

# MEMORY TRAINING



**FOR  
ORGANIZERS**

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**WHY MAKE A MEMORY TRAINING?**



## **WE WON'T BE ABLE TO OVERTHROW CAPITALISM OVER THE NEXT WEEK.**

The work we're doing will take time. We need to build committees, build connections with co-workers and build experience. If we don't remember things, it is hard for us to improve on our activity, and to systematically welcome and orient new people.

## **THERE ARE PROBLEMS IN HOW PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY WORK NOW IN THE IWW.**

There is not adequate documentation of organizing experiences. There are gaps in institutional knowledge. There is sometimes glamorizing of sensational direct action and not enough awareness of or encouragement for behind the scenes work. These problems have very real consequences in what we remember, as individuals, as committee, as branches and in the IWW as a whole.

## **WHAT IS IN THIS TRAINING MANUAL?**

Here you can find a description of common problems in memory on personal and collective level. This document also explores causes of this and some resources for improving memory. It's a long document, and not all of this may be useful for you. Use the table of contents to find stuff that sounds relevant to your organizing.

# Section 1



# Personal Memory

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# PART

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ER? WHAT SHOULD ORGANIZERS REMEMBER? W



There are a lot of important things for an organizer to remember. This section of the training explores some key things, listed with the likely consequences if organizers don't remember them. Part two will explore general resources for improving memory. Part three of this training will explore specific strategies on improving each practice. To use a concept from the OT 101 this section is Agitation that helps to beware of problems with memory for organizers, the next two sections are Education that explores solutions.

As an organizer you should remember your commitments, what you said you will do. If you don't remember this, you can't do them. This leads to important work not happening. It can also make people not trust you.

## Best Practices

An organizer should remember best practices from things they've done in the past. Otherwise, they will spend time doing things in a less effective way, and make mistakes that slow down the work. An organizer should remember

## Commitments & Promises

An organizer should remember things about other people, basic facts about their lives, what their passions are, what they've shared. If they don't, they won't work as well with the other people, and may seem uncaring or unsympathetic.

## Personal & Professional Details

## Meet People Where They're At

An organizer should remember when they didn't used to be involved with and familiar with IWW processes. If they don't remember this, it's easy to seem distant to non-members or new members, and to not communicate in a way that's understandable and relatable, which makes it harder to build trust.



# PARITY 21

GENERAL TIPS TO IMPROVING MEMO BY



Everyone has their own style of learning and remembering things. People should understand their capacities, experiment with different techniques, apply what works best for them, and have standards of accountability so they can improve their abilities. What follows are some generalizations from the authors' experiences which may be of value to others.

## Take Good Notes & Keep Records Accessible!

Always keep a pen and notebook (even a pocket-sized one) on hand. Write down anything you won't be able to keep in your head. If in doubt, write it down! Often writing down pen on paper will help you remember more than typing them on a phone or computer. For people with strong auditory skills, you may want to use a recording device or app on your smartphone. It may also be useful for you to recite records rhythmically and relate information to colors, smells and textures. The more senses you can involve, the better. Because of differing physical and mental capacities, not everyone will be able to easily write pen on paper. Similarly, people's abilities to focus and read varies. While this point and this training document is an encouragement for more documentation, it should not be used to pressure people for things they can't do, or to shame people for not doing these.

## Know your capacity, know your limits

As above, know what you'll be able to keep in your head and what you'll need to write down.

Just because it's important to remember doesn't make it easy to remember. Be honest with yourself about your capacity, and use supplements like writing it down, adding it to your online calendar or making an audio recording as much as you need.





## Pay attention.

Unless you focus enough to encode something into your brain, you won't be able to recall it later. It takes approximately eight seconds of intense focus to process information into your memory. Try to absorb information in a quiet, controlled space where you won't be distracted and can do that type of focus.

## Talk directly with people, put a human encounter to the things you want to remember

By connecting with people on specific tasks, you personalize the goal you're working for. This can help it click with you more, and build motivation to finish the tasks you've volunteered for. If you agreed to do something over a text or email, the next time you see the person who asked you to help, mention the task. It becomes less of an abstract obligation, more tangible.

## Don't burn yourself out.

High levels of stress make concentration, learning and memory harder. Stress is hard to avoid as an organizer. There is a lot of pressure working class people face just trying to survive. There is an inherent added stress to recognizing the problems within capitalism, and in feeling responsible for doing work to fight this system. Collective action also has the inherent danger of retaliation from people in power that can make people's lives worse in many ways. We can't

end stress without ending capitalism. However, there is often added and excessive stress that organizers impose on themselves. This is a major problem when people volunteer for too much and over-commit.

Recognize that this can be a self-destructive force. If you're over-committed you'll get worse at remembering things, and eventually may push yourself to the point where you'll stop doing organizing altogether. Remember that it's a marathon not a sprint, and it's always okay to say no to things.

## Keep learning and developing new skills

If you're locked into doing the same things continually, it will be harder to take in information over time. Doing things that are less familiar and developing new ways of doing things is beneficial in the long term.

## Keep learning and developing new skills

Check in on your well being, and be conscious of what you eat and your energy level. Take the time to do physical exercise to keep your capacity for memory, and to improve it. Make sure to get enough sleep. If you're working on a critical campaign there can be a strong urge to press yourself hard, to be able to attend more meetings, do more one on ones, respond to more emails and buildup the fight.

Yet past a certain point this approach is self-defeating. If you're committing so much of your time and not getting enough sleep you will be less likely to remember important details that come out of

all the extra meetings and one-on-ones you

participated in, and the total gains are limited. Be conscious of how much you consume caffeine, alcohol, marijuana or any other drug. Be alert to whether this is negatively affecting your memory. If it is, assess how much benefit you get from your current levels of consumption, and see whether decreasing the amount you consume is worth it for the benefits you might get with improving your memory.

## Have Friends

Friends shouldn't just be people that you're organizing with. They should be people beyond your organizing world that you can enjoy time with and relax with. If all your friends are other organizers, it would still be good to carve out time that's not connected to organizing--watch a movie, go out to the bar, play a board game, have an evening together where people don't talk about the direct action campaigns you're all working on. There can be a tendency for organizers to try to be "class war robots," to focus their whole life on organizing. Having social ties helps reduce stress and improve focus, memory and how much you can accomplish in the long term.

## Have hobbies

It's the same logic as the last point. You should be able to engage and be creatively stimulated with things other than organizing. It will help reduce stress and make your ability to do recall better, sharpening your capacity for the important organizing work you're also doing.

## For complex material, focus on understanding the basic ideas

Pick your battles. Focus on learning and being able to recall the crucial core rather than isolated details. Generally you can write down technical specifics and consult them as needed, what's more important to take into your mind are the larger connections. To make these connections clearer, it can be helpful to explain the ideas to someone else using your own words.





**PART**

**3**

**BUILDING**

**MEMORY**

**IN THINGS**

**ORGANIZERS SHOULD**

## To better remember what commitments you've taken on:

### Write it down

Immediately after you volunteer for something, write it down. Make sure to include all details of this, deadline, and relevant information. If there's things you don't understand about this commitment, include a note of that as information you'll need to find out as part of the task. Have some easily accessed To Do list that you can add tasks to. This can be a notebook that you always keep on you, a document you access on your phone, a draft email you write, or an online document you can access from your computer or phone.

If when you take on commitment you don't have access to your To Do list, write it down as an email, text to someone or on a scrap of paper, and copy it to your To Do list as soon as possible. Don't wait hours or even minutes before writing it down, there is the danger of losing key details. Even if your personal memory is good enough that you don't need this list, it's still beneficial to write this down. Doing this will build a record what you're doing, and can make it easier later to review overall patterns and help shift responsibilities to other people.

### Limit your commitments

Volunteering for too many things is a common problem among active IWW members. Be careful how many commitments you take on.

Overloading yourself contributes to burnout, and if you let things slip through the cracks it will not only let people down but impact your reputation as a reliable resource.

### Limit your commitments

Try to build continuity between different commitments that you take on. If you're responsible for doing five different things that all relate to a shared event or campaign, it will probably be easier than five things that relate to widely disparate things.

## To better remember things about other people:

### Write it down

It may feel creepy or make you uncomfortable, but keeping individual records containing personal details on each person you're organizing with will help you achieve your organizing goals. You shouldn't write down these notes as you're interacting with the person in question, but afterwards, as soon as you are able. For example: if a coworker tells you that they have chronically ill children and must use FMLA regularly to take time to care for them, that is important! It may not seem so now, but in the future you may discover a widespread concern amongst other coworkers involving FMLA, and you may want to contact this coworker to see if they want to participate in an organizing action based on this issue.



## Build a Story

As described above, isolated details are less important than getting at basic ideas and connecting patterns. Especially when it comes to other people, getting a narrative is important. You can ask people directly "what are the most important things for you?" or get to know them well enough to make reasonable conclusions on that. Understanding their narrative, where they've been, where they'd like to go, will help fit in and be able to recall details about them.

## To better remember best practices from things you've done in the past

### Write it down

Get in the habit of documenting your thoughts and experiences right after completing complex tasks. It will help a lot with being able to draw from these experiences later. For instance, if you've bottomlined logistics for a picket, and after the campaign ends so you're not involved in supporting a picket for another year, the next time you do this a written record will be valuable of knowing what to do.

### Use both primary and secondary sources of your past actions

Primary sources are things from the moment of when you were working on a particular effort, they can be notes that you wrote to yourself, to-do-lists, video recording of your activities, emails you sent as part of the communication. Secondary sources are after the fact, and are more reflective. A write-up you do a week after a

campaign is a secondary source, an article you write on the campaign a year later is a different kind of secondary source with more distance, which has both advantages and disadvantages.

It's useful to build an archive of stuff from the moment, to scan journal entries, to do list or scraps of paper you have around, to organize files you've made and to add email text and any recordings to this. Months or years later, this will allow you to immerse yourself in the activities you were doing during a specific campaign. It can help you better your thoughts and feelings, which is crucial to being able to replicate things that you did at the time. Don't just rely on the record of things you did at the time. You need reflections you wrote after the fact because those records can lack crucial overall context. Pair primary and secondary sources to combine immediacy with the value of some distance.

### Get feedback from others

Don't rely on just your own memory or even your own documented records. You may be too harsh or too forgiving on yourself. Try to do an anonymous survey and talk directly with people who participated in this process with you. Get honest feedback on what went well and what could have gone better. Gather the surveys, take notes on the conversation, and put them in a place where you can review this feedback as necessary. Other people probably missed aspects of your activity that you did. At the same time, recognize that you may have also not seen or not fully processed some of the stuff that you did, and there's a lot to be learned from these kinds of conversations.

## **To better remember best practices from things you've done in the past**

Talk with other people. If you see someone that's doing effective organizing, ask them about their process and things that they've learned in their time as an organizer. Take notes on these conversations.

## **To better remember when you didn't used to be familiar with IWW processes**

Think back and reflect on details of your first encounter with the IWW. Try to focus in on your feelings and if there was stuff that wasn't clear to you. Ask yourself if there was anything that made you feel confused or alienated.

Look back at old notes you made, emails, texts or fb messages you sent, as well as your reactions to messages that were sent to you. These may remind you of any feelings of confusion or alienation you may have experienced at the time.

It can also be useful to attend a meeting of another organization every now and then. Especially if they don't do a good job explaining their processes, it can help you appreciate what it's like in your branch for new people if important things aren't explained well. It can also give you ideas on how to make information more clear to new people in your branch going forward.

Review these kinds of notes before meetings, trainings or other events you know may have new people. Get familiar with mistakes to avoid until you've internalized these lessons.

**ROLEPLAYS**

**PART FOUR!**





In this section of the manual there are different possible roleplays and exercises that allow practice for different aspects of things talked about in the first three sections. It's suggested that you do all of them that cover things you feel unfamiliar with. Find 1 or 2 other people in your committee or branch to practice these with. Do it with other people who are also seeking to improve their memory skills, or who will give a little time to help you develop your skills. If it's 2 people, take turns doing both sides of each roleplay. If it's 3 people, take turns doing each part of the roleplay, with a third person observing and after giving feedback on how the roleplay went. Roleplays will generally last about 5 minutes each. They often feel strange and awkward, but so does the process of organizing. Experiencing this in simulation can make doing it for real easier. If you are an at large member of the IWW, or in another situation where you don't have anyone locally you can practice these roleplays with, you can contact the IWW Education Department at [iww.education@gmail.com](mailto:iww.education@gmail.com). They may be able to connect you with someone else to practice these exercises with over phone or video-call.

## **Roleplay #1: Taking notes on your commitments.**

Before the roleplay, person B writes down a list of 5 different organizing tasks that they want person A to help with. In the roleplay, they have a conversation, and Person A agrees to all five tasks when asked. Immediately afterwards, person A writes a

note to themselves on everything they volunteered to do. Compare with Person B's list after to see if they missed anything. If someone isn't in the habit of doing this and wants to start, this roleplay will be most useful as recurrent rather than a one-off. If Person A does this with a person or multiple people every two weeks for a couple of months they'll get in the habit of recording the example details, and also real-life details.

Variant: Person A does not write down what they volunteered to do immediately. Instead, they set an alarm for themselves, and when it goes off they write down as much as they can remember.

Compare with Person B's list to see if they missed anything. This alarm could be for 10 minutes, 1 hour, or 5 hours. Ideally it would be several different lengths of time to practice how much detail they recall at different lengths of time.

## **Roleplay #2: Limit your commitments.**

As with the first roleplay, but this time Person A should only agree to 2 of the 5 things that Person B wants them to do. Person B will be a bit insistent (it's really important work) but Person A doesn't want to add too much stress to themselves or burn out, so they should hold to this limit.

## **Roleplay #3: Write down information about other people**

Person A and B are co-workers. Person A is working longterm to organize at work. The two

talk,

and Person B describes an important and distressing event in their personal history. After the conversation, Person A writes down important things learned from this conversation that will be important to remember in future conversations.

After this roleplay, it may be useful to have a debrief and talk about whether it felt creepy doing this, and if so how to address those

## **Roleplay #4:** **Getting enough sleep**

Person B is inviting Person A to an important organizing meeting late Thursday night. Person A has been to 3 meetings this week and is tired, they know for the sake of their health and concentration they should say no to attending this meeting and get sleep, but feel awkward and selfish saying this, and letting people down.

Person A should say no to attending the meeting. The point of this roleplay is to practice and get comfortable doing this in real life.

**PART FIVE**

**AFTER-ACTION REPORT  
TEMPLATE**



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# **AFTER ACTION QUESTIONS:**

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Taken from the GDC Picket Training, this is a template used for documentation specifically after helping to organize direct actions. This is included as a resource that may make it easier to write documentation on specifically this kind of activity. It may also make it easier to help document other aspects of your organizing.

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**NAME OF ACTION:**

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**DATE OF ACTION:**

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**LOCATION OF ACTION:**

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**IF ACTION INVOLVED OTHER  
GROUPS, LIST THEM HERE:**

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**IF THIS ACTION WAS A COUNTER-ACTION TO AN ACTION ORGANIZED BY ANOTHER GROUP, PLEASE NAME AND BRIEFLY EXPLAIN THAT ACTION HERE:**

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**GOAL:**

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**SELECTED STRATEGY AND TACTICS:**

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**HOW IS ALIGNMENT BETWEEN GOALS, STRATEGY, AND TACTICS REPRESENTED IN THE ABOVE?**

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**ARE THERE OTHER PARTICULAR CHALLENGES, OR CONTEXTS, THAT NEED TO BE EXPLAINED IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THIS EVENT? IF YOU HAVE MAPS, PLEASE ATTACH THEM TO THIS REPORT.**

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**HOW MANY PLANNING MEETINGS WERE HAD, AND HOW FAR IN ADVANCE WERE THESE MEETINGS?**

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**WHO ATTENDED THEM, AND WHAT SPECIFIC WORK WAS ACCOMPLISHED IN THESE MEETINGS?**

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**HOW CAN THIS PLANNING PROCESS BE IMPROVED FOR THE FUTURE?**

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**PLEASE WRITE YOUR NARRATIVE OF THE EVENTS IN THIS SPACE:**

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**WHAT DO YOU FEEL THE MAJOR LESSONS YOU LEARNED AS AN INDIVIDUAL ACTION ORGANIZER?**

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**WHAT LESSONS DO YOU THINK THE GROUP OF ORGANIZERS AND PARTICIPANTS IN THIS ACTION SHOULD LEARN?**

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**WHAT LESSONS DO YOU THINK THE GROUP OF ORGANIZERS AND PARTICIPANTS IN THIS ACTION SHOULD LEARN?**

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**SECTION 2**  
**Collective**  
**Memory**

# Part 6

**What should the union collectively remember?**



This section explores some crucial aspects that the union should keep institutional memory on, common causes of this not happening, and what the consequences are for this lack of collective memory. Part seven of this training will explore specific strategies on improving each collective practice.

## Meeting Notes

**1.** When there is organizing happening there here should be regular formal meetings happening. If not, then there's no structure for making collective decisions, reviewing overall activity happen, and formally involving newer people. There are a lot of bad things that can come from this gap. There may be no decisions collectively made, and different people go in different directions, making things more chaotic. Alternatively, there may be an unacknowledged structure to how decisions - a few people who have involved longer gather at the bar and talk about what should be done--that are unaccountable and undemocratic. If there isn't organizing happening then meetings aren't needed, and it's rare for starting meetings alone to jumpstart work that isn't happening. But when it is happening, when people are doing one-on-ones, people are regularly taking on tasks to help a campaign, the

co-ordination that comes from a meeting will be required. If meetings aren't regular, scheduling the next meeting before the end of the current meeting, there is a strong danger of delays and less people being able to attend, weakening continuity.

**2.** At these regular formal meetings, there should be notes taken. If notes aren't taken, then there isn't a record of what was discussed and decided. This makes for a more chaotic collective process in which it's easy for follow up to not happen. It also means that some people at the meeting who take personal notes or have a better memory will have an advantage over others, making the process less democratic.

**3.** Those notes should be sent out to all members or the branch, committee, or local. If they aren't sent out, most people at the meeting won't have a record of updates given, decisions made, and tasks people volunteered for. If notes aren't distributed, it's like they don't exist.

**4.** The notes should be written in and comprehensible and accessible style. If this doesn't happen, for newer people and those less familiar with specialized jargon, it is like the notes don't exist.

**5.** The notes should have necessary details, and only the necessary details. If this doesn't happen, while it doesn't make them completely inaccessible, it makes comprehending what happened in the meeting harder for people with limited time, and makes the process less democratic.

**6.** At a meeting, the notes from the previous meeting should be available. Some meetings will formally review and vote on last meetings notes, in any case they should be available. Since meetings are following after each other and building continuity, it is important to have the record of what was discussed and decided previously. If this doesn't happen, it relies on personal memory to ensure follow up, and puts people who didn't attend the last meeting at a major disadvantage.

**7.** The notes should be archived effectively. If this doesn't happen, there won't be a way to look back on past decisions, ensure long term follow up, or note the language of significant decisions made.

## Turnover

People should stick around in the IWW long term. If they don't, everything they've learned, every ongoing project, and all the trust they've built up with

others will cut off. The union is nothing more than the people that belong to it. When people leave, it weakens what the IWW is and what it can do. If the person who leaves has specialized knowledge that isn't documented or transferred (knowing how to do things, knowing specific people in the area or elsewhere in the IWW) the loss can be doubly damaging.

## Documentation

It's important that people write down stuff from their organizing: a summary of what happened, their analysis of what happened, contact information for people they organize with, techniques for doing certain things. If they don't do that, then that information can be lost if they leave the area or they leave the union. (See previous paragraph on turnover). Even if people stay involved, they may forget crucial information. Even if they don't forget, if everytime you need to find something out you have to ask them it's a delay, and makes the process more chaotic. This can also make a gatekeeping effect, where a person (through design or unintentionally) makes themselves a gatekeeper to find out key information, forcing the committee or branch to always ask them to solve certain problems or provide information. This undermines



democratic processes, and tends to give people that have been involved in a group for longer disproportionate impact.

## Knowledge for Delegates

Delegates are the people elected by a branch to sign people up to the IWW, regularly collect dues, and help keep in contact with people. It can be easy for new delegates to not have much training or support, when there's a desire to build up branch involvement without setting people up with resources to succeed. Since delegates are the face of the IWW and the key to keeping people involved, when delegates don't know how to sign people up, collect dues, file delegate reports, or follow-up with people, it can cause a breakdown in communication. This can lead to people being less involved in the IWW, up to the point of leaving.

## Knowledge for Administrators

It is useful if branch officers and other people in administrative roles know what they are doing. If Branch Secretaries, Treasurers (Or BST: Branch Secretary

Treasurer when those roles are combined) or Organizing Department Liaison's don't have training, mentoring and support to succeed in their role, then they won't be able to help coordinate delegates, effectively build branch meetings, or keep collective processes running smoothly. This can have very severe consequences, a branch with a large number of people and active organizing can find itself unable to meet expenses or fall into conflict with IWW general headquarters if local branch administration is not functioning effectively.

## Knowledge of the Broader Union

Within a committee or branch, there should be a functional knowledge of the wider unions. IWW members should know the overall structure, different areas of activity, and connections that exist. If no one knows these things, the group won't be able to learn from previous mistakes (look back at the section of "remembering best practices") and can feel more isolated and stressed. If only a few person or a single individual in the group knows about the broader union, that concentrates power in undemocratic ways.

# Knowledge within General Committees

**General committees are formed from IWW members across North America, nominated at Convention and elected at Referendum. They have different specific mandates, so the Organizing Department Board supports organizing campaigns, the Survey and Research committee does research and surveys, the Literature Committee develops new IWW literature. When there isn't good institutional knowledge it is harder for newer members to function effectively on these committees. That adds to confusion and workload, and makes it harder for the committees to function effectively. When these committees get weaker, the collective institutional knowledge of the union gets weaker, and the isolation of different branches and campaigns increases.**





# PARIT



**Building  
memory in things the  
union should  
collectively remember**



# Meeting Notes

## *Identify what is causing the problem*

There are a lot of things that can cause problems with meeting notes. Discuss the specific aspects and general norms of the group, and try to draw out what the problem is so you can focus energy on building up in necessary areas.

## *Look at different examples*

If you see recurrent problems in how your branch does notes, find examples from others that can encourage different practices. You shouldn't have to invent better templates from scratch. Precedent exists.

## *Specific Problems With Meetings and Collective Memory*

What follows are some guidelines for best practices to address the specific ways that memory within meetings can break down.

### *When there is organizing but there aren't regular formal meetings happening*

Talk frankly about how big a problem this can be for organizing. Reference problems

that have happened locally or in other areas from this. Bottomline putting together a meeting, get as many people involved in the same room. It's important to be systematic and to put in the time necessary to reach out to people directly. (To see more specifics on how to do this, see the training manuals "Bottomlining Training" and "Bottomlining a Delegate Meeting" in the IWW Education Department's Curriculum Library) If you aren't able to do this yourself (for instance if you see the need for regular meetings of your branch's hotel workers committee but don't work in the industry and don't want to bottomline this) then have a series of one-on-one conversations with people involved until you find someone willing to take time to setup a meeting. Give that person as much support and resources as you can that will make this job easier. It may be useful as part of this to ask if they want an "accountability buddy", reminding them of commitments and deadlines they made. Recognize how much work is needed to effectively start a process of regular meetings. Spread the work around (to reliable people), don't require one person to do all this.

### *When meetings happen but notes are not taken*

Establish a standard practice of starting

each meeting by determining who will take notes (and also who will facilitate). If there is pushback against this, have a discussion on the value of doing this. It is just as simple as this sounds. If a meeting starts without notes being taken, then there won't be full records. Work to rotate roles wherever possible. If someone is unsure of doing this, pair them with a more experienced person to do this task together. If the person taking notes has things they want to talk about in the meeting, arrange someone else to take over when they're talking so it doesn't slow the process down. (For more on Rusty's Rules or other basics of having a good meeting, see any of the training resources in the IWW Education Department's Curriculum Library under "Meetings").

### *When meeting notes are taken but not reliably sent out.*

There are two basic ways that this distribution can happen: **1.** whoever takes notes each meeting has the responsibility of sending out the notes **2.** There is a specific role in the committee or branch responsible for doing this (often the chair or the Secretary). If this person loans the note-taker their laptop, or establishes a shared document, it can make it easier to keep track of and distribute the notes. It can work to have note takers be

responsible for this distribution, but it is probably a good idea if so to have someone else be specifically responsible for checking in with them and reminding them to distribute the notes. It is strongly suggested notes be taken on a laptop rather than a notebook. If the meeting notes are done on a notebook, it adds to the time to type up the notes and distribute them. It also increases the chances that the final step might not end up happening.

### *When notes are not written in an accessible style*

For this aspect, recognize that most people will not be naturally good at this. It is an acquired skill that needs time and practice to improve at. In some committees and branches there is a defined role (chair, secretary, or other) who are responsible for reviewing and distributing the notes. This is a useful thing to have. As part of this work, this person should clean up these notes before sending them out, defining acronyms, and editing for overall clarity. Depending on the length of the meeting and the style it is written in, this can be a significant time commitment. Recognize this, and acknowledge that as part of the duties for this role. Be careful to not pile more work on people than they're expecting and burn them out.



**The person cleaning up the notes should give feedback to the people who take notes. Don't be complacent, and don't accept without issue persistent errors or inaccessible style. Don't be too harsh, note positives, and be grateful that people are helping with this, but also keep pushing people to improve and grow their abilities.**

**Sometimes branches have the practice of sending out first draft of the meeting notes, and asking for feedback and edits. This is good to get more input from more people, but it is also useful to have someone following up to make sure revision happens, and the final version of the notes is sent out.**

### ***If the meeting notes have too much detail and are unwieldy***

**This is something that will improve with practice. For some note-takers, it is much easier to have very long meeting notes that mentions every discussion point, rather than sorting information and making judgement calls on what shouldn't be included. During the stage of revision, it may be useful to remove extra detail. Also, someone could copy-paste the most important updates and decisions done, and put them in a one page at the front. This provides a highlights of the meeting for people with limited time or who are**

**unlikely to be able to process the longer document. Writing a table of contents is also useful in some cases, since it helps people to find the most relevant parts in the notes. It might be good to discuss this with your group, figure out what length people are comfortable with, what the most important content is. It may also be useful to review other organizing efforts and other branches, to see what details are most helpful, and what different styles people have used. For many meetings, a useful breakdown is: 1. who was present at the meeting 2. list of formal decisions made, and what the vote count was 3. list of everyone who volunteered to do something, and what they volunteered to do 4. summary of updates given, including name and contact information of people who gave the updates so people interested in more information know who to contact.**

### ***If the meeting notes don't have enough detail***

**Have people practice this. It may be useful to pair more experienced and less experienced noteakers, for the same meeting, with a shared online document. That way they're more likely to catch significant detail, and the less experienced person can see how the other person writes things up. Also the note-taker should understand**

that it is good practice to pause the meeting and ask for repeat of information that they didn't cover. This might slow things down a little, but it allows important things to be documented and is vital for long term process.

If the note-taker or anyone else involved in the follow-up feels that the notes of a recent meeting are incomplete, they should send them out to membership as draft notes with the same process described above.

### *If the notes from the last meeting are not available*

Talk about the value of this practice. Establish a specific role. This can be the person that is responsible for printing the previous notes and bringing them each meeting, or having a computer not otherwise being used that has the notes loaded. Alternatively, your branch can have different volunteers do this meeting-to-meeting, but there should be a role that will text people to remind them of this the day before. If they don't confirm they'll be there that person should bring the notes themselves.

### *If the notes are not archived effectively*

Establish a specific role to do this. This

could be the secretary or chair, but have a discussion on capacity, and don't assume they'll be able to take on more tasks. Whoever is doing this should be able to consistently file stuff in a physical or online space, and help share this access with everyone who wants it. They should be well organized, approachable, and friendly. They should not have any gate-keeping behavior.

## Turnover

Reducing turnover and Improving member retention is among the most important things for the IWW. If this doesn't happen, everything else done to improve memory is less impactful. And if people consistently joined the IWW for life, instead of leaving after a few months or years, then even problems with documentation and personal memory would be less severe.

There are a few basic things that you and your committee, branch or local can do to reduce turnover and improve member retention:

- 1.** Have clear and intentional conversations with people before they join. People should know what they're joining, the positive and negative things about the IWW locally and globally. There should also be preparation for what challenges involved with organizing are, and encour-



agement for people to not under-commit, or over-commit/burnout.

*Write it down!*

**2.** Follow-up with people after they join. Help people learn, listen to new ideas they have, and be patient with mistakes. Work not just to present information or get them to do tasks, but to build relationships and develop collective leadership.

**3.** Build a supportive community. People should meet and develop ongoing contact with different people, who can work on projects together, listen to each others' problems, and develop their organizing skills together. This should be done with patience, respect and mutual aid.

**4.** Avoid toxic masculinity, racism and ableism. Don't tolerate these behaviors in others.

In addition, it is helpful to build a culture of documentation (see below), people making themselves replaceable and helping people to meet each other. That way, if any one person leaves the area or leaves the union, it's not as damaging, since the information they know isn't just in their head.

As with improving personal memory, it is valuable for a union, local or committee if people are in the habit of writing down their organizing work. This takes extra time, and may not be familiar to everyone, but there are significant immediate and long term benefits to growing this practice. There are a couple easy ways to promote this activity, discussed in this section, and more complex patterns explored below.

One crucial thing is to make resources for documentation available. At IWW meetings, trainings and other formal events, have laptops and notebooks available. Provide the tools that people can use to document experience. Many public libraries provide temporary use of laptops free of use. It may also be something your branch wants to invest in purchasing for organizing use by people who don't have it.

As well, it is important to normalize the practice of writing things down as an aide to memory. It may not be something people are used to doing, but the more that it's seen and accepted as a common practice, the more it encourages people to write down stuff themselves. Don't just have a pile of notebooks or a laptop sitting idly by. Use them, and encourage others to do the same in a variety of ways applicable

## Documentation



to their organizing.

**Note: IWW members should be conscious that members and potential members have a range of physical and mental abilities. Do not make assumptions that everyone is able to hold a pen, or type for extended periods on a laptop, or read long documents, or see documents at all. Producing documentation is essential but not sufficient, and part of your organizing process has to include review of who these materials can reach, and who they can't.**

### ***Speak of the value of documentation***

**It's easy to recognize the work that goes into a confrontational picket, or the delegate that signs up 10 people to the IWW in a week. The value of the person who is careful on writing things down can be less clear. Therefore, it's useful to take time to recognize the value of this work, and praise the people who do it. It doesn't have to be over-the-top, but it is helpful to get in the practice of saying things like: "It was really great that Megan wrote down all the supplies we needed for the last Whole Foods Picket. If she hadn't, we might not have remembered all the stuff we needed." This makes the behind-the-scenes tasks more visible, and can encourage other people to take the time to write stuff down in their own organizing. If your branch/local/committee is erratic**

**on documentation and doesn't praise people who do this effort, take the time to offer this support yourself. Also, talk one-on-one with social leaders in your branch about why this is a problem, and work to get them to make similar statements. Even if it's a fairly dull practice that people aren't used to doing, if multiple Wobblies that people respect are emphasizing the importance of this, it can encourage people to take up the practice.**

### ***Speak of the problems of not doing documentation***

**For this, it is usually better to not call out people by name. It is generally possible to acknowledge problems with people not documenting their work in a way that doesn't use shame, but does speak to the problem. You can say things like: "Our fb page recently got messaged by someone interested in the public campaigns from metal shop worker organizers in our branch. He wanted specifics that I couldn't remember, and couldn't find written down anywhere. I tried to connect him with Abigail who knew more about this, but it took awhile to connect the two, and I think the contact lost interest by then. I love hearing the verbal reports from this campaign each month, but it seems like it's a problem that there's not much written down. Could people start writing**

**down branch reports too, especially details that it's okay to share publicly?"**

### ***Show the value of documentation.***

**It shouldn't have to be just a verbal statement on the value of documentation. If it is, there is contradiction going on. Apply effective documentation to organizing, or draw on effective documentation being done by other parts of the IWW. Take those documents and distribute them to people, use the time they took to write things down to make your own activities a bit easier. Talk about that. Say things like: "Hey, I wanted to give you this report-back someone in Ypsilanti wrote of their last picket. It's great that they do such a good job writing up that stuff. We should write down our own actions better, so we can share them with others and have a record to learn from."**

### ***Do an Annual Learning From Our Mistakes discussion***

**This is a practice begun by the Portland branch of the IWW in 2001, and adopted by some branches since. Create an annual document after discussion among IWW members at the end of the year on what mistakes were made and problems seen. This can be a combination of in person discussion with note-taking, online editing and online. Having this is a useful piece of**

**documentation in itself, and can help identify areas where collective memory and lack of clear documentation are having an issue. Often week-to-week people can be focused on immediate challenges, so it can be harder to draw out the patterns and see the consequences of gaps in institutional memory. An annual review can make that much clearer.**

### ***Appeal to people's desire for legacy***

**When people accomplish something through direct action organizing, they should be proud of it. They should want to be able to remember exact details later, and to make it available for people later, and for people across the world to read and learn from. Connect with that. People will be more likely to do something if it appeals to their feelings.**

### ***Have a culture of mentorship***

**There's only so much that anyone can do to promote more documentation via meeting. For people to change their behavior it is necessary to work with people over time. Have honest one on one conversations about stuff talked about in the personal memory section. People that have more experience with this stuff and are better at it should work with people who are newer and not as good. It would be silly to expect people to pick up**



**complex skills overnight, but with time, patience and consistent support people can get better at these skills, and can help push the union as a whole to improve.**

## **Knowledge For Administrators**

**Most of the things relevant for delegates are also relevant for branch secretaries, treasurers, or branch secretary-treasurers. (BST) As more central administrators, there's going to be a greater level of information and technical requirements. This makes training and shadowing even more important. Especially for secretaries and BSTs, it's important to set limits to their role within their capacity, as there can be an overwhelming amount of effort needed to maintain a branch, and even more to help grow it. People should know what they're getting into, and be prepared and experienced enough to be able to spread the work around as much as possible. It's also important that people in this role have a good ability to keep others accountable, to get reports from people, to have committee meetings and report-backs happen regularly.**

## **Knowledge of the Broader Union**

**If only a small handful of people in the branch know anyone in the broader union, that's a problem. If you're one of those people, help connect people. Find areas it would be useful to link to people and give contact information. If your manufacturing committee needs to get advice from someone who has experience in this industry in another city, it doesn't have to be you who are always calling to chat with them. Ask a newer member to do it sometimes, give them the number, and have them report back to everyone.**

**Your branch should think about who they are sending to Regional Organizing Assemblies, Organizing Summits, Convention, and other IWW events. If it is always the same couple of people, then those people will be the only ones with get to know others face to face, and they'll have less chance to build relationships and knowledge of the wider IWW.**

**Figure out how well the main formal and informal institutions of the union (The Industrial Worker, the general committees, the GOB, the official listservs, Red Card Holders) work to connect people in a positive way. If these aren't working, think and**

**talk together about what might be better ways to link people consistently.**

**Figure out the extent that official union channels may be too jargon-heavy and hard for people to understand, or if they are dominated by interpersonal animosity and other things that may be alienating to people. Work to connect people in wholesome and effective ways. You can do things like get a campaign report-back from recent organizing and forward email to your branch, or have them call into a meeting or training event. Be creative, and have discussion with what people in your branch will want.**

**3. Most interactions of these committees are through conference calls or emails, there is little in-person co-ordination. Because of this, it is important to be intentional in documenting work, answering questions and supporting newer people. There needs to be not just how to guides written up, but also written up in a convenient, easily distributed package that people can easily access. (Similar to the OTC manual). If those resources don't exist, people should expect that there may be more challenges with making this**

## **General Committees and institutional knowledge**

**The same combination of trainings, shadowing and people knowing what they're getting into as with branch officer roles is important. There are some added challenges to this role**

**1. the knowledge required is even more specialized**

**2. There is a smaller pool of people that have been in this role before, so there is less opportunity for mentorship**





*Similar to part four, this provides an opportunity to practice different specific scenarios. People should try all of these that cover things they want to do but haven't done before. For all scenarios, the participants should switch roles after about 5 minutes, and practice doing both parts.*

## **Roleplay #1: Starting Meeting Notes**

Person A and B are both recycling workers, and have been organizing together as part of a workplace committee. The committee has grown a lot, has done some direct actions, and meets regularly, but there are rarely meeting notes, and it's a been challenge for keeping updates with committee members who can't make the meetings. Person B thinks notes are unnecessary and tedious to do for these meetings. Person A should try to persuade him that this should be a regular practice. The purpose of this roleplay is to get more comfortable talking about this, and within the scenario to get a specific change in practices.

## **Roleplay #2: Speak of the value of documentation.**

Person A and B are organizing together (can be recycling scenario or any other specific example). Person B is enthusiastic and puts in a lot of time for organizing, but

doesn't always remember their commitments and isn't the best at following through. Person A should talk about the value of documentation to them, praising some other individual for taking the time to document stuff, and pointing to tangible ways that this has helped. Person A can use real examples they know of, or invent ones. The purpose of this roleplay is to get more comfortable talking about these things. It will not necessarily cause an immediate change in behavior, the goal is doing repeatedly to help encourage more systematic processes.

## **Roleplay #3: Speak of the problems of not doing documentation.**

The same as Roleplay #2, except now the conversation is specifically about the problems that come from not doing documentation. This can be a discussion of problems with how Person B doesn't document things (this should be done in a clear but not mean way), talking about it as a collective problem that everyone shares, or talking about problems with another organizing effort that lacks documentation, that Person B can take implications from. (If doing this, make sure this doesn't turn into gossip).

## **Roleplay #4: Knowledge of the Broader Union.**

**Person B has only ever talked to IWW members from their branch, Person A went to Convention last year and has kept up occasional phone and fb messenger contact with a half dozen IWW members across North America. Person A will talk to Person B, give them contact information for another IWW member they have been in contact with, and ask them to reach out and get answer to a specific organizing question. (It can be: "how did you setup a workplace committee meeting when people worked so many different shifts" or any other specific example). Person B may resist this, since they've never met this person, and might feel that Person A should do this. Person A encourage them, talk of the value of getting more contact with people, and talk through any concerns they have.**