

# Strategies for Typical Management Responses to Unionizing

“We’re all family” or “This will divide us” – *The Family Argument*

Having friendships and close understandings at work is a great driver for organizational success and should be nurtured to the extent possible. While this sentiment is the ideal, the reality is that a workplace is not a family. Even if it was, families occasionally have disagreements, face tough times, or must make difficult decisions. When addressing this type of Management response, it is important to focus on both the reality of work *and* the want of organized workers to maintain fruitful and productive relationships at the office.

## Potential Responses:

- “It’s wonderful that we all do have such great relationships at work. Unfortunately, though, workplaces aren’t family (Can you fire family members?). We all are working professionals, and as such, need to have professional structures and relationships that define how we interact with each other. These structures should not be dictated, they should be mutually agreed upon and fostered cooperatively. This is when such structures and policies can be most supported.”
- “It is in everyone’s interest (management and workers) that we have a professional and close working relationship in the office. We want to continue fostering this and a union is one of the best ways for us to do it. As a bargaining unit, we’ll be building collective identity at the organization and working towards a successful [organization name]. We want to work in a great atmosphere just as much as managers do. A union and united workplace are not mutually exclusive identities.”



“This will make us less competitive”

Or

“We can’t afford this”



## – *The Financial Argument*

Management will often use this argument as a means to deter unionization. In the nonprofit sector, this may seem like a very sympathetic argument given the nature of our funding sources. However, workers who organize also have a stake in the financial success of the organization. No one wants to do harm to the organization or put it out of business. As a matter of fact, unions can help with efficiency and financial stability, and make its bringing about much more inclusive.

### Potential Responses:

- “The union isn’t looking to destabilize the organization! We want it to be financially successful and competitive just as much as you do. With a ratified bargaining agreement, [organization] will be able to project its finances well into the future through mutually-upon wage scales, pay increases, and benefit expectations. Rather than unpredictability, everyone will know what they can expect each year.”

### **REMEMBER:**

No nonprofit or for-profit should exist in a way that prevents its workers from having a reasonable standard of living. Everyone’s knowledge, skills, and abilities have value, and maintaining low wages or benefits is not a fair system. For example, if [organization] were to operate while only paying each person \$25,000/year, whose financial stability is the organization looking out for? Certainly not that of its workers who wouldn’t be able to afford housing or food. An organization’s financial viability should not be at the harm or disadvantage of its employees. We all contribute to the work; it’s only fair that everyone shares in its success.

### Potential Responses:

- “We value [organization]’s work and want it to succeed. At the same time, its success should not be at the cost of any of its employees. Our unionization ensures that we will negotiate with one another when we have to make difficult financial decisions. It is a core tenet of [organization name] to “Do No Harm” and our union will operate that way to minimize the risk of harm to both the organization and its workers” (or other key tenet).
- “One of [organization]’s biggest challenges has been stability. We have very high turnover rates when it comes to employees, which harms the building of institutional knowledge and raises concerns to our donors when they have to constantly interact with new faces. Unionizing helps to curb this while also setting up structures and processes for building employee professional development and retaining vital skills to the organization.”

“What did I [Manager’s Name] do to deserve this?  
I’m a good manager!”

– *The Personal Attack Argument*

One of the most important things to remember is to never make unionization personal. Yes, there may be employees wanting to organize because of mismanagement, or even outright animosity towards certain managers. While understandable, this type of rationale for unionization is unproductive. Instead, workers and unions should always endeavor to keep the focus on collective rights and protections.



Potential Responses:

- “We are not organizing as a means to criticize you. We are organizing to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and in a way that’s consistent with mutually-agreed upon processes.”
- “Of course, we have a great relationship with you [manager’s name], but you may not always be here (i.e. retirement, sick, find another position) and so we want to make sure that many of the good approaches you’ve used are established as part of PG’s operations.”

“A union won’t  
represent your  
interests”

– *The Anti-Representational Argument*

This argument from Management focuses solely on power. When workers organize, they are seeking to share in decision-making power at the organization. If “we’re all in this together” as managers and workers, shouldn’t we be including everyone when making important decisions?

**IN SUMMARY:**

Fundamentally, a union is a democratic institution where workers meet, discuss, debate, and vote on key decisions. The more active each member is, the more democratic the union. If a union isn’t representing your interests, you as a worker can change that. Without a union, the only way to advocate for your interests is through one-on-one negotiation. This approach is severely weighted in management’s favor, as they have the organizational resources and power to force you to agree to their demands. In this case, is management representing your interests? Certainly not.