

How Do Unions Organize A Health Care Employer?

The health care industry includes both unionized and non-unionized employers. Unionized employers may have established and successful working and collective bargaining relationships with their employees' labor unions. For non-unionized employers, staying union-free may be a goal, so understanding how and why union organizing activity starts is important.

EXTERNAL" OR "INTERNAL" THREAT?

Employers often view unionization as an "external" threat in which labor unions target a specific employer and initiate union organizing activity against that targeted employer. While unions sometimes target specific employers, such as SEIU's campaigns against certain hospitals and nursing homes, those kinds of campaigns are a minority of organizing campaigns.

Generally, union organizing is an "internal" threat that starts within a workforce when employees contact a union and ask the union for help because they are experiencing problems or perceiving problems at work. Those problems share two common characteristics: the employer either caused the problem or permitted the problem to exist, and the employees perceive that the employer cannot or will not solve the problem. Employers, not unions, are the cause of most union organizing activity.

CAUSING UNION ORGANIZING ACTIVITY

Employees who contact a union perceive, correctly or incorrectly, that a union organizer and a union can help them solve their problems at work. The people who are most likely to "organize" employees for a union are the employer's employees who have become dissatisfied at work, the employer's supervisors or managers who have caused or failed to solve problems, or both. In other words, the real union organizers work for the employer, not for the union. A union cannot organize an employer's

employees unless the employees are very dissatisfied. A union cannot successfully organize a company's employees if the employees are satisfied.

Union organizing activity is not a sign of a union's strength or popularity; it is a sign of an employer's weakness or failure. A union does not really win a union organizing campaign; an employer loses it. A union organizing campaign is really a vote of confidence or no confidence in the employer; a vote for the union is really a vote of no confidence in the company. In brief, an employer gets the union that it deserves to get.

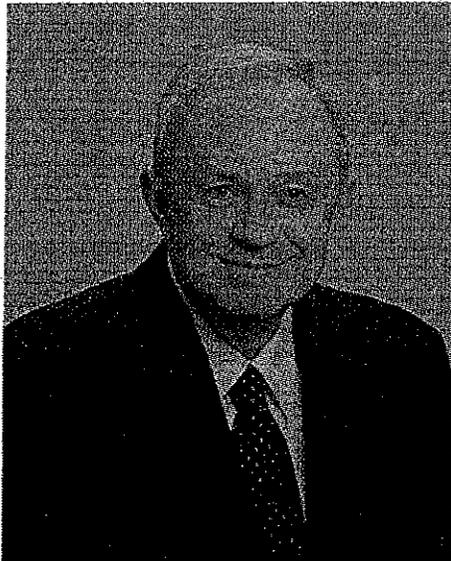
PREVENTING UNION ORGANIZING ACTIVITY

Because union organizing activity is primarily an "internal" threat, unionization can be prevented by a health care employer. That is because the causes of union organizing activity and the solutions to the problems or the perceived problems that result in union organizing activity are both under the employer's control. What a health care employer does to prevent union organizing activity is more important than what a union may try to do to organize an employer's employees.

If a union-free employer's goal is to remain non-unionized, it should make a union unnecessary for its employees by continually trying to create a positive, problem-free workplace. How a health care employer treats, manages, pays, and communicates with its employees on a daily basis should all help achieve the goal of staying union-free.



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Gary W. Klotz is a shareholder practicing in Butzel Long's Detroit office. He is a graduate of the University of Michigan Law School (J.D., cum laude, 1977) and Oakland University (B.A., summa cum laude, 1973). Klotz has represented employers in labor and employment law matters for over thirty years. He has successfully defended employers in state and federal courts, as well as before state and federal administrative agencies. He also has extensive experience representing employers in labor arbitration cases, collective bargaining negotiations, and preventive employee relations counseling.

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313-225-7000

Team Contact:
Robert H. Schwartz
Bloomfield Hills, MI
Tel: 248-258-2611
Fax: 248-258-1439
Email: schwartzrh@butzel.com

Our Health Care Industry Team:

Thomas R. McAskin
Susan H. Patton
Mark R. Lezotte
Debra A. Geroux CHC
Jen A. Dukarski
David F. DuMouchel



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