing that bad conditions didn't fall from the sky can be empowering. If someone made the decision that caused this mess, that someone could also unmake it.

4. MAKE A PLAN TO WIN

Now that your co-worker is angry, it's time to offer some hope. Hope comes from our power in numbers and a winnable plan. That's how you make cuts to public services and privatization into a problem for the Ford government.



This step will be trickier if today's petition/issue doesn't address a problem that this person feels strongly about. It is easier to organize around issues that are widely and deeply felt— but still make note of the responses. Another issue with the Ford government will likely come around that will engage this member to take action and you'll want to make sure to follow up.

But what you can say is that power in numbers is our only way to get a say on any issue. For instance:

If we win on this issue, do you think the Ford government will learn something? Will taking action on the next issue be easier?

This is the first step. To stop all the cuts and chaos of the Ford government, they need to see workers and communities standing together. How else are we going to build enough power to stop them from making the cuts to education you are worried about?

5. GET A COMMITMENT

Ask the member to be part of the solution by taking a specific action.

Will you sign this petition and come with us to deliver it on Thursday?

If someone is fearful, acknowledge that her fears have real reasons behind them. But still, things won't get better unless she gets involved. Your job isn't to convince her that she's wrong about her fears, but that she needs to act anyway.

Are we going to ensure our families have the healthcare they need if we don't take action? Are you willing to let healthcare get privatized?

Helping her through it will be a lot easier when you're inviting her to act on what she's already said—not pushing an action you're trying to “sell.”

6. INOCULATE AND RE-COMMIT

Now your co-worker is committed—but do they know what they're getting into? Ask how they think the MPP or Ford Government will react to the action.

What do you think the MPP will say when we go to his office?

If there's a likely risk she hasn't thought of, warn her about it.

Some of the Ford MPPs have been calling the police on peaceful protests outside their offices. How would you feel if the police showed up?

Talk through the possible outcomes and our preparations for these possibilities. Then ask whether you can still count on her participation.

Does any of that change your mind?

This part might sound like you're undermining your organizing. You've gone to all this work to help your co-worker decide to act, and now you're trying to talk her out of it? But like inoculating against a virus, the idea is to help them develop an immunity to any challenges faced —by giving them a small dose before they are exposed to the real thing.

This way, if there is an issue, she won't be thrown by it. In fact, your correct prediction will boost your credibility.

7. SET A FOLLOW-UP PLAN

As a famous community organizer once put it, "90 percent of organizing is follow-up."

Agree on the next step, and when you'll check back in. Maybe they're going to meet a group of you Thursday to deliver the petition, or they'll ask two co-workers to sign. Or maybe you simply promise to report back on Friday about how the meeting/demo at the MPPs office went.

Remember, you're not just trying to pull off this one action. You're also trying to draw people gradually closer to the center and build an ongoing network of communication. You're trying to make standing up, in an organized way, a normal and natural part of workplace and community life.

Can you ask Janessa and Jane to sign? Great! I'll come back at the end of the shift to find out how it went, okay?