

# **GENERAL PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

**FOR INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENTS  
GENERAL OFFICERS  
AND UNION LEADERS**

## **ORGANIZING**

**AN ANALYSIS OF  
OPTIONS AND ALTERNATIVES**

**MARK BRESLIN  
BRESLIN STRATEGIES INC.  
[www.Breslin.biz](http://www.Breslin.biz)**

**Confidential Document  
April 2006**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This document is provided as a strategic guide for the leaders of the union construction industry of North America. The contents are the viewpoint of the author only.

Circulation of these documents is for purposes of organizational policy discussions and examination of strategic options. Circulation includes the International General Presidents, General Officers and other leading labor leaders in North America.

This report is provided to stimulate discussion on strategic options to regain market share. The focus is on organizing and the future. Having had the opportunity to work with almost every craft, and with organizers across the U.S. and Canada, I see the best and worst of both strategies and results. I see the true innovators and those stymied by inertia or union politics. I am of the opinion that the quality of leadership in the area of organizing has reached a level of professionalism and capability that can not only adopt but also manage rapid change. As such, this report is provided to assist in development of future strategies for not only labor, but also management, in the area of organizing and market share recovery.

### **ORGANIZING: COMPLEX & MISUNDERSTOOD**

The term “organizing” has been the traditional term to describe labor’s efforts. But organizing means many things to many different people. It means different things to:

- Rank and File Workers
- Union Leaders and Officials
- Union Signatory Contractors
- Non Union Employers
- Legislators
- General Business Community
- The General Public

These are just a few sample populations and each one responds differently to the term. These differences in perception reflect an increasing disconnect between the term “organizing” and the activities surrounding market-share development. It is important to keep this in mind when reading this report.

## **SITUATION ANALYSIS: FOUNDATIONAL FACTS**

This report's analysis and recommendations are based on some fundamental facts;

- Labor market share development is a highly complex process with multiple interrelated strategies.
- Single path strategies that have been primarily used for a number of decades have had little to no measurable growth impact.
- The business propositions and employment opportunities we are offering have significant value.
- Organizing is not financially self-supporting and few organizations measure costs vs. results.
- Management has no buy in to traditional organizing, yet can be of significant assistance in market recovery if leveraged properly.
- Rank and file have mixed feelings on organizing, but primarily negative due to an impression that new employees are taking their jobs. This often creates internal union political opposition as a result.
- Many individuals engaged in these activities currently have little formal preparation, training or tools.
- The management, measurement, leadership, strategies and resources related to organizing and market share development are rapidly improving.

## **A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY APPROACH**

Multi-tasking is a modern term for giving people too many things to do at once. Thus workers often under-perform due to being spread too thin or by being generalists who never acquire superior skill sets in any areas that generate results.

It is this author's opinion that similarly, too many areas of responsibility are being grouped under the term organizing, and assigned to organizers or organizing departments. Often organizers are engaged in bottom up, top down, prevailing wage enforcement, research, worker recruitment, and more. These dedicated and talented people can only do so much. A higher degree of specialization and dedicated resource is required for smaller segments of responsibility.

This report focuses on three areas of specialized strategy and expertise as follows;

1. Recruitment: to Meet Attrition Rates
2. Union-to-Business Relationships: to Grow User Base
3. Union & Management Marketing: to End-Users to Expand Markets

The key theme of this report is that there are different approaches requiring different skill sets, resources, data and materials necessary for success. To simply lump all this under one heading, department or individual is often a strategic error.

## **RECRUITMENT: MEETING ATTRITION RATES**

Labor is bleeding market share through membership attrition.

This is a very serious problem for both labor and management in the future. Currently the attrition rates for most overall International Unions numbers in the thousands and many are over 10,000 lost members each year. As an example, 10,000 per year means recruiting 40 new union members every single business day **just to stay in the same place.**

The problem is this; with the Baby Boomers less than a decade away from beginning retirement we will soon see attrition rates double. So a union losing 10,000 now will be losing 20,000 members a year in a decade. And we will be scrambling to replace top journeymen with fill-ins and trainees. Further, other industries will have the same challenges creating a tighter and highly competitive recruitment marketplace.

The apprenticeship system is not the answer. As an infrastructure there is simply no possible way for it to keep up with those numbers. There will have to be major policy, labor agreement and structural changes directly focused on addressing retention, employment-extension and recruitment.

Organizers cannot solely meet the dramatic challenges of attrition (to stay in the same place) and also grow market share at the same time. Those are two different hats that need specialists as well as new strategies.

Recruitment is often an activity engaged in at high schools, job fairs and related. We do need to plant seeds for the future, but more importantly, we need bodies coming into and staying in the system today. And we need full-time experts to get it done.

Here are a few specific suggestions to consider;

- Use attrition data to educate the rank and file on the necessity of bringing in new workers. Blunt their opposition to organizing with these numbers presented frequently.
- Insert Retiree Work Provisions in your collective bargaining agreements. These allow a retiree to come back for up to 6 months per year (Apr. – Nov.) and receive wages, maintain H & W, but not additional pension contributions. These are being used now.
- Develop an abbreviated apprenticeship program (i.e. 2 year). Although many programs simply re-classify workers at various stages of apprenticeship, there are many types of work that do not require four years of apprenticeship to become gainfully employed. The fully rounded, perfectly set up journeyman is giving way to the highly skilled specialist and if that is what the market will take, we can increase our intake accordingly.
- Seriously examine new classifications for semi-skilled workers that can be recruited and integrated immediately into the journeyman system.

- Provide recruitment bonuses for rank and file who bring in skilled workers. A bonus of \$ 250-500 paid after the recruited worker completes one year. As out of the box as this sounds, some unions now spend more than \$ 1500 recruiting per member in hard costs. If you crunch your numbers you will find out that a recruitment bonus is a economical and rapid method. Naturally, this will need to be balanced with employment and economic conditions. In heavily non-union areas though, this should not be an obstacle.
- Develop a Construction Recruitment Division. Retain people who are expert in the recruitment field to assist in its development. Every major company in the US and Canada has a recruitment arm of their company. We can learn from corporate recruiting as it is system driven, highly organized, and financially sound. There is a lot of seasoned talent in that area looking for opportunities. To compete for talent we need a more sophisticated, integrated and focused strategy.
- Develop “industry stripping” techniques outside of construction. Focus on transferable skills, proven work ethic and areas where layoffs are pending or where compensation is limited.
- Utilize employer referrals to the greatest extent possible. Require employers to commit to specific period of initial employment.
- Suspend the pension contribution and other non-necessary fringes for the member’s first year and place this money in an account similar to “vacation pay” to keep these workers from leaving due to pressing economic needs in their initial term as a union member.

Whether you like or dislike any or all of these ideas, the theme is clear. Recruitment is an entire job unto itself. It cannot be centralized in the Apprenticeship and Training area due to a lack of sufficient infrastructure; it cannot fall entirely on the Organizing area as they often have more than they can handle on their plates. As such, consider recruitment more than a method to stop the bleeding; but an area with significant return on investment possible. **And above all measure costs to results.**

## **BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT: UNION TO BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS**

The strategy of unions engaging non union businesses in meaningful and value-added relationships through top-down organizing is a concept that is being proved in the market today.

I have seen dramatic results in growth in most every craft and market in North America (except where economic conditions have killed the market or the union leadership is simply too backward or political to do anything useful). That said, it too is an area of specialization that cannot be lumped in with every other organizing activity.

Creating business-to-business relationships takes a professional approach. And professional business development is something that starts with the individual. **Breslin’s bottom line on this subject: the wrong guy is worse than no one at all.**

I have been criticized by a few in labor for my blunt assessment that a good number of organizers need to be fired; as they do not possess the skills, personality, desire and **above all: the ability to obtain measurable results**. And in the area of business-to-business marketing this is absolutely critical.

Many organizers are in their positions due to union politics, connections, nepotism and similar. Like being the “coach’s kid,” that is fine as long as you can produce. If you can’t produce you should be terminated. Due to union politics many D.O.s are stuck with this but should not have to be. In my view, there should be **no compromise in quality or capability in this area. Performance must be evaluated on results and not activity.**

Business to business relationship building or marketing requires a very different profile than a traditional organizer may have presented. This individual must have;

- excellent appearance
- mastery of knowledge of product and organization
- advanced communication skills
- basic to advanced presentation skills
- understanding of clients and general business
- strong persuasive ability
- relentless ability to face rejection
- diplomacy and sincerity
- professional materials and a game plan to execute

I have met thousands of organizers and business agents in the last decade and I will attest to the fact that most could be successful with this approach. **What they currently lack is the proper training, materials, political support and confidence to go to the market.** So often they just do “what the last guy did”; and get the same results. But this is changing rapidly. Recommendations to further develop this area of your approach might include;

- A formal, mandatory and standardized training program developed and implemented so everyone is on the same page and representing the same answers, benefits and responses.
- Eliminate the term organizing from all union-to-business contact. The term is archaic, has an exclusively negative frame of reference from the business and contracting community, and reduces union contractor buy-in and leverage. Consider removal from business cards, materials, department titles and related where individuals or departments are responsible for business to business relationships. This has been done already by many locals and at least one International Union.
- Incentive competitions; results increased 25% in one year for two different District Councils with the introduction of a prize (trip to Hawaii) for top performer(s). Would \$ 2500 to get ten or twenty extra employers a year justify the cost?

- Make sure your organizers / marketing representatives are going to every pre-job in their areas every day. It is the best networking with non-union employers that time permits.
- Create new contracts at lower compensation thresholds that will allow organizers to penetrate new or lost markets at a competitive level.
- Creation of an in-house marketing & communications library. This would include books, marketing and sales library of tapes, presentations and similar. Notable experts include; Brian Tracy, Dr. Tony D'Alessandro, Jeffery Gitomer and maybe even Anthony Robbins. Do a web search on these experts and other resources and make them required reading and viewing for your organizers and marketers.
- Utilize the Breslin Strategies Top Down Organizing Business Development Kit.
- Perform a materials audit. A successful marketing kit for today's marketplace should include; brochure, testimonials, cover letters, client list, training schedule, business proposal, DVD or CD, custom Power Points, web site and similar.
- Create a national list-serve where best practices can be shared by all organizers. Include centralized organizing or marketing materials reference. This could be on-line or by request to the International. This requires gathering all of the material of the various locals and joint labor management groups and making it easy to review, order or obtain.
- Develop International materials in generic format that can be customized by individual local organizations. Including presentation folders, inserts, DVDs and similar.
- Create an alliance with your union contractor association where-by in the process of unionizing new contractors, they also become members of the association. Provide them with that additional incentive to assist you by lending their name and credibility.
- Create a union contractors association when and where necessary.

## **UNION & MANAGEMENT: END-USER MARKETING**

This final strategy is one that a lot of money has been spent on with little results thus far. Many labor-management organizations have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on radio advertising, TV and other media which is great for general public relations, but does not translate to end-user utilization.

End user marketing is not a shot-gun approach. It is a high-powered approach that has very few, but very important clients that you are targeting. As such, you need to develop materials, messages and your campaign strategies exclusively with them in mind. Further, you need the absolute commitment and partnership of your employers. Here are some ideas to initiate an end-user marketing program;

- Get involved in the major business organizations in your community. Sponsor programs for the Chamber of Commerce, Homebuilders Association, Economic Development Board and similar. Have representatives assigned to these organizations to seek leadership roles.

- Aggressively look for opportunities to make formal presentations to these organizations. Host a meeting at your training facility.
- Cultivate relationships with the Business Editor of your local papers. Make sure you can place stories relevant to “business” connecting it with union activities.
- Create a “success story” publication for circulation to building owners, developers, utilities, and other private market clients. 2-4 x per year.
- Seek out a marketing company that has experience with the clients you are seeking to persuade; not one that has union contacts.
- Put together an entire integrated campaign plan to show to employers before asking for large amounts of money. Look at developing new markets that they are not already in to avoid their concerns about opening up competition to their existing clients.
- Identify a small group of your best representatives and provide them with advanced training in sales, presentations, business writing and public speaking.
- Develop specific materials for end-users that are again flexible and easily customized.
- Develop, at an International level, a marketing school or curriculum that can be provided to the affiliated unions.

### **Summary**

Organizing is the future of the labor movement but it will require a lot of experimentation to find what will work best for you and your organization. Most importantly, like any other business enterprise, you must monitor costs vs. results and put your resources where they show the greatest value and return. There is a virtual army of individuals, organizations, and associations that need to become engaged directly in the process. They are waiting for a role to be defined and that is up to each of you.

I hope that the enclosed General President’s Report was of value to you and your organization. It is meant to be a further reflection of my total commitment to the success of each of you and the union construction industry. Please feel free to contact me with any questions, criticisms or additional ideas.

The next G.P. Report will focus on workforce accountability, end-user expectations and associated policies and strategies to improve field performance and our market reputation.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mark Breslin, President  
Breslin Strategies, Inc.  
[www.breslin.biz](http://www.breslin.biz) [mark@breslin.biz](mailto:mark@breslin.biz)  
925-829-1332

