

ORGANIZING UNDER COVER (\$ALTING)

"Salting" is the deliberate act of getting a job at a specific workplace with the intent to organize a union.

Most union campaigns start with a lone individual or small group of individuals with no union experience deciding to organize a union from scratch. Sometimes, a union campaign can be strengthened if you know of a friend with union organizing experience. By applying for open positions at your workplace, your friend can secretly help you organize your workplace.

There are other circumstances where salting is used. Once you have organized a union at your workplace, you will usually discover that it is in your best interest to organize other workplaces in the same industry. Remember that there is strength in numbers. Unions do not necessarily have to be limited to one workplace, and salting is one method of organizing additional workplaces in your industry. If you don't have any contacts at these other workplaces, you, a friend, or a fellow union member may attempt to get a job there in order to find potential union contacts or begin organizing themselves.

The employers will argue that by salting, unions are being "deceitful". Nothing could be further from the truth. Employers are always spying on their workers (even to the point of hiring specialists to pose as difficult "customers" in order to "test" a worker's "loyalty" to the company, or encouraging favoritism by having one worker spy on another). Because the employing class has a well documented history of using deceitful tactics (including lies and intimidation) to undermine (legally protected) union organizing efforts by workers, salting is how workers can fight back against repressive and often illegal union busting tactics.

This doesn't mean that the salt gets a job and immediately starts talking union. An in-your-face, blunt approach such as that not only tips off the boss, it usually alienates potential union contacts among the rank & file workers. A successful salting campaign requires patience, subtlety, and the ability to listen to one's co-workers. That doesn't mean a salt's job is to deceive their coworkers. Quite the opposite. A salt must first deal with the mindset fostered by the employing class that the working class has a common interest with the bosses (they don't).

**HERE ARE JUST SOME OF THE THINGS
TO KEEP IN MIND.**

Essential Information for Salts

Applying for the Job:

- Don't wear Union stickers, buttons, shirts, jackets, caps or anything else that could identify you as a Union member or supporter.
- Don't be afraid to badmouth the Union to the employer- but don't talk down the Union to coworkers.
- Avoid obvious references to Union jobs in your resume or application as much as possible. If it's obvious that you've worked at a union company, be prepared to give a believable explanation as to why you're applying for a non Union job.

After You're Hired:

- Keep your eyes and ears open and be a good listener.

- Do your work well, and make a good impression on both the employer and your coworkers.
- Listen to your coworkers to find out if they have any complaints.
- Try to identify the natural leaders among the workers, and get to know them.
- If possible, get a list of all employees, or make one of your own. If you can, try to include home addresses and telephone numbers.
- Write down useful information about your coworkers - their jobs, their skill level, their attitude toward management, their Union history and so on.
- Write notes on everything that happens that might be important - things people say about the job or the company, disciplinary actions, problems that come up at work, health and safety issues and so on.

- Try to get copies of any company materials - employee handbooks, rules, insurance information and so on.
- Don't tell you coworkers that you're a Union member or a salt. You want to be seen as being an ordinary worker.
- Get to know someone well enough to establish trust before talking about the Union.

If You're Fired:

- Ask about the possibility of rehire, with a witness if possible.
- Ask how many others are being laid-off or fired, and who.
- If people know that you're a Union supporter and you think your termination has anything to do with your Union activity, ask whether you're being let go because you support a Union.
- Report your termination to the Union immediately.

Some Responsibilities of Salts

- Make regular reports to your Union (once a week at least)
- Notify the Union of any hiring immediately.
- Save all pay stubs and forward copies to the Union.
- Keep a pocket memo pad.
- Take DETAILED notes from the beginning:
 - Date and time you applied
 - Who you talked to and what was said
- Keep notes while working:
 - Don't be obvious when taking notes
 - Write down information while fresh on your mind
 - Write down names and classifications of co-workers
 - If possible, get addresses and telephone numbers
 - If you can't get anything else, write down vehicle license numbers

- Note any mention of "Union" (positive or negative)
- Note anything of possible value said in conversation
- Gather information
 - Copies of company policies
 - Copies of safety policies
 - Copies of company news letters or bulletins
 - Copies of time cards, if you're using time cards
 - Employee lists (with addresses and telephone numbers, if possible)
 - Lists of jobs
 - Names of any worker who expresses interest in a Union
 - Employee complaints
 - problems with pay checks
 - poor wages
 - unfulfilled promises from management
 - unpaid overtime
 - poor supervision
- poor treatment
 - favoritism or discrimination
 - problems with health and safety
 - any other gripes
- Background of coworkers, including previous Union membership
- Number and type of company vehicles
- Obvious traits of owners or managers
 - expensive cars
 - life styles
 - personal problems
- Watch out for the following, and take very specific, clearly-written notes with names of all persons involved. These are questions that supervisors cannot legally ask, and may constitute unfair labor practices (ULPs).

- Management can't ask during a hiring interview about an applicant's Union affiliation or how he feels about Unions.
- They can't ask whether you've ever signed a Union authorization card
- They can't tell workers that you'll be fired or punished or in any way discriminated against for engaging in legal Union activities.
- They can't ask about Union business; for example, who attended meetings, what was said, who said what, etc.
- They can't say that forming a Union will

cause anyone to lose their jobs.

- They can't tell workers that organizing will do away with present benefits.
- They can't say that the company will refuse to deal with a Union.
- They can't threaten to close the company to avoid a Union.
- They can't lay off or fire workers in retaliation for Union activity.
- They can't discipline a worker for Union activity.

**IF YOU OBSERVE ANY OF THESE THINGS HAPPENING,
BE SURE TO WRITE DOWN EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED:
WHO SAID WHAT, WHEN AND WHERE, AND WHO HEARD IT.**

Some Final Words

Salting is not an easy task, and often it's not very fruitful. It takes a special skill to find potential union organizers in an unfamiliar workplace, especially if you are the newcomer. These skills are attained through organizing experience. It is certainly wise to know something about organizing a union before you attempt to salt a workplace. It is not nearly as difficult to enlist the help of a trusted friend to help strengthen the potential union organizing committee at your own workplace, however, and those wishing to salt a new workplace would do well to practice by salting at a friend's job first before moving on to the bigger challenge.

This may sound a bit discouraging, but remember, organizing takes time. Although on rare occasions, such as the Lawrence Silk Strike of 1912 or the Lumber Workers Industrial Union in 1917, entire industries have been organized in a matter of days, usually it takes much longer. Most single-shop union organizing campaigns require months if not a couple of years. Organizing by industry can take even longer. Patience is essential to successful organizing. You do your co-workers no good if you attempt a "fly-by-night" campaign. These usually fail, and workers become distrustful, if not outright hostile to unions because the salt isn't in the fight for the long haul or the would-be organizer doesn't think of his / her co-workers. So if you do decide to try salting, make sure you are dedicated to the enterprise.

Additional Readings

- [Salt: the flavor, not the meal by MK Lees for Organizing Work](#)



- [Salt is Back on the Table by Noah Wingard for The Industrial Worker](#)



- [“Salting” Built the Labor Movement—It Can Help Rebuild It, Too by Erik Forman for In These Times](#)



- [Salting 101 Webinar by the Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee](#)



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HOUDINI Magazine