

Poaching as a Membership Recruitment Strategy

Trade union rival is not a new phenomenon, but it appears that it is fast becoming a problem that threatens to create tensions across the spectrum of the labour movement. The poaching of union members is said to be a growing concern as the contraction of economies have resulted in massive retrenchment, redundancies and layoff of workers. It goes without saying that union membership has declined and the impact has been felt by both large and small trade unions.

There is no doubt that the economic crisis which continues to plaque the world, has contributed to the financial woes of labour unions. It is interesting to note that unlike other commercial enterprises, trade unions have not gone under. While they are challenged to meet their financial obligations, they maintain their operations through various fund raising efforts and other initiatives. The contraction in unionized membership ought to give added impetus to trade unions to threat to union organizing far more seriously. Membership based organizations can only survive if they have members, and so with this in mind, individual trade unions are left with no other option than to pursue new members.

This requires that a dedicated action plan is devised. In the circumstances where a large percentage of the labour force is unorganized, there is more than an added incentive for labour unions to canvass this target group. With the changing demographic in the work force, occasioned by the exit of persons who are retiring from active service, there is a strong case for trade unions to organize young workers.

One problem that besets many trade unions is that of competition among themselves in recruiting membership. The fact that some sectors have more than one trade union organization attempting to represent a particular interest group, this can potentially give rise to a lasting problem of competition, as each strives to establish itself as the bargaining agent for the workers. This is potentially dangerous, as it can lead to unnecessary tensions, and in some cases undermining.

Often a rival employer will seek to poach the talent from another employer so as to maximize the potential profit which can be made by his company. In some cases this will be in relation to one high executive employee but in other circumstances it can result in whole teams being poached. Using this as a guide, it is a reminder that trade union leaders as human beings are no less innocent, and so can be driven to act in a similar manner, as they move to promote their own self interest.

It can however be rather disgusting when one trade union organization openly and deliberately set out to attract the membership of another member organization by whatever means it so desires to pursue. It is unfortunate that one would sit on the sidelines and wait for an opportunity to reach out to the membership of another, under the guise that they can be of more assistance. This is called seizing the moment. This moment presents itself when there appears to be some form of in-house disgruntleness or dissatisfaction shown by the members, over the actions or decisions of their organization.

It is to be respected that individuals have the right of choice, and therefore might feel the urge to fall to the temptation to move on to another organization. What becomes a matter of concern is how the competing organization goes about attracting or soliciting the membership of another. This brings into question the business ethic of the competing organization.

It is important for those who are being solicited to take some time and consider the ethical behaviour and the creditability of the organization that attempts to win them over, all for the purpose of satisfying a membership need. It may be wise for members who are being influenced to remember that running away does not necessary solve a problem, but patience and working together to find a solution, is what really matters.

Poaching is nothing short of an injustice and it may be added, summed in the words of the late Dr. Martin Luther King who said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."