

I am writing this in the hopes that a sense of encouragement and enlightenment can be instilled into the workers within the auto industry as our morale has been decimated by the current situation. Actually this is intended for all workers regardless of industry.

Just weeks before the Chrysler bankruptcy announcement, we the rank and file successfully got a manager removed, through direct action along with persistence and our determination for results.

I am a rank and file employed at one the Chrysler transmission plants in Kokomo, Indiana. I am a UAW member from Local 685. I am also a member of Soldiers Of Solidarity. A quiet member that refrains from much dialogue within the discussion list but a member nonetheless. I love conversations much as anyone especially about the labor movement and political economics. But I enjoy direct action much more.

Battles with this particular supervisor had been going on and off for years. Where others one by one have not succeeded, three of us made a difference.

Two weeks earlier I confronted the plant manager face to face about my department (Production Control or PC) renewing our supervisor's contract. He had taken the buyout months before. But remained because PC kept renewing his contract. The plant manager knew nothing about it. PC is controlled from Detroit not by plant management. I told him I was going to gather as many workers from my department and I would return.

I first suggested that we the workers go to the plant manager and raise the roof off the place for our department management renewing a contract with this particular supervisor for whom we had an entire book documenting his harassment.

I was laughed at by some while others blew it off as pointless to pursue. Two weeks later the battle resumed as the supervisor made some threatening statements to fire anyone for any reason and he didn't care. I was not amused.

The following week was a down week. When we got back to work a week later he made comments that he was going to fire someone before he left when his contract expired. We heard this before from him but nothing happened when we reported it to the union officials. They said document everything, we had been. We had a book.

It seems like everyone at one time or the other has had a situation with this manager. The "book" is all of the documents. I referred to it as a book because of so many reports of harassment or discrimination. It seems that nearly everyone in the department has had at least one issue with him. This is a department of around thirty to forty people from all three shifts. I told someone once that everyone that ever reported on him was a contributor to his removal. I stand firmly on the belief of DOCUMENT EVERYTHING. This is a good reason to have a pad of paper so that that all actions can be documented. These documents were from many months of rank and file reports. Which is why I consider it very important to have a small notebook, pocket size is appropriate. Document everything.

In this situation this particular supervisor was proven to be creating a hostile work environment. Many times workers wanted to beat him up. Some told me to find him after work and jump out and hurt him badly. Of course I said no and that is a coward's way out. I wanted to outsmart him like a game of chess. Chrysler posts a policy, that they will have zero tolerance for anyone creating a hostile work environment. Of course usually it is used against employees. But this supervisor just went too far and opened up his own fate by saying he would fire someone before he left.

It turned out that this statement would piss off two of the biggest loud mouths in the factory. They took his threat personal as I did. They are hard working but also ruthless in the pursuit of justice. They knew I believed our strength was our numbers. They even reminded me of how long I had wanted to beat him at his own game.

We joined forces and we just continued the entire day confronting management and making phone calls to human resources. I talked to union officials and claimed that nothing may come out of this but let's at least humiliate the hell out of him. I just wanted to outsmart him. As the union officials

became involved, myself and the couple stepped back. They were grateful I joined in. I was grateful they contacted me. It was fun in a manner of speaking.

Soon the roof was raised. After our shift, as we left work, we were told that the supervisor was in a meeting with department management, human resources, the plant manager and our union representatives. I simply expected to have him humiliated. Less than a half hour later my phone was ringing. He was gone! The plant manager tore up his contract and he was gone.

I cannot explain the emotions the very next day at work. You would had to have been there. The feeling was tremendous. It was all over the plant. There was a feeling of relief, admiration and confidence from the workers while management eyed us with suspicion and contempt. It was such a feeling of empowerment through a victory no one expected. It was only through several of us taking direct action, that we were victorious on removing a manager that had harassed us and created a hostile work environment.

For around three weeks we had no immediate supervisor. Everyone did their job and morale was high. We even told a union steward that was walking by that we needed no steward.

In the aftermath of this victory, I was approached by the rank and file to be the union steward, for ours had taken the buyout weeks earlier. The election actually would not happen due to redistricting from the loss in membership. I was not entirely disappointed for that would mean that I would be bound by certain rules. Which is why I like to be a rank and filer, less rules to abide by.

Many years ago I was ridiculed for joining Soldiers Of Solidarity. Now it's the other way, someone made the statement that I am the one to bring about change within the UAW. I respond firmly "NO!" If you are dependent on one person or group of people to protect you then you are wrong! That is why we are in this mess. What we need is a type of unionism called "solidarity unionism" not our type of unionism called "business unionism." And we need direct action not collective bargaining. We need solidarity unionism and direct action. When an injury to one is an injury to all. It seems that the Industrial Workers of the World had it correct all the time. The working class and the employing class have nothing in common.

I'm grateful I joined SOS. I have met many wonderful and interesting activists I shall never forget going to my first rank and file meeting. It encouraged me to go on and work for victories like this.

Chris Ryan  
Local 685, UAW  
Kokomo, Indiana