

# Analyze This!

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*The secret message communicated to most young people today by society around them is that they are not needed, that the society will run itself quite nicely until they— at some distant point in the future— will take over the reigns. Yet the fact is that the society is not running itself nicely...because the rest of us **need** all the energy, brains, imagination and talent that young people can bring to bear down on our difficulties. For society to attempt to solve its desperate problems without the full participation of even very young is imbecile.*

-Alvin Toffler

## GETTING INVOLVED IN THE UNION PART IV: BUILDING MEMBERSHIP AND STRENGTH IN THE NEXT GENERATION OF WORKERS

Unions have played a critical role helping to make life better for all working family across the country and across the world. In the United States unions helped to pass laws that ended child labor, established an eight-hour work day, and continue to protect the health and safety of workers. Unions helped create Social Security, unemployment insurance and the minimum wage.

Today unions continue to fight to improve the lives of working families, and through their strength have helped workers achieve competitive wages and benefits and a strong voice in the workplace. Did you know that workers in a union earn approximately 30% more than non-union workers? This differential is even greater for women and minorities. Further, unionized employees are more likely than non-union employees to have health insurance coverage, a defined-benefit pension and paid personal leave.

Now more than ever politicians and management are attacking public employees and the services that they provide. At the bargaining table they are seeking wage reductions, radical changes to health insurance plans and employee costs, and significant modifications to important benefits like retiree insurance and pension contributions. In one bargain they want to eliminate important provisions of the contract and erase the years of negotiation and sacrifice it took to achieve these wage and benefit levels!

It is time to strengthen the power of the union and the greatest source of untapped energy and potential are our young, new members. That is why AFSCME is reaching out to the next generation of leaders through the Next Wave Program.

### THE NEXT WAVE PROGRAM

The Next Wave Program focuses union efforts to recruit, engage and educate younger union members. The goal is to encourage younger members to step up into leadership positions and carry on the legacy and strength of the labor movement.

Why is it important to reach out to the younger union members? Fifty-two percent of AFSCME members are over the age of 50 and will be eligible to retire within the next 10 years. This turn-over will create a huge leadership void and a loss of institutional memory. The future of not only AFSCME but also your local depends upon the ability to identify and activate new young leaders to fill the gap when seasoned activists move on.

Young members have inherited contracts that provide competitive wages and benefits. Many do not have a historical understanding of the years of effort and sacrifice it took to achieve and maintain these benefits. The Next Wave introduces newer members to the value and role of their union both in their workplace as well as their broader community.

The Next Wave Program is also working to make the union more responsive to the needs and issues facing young people today.



## WHY SHOULD YOUNG WORKERS WANT TO GET INVOLVED WITH THE UNION?

In the last 10 years younger workers have fallen behind. Compared to workers over 35, young workers are less likely to be employed, less likely to have health insurance, and less likely to have a retirement savings plan:

- ◆ Studies indicate that about 19 percent of workers ages 16 to 24 are unemployed. In contrast, only 13.4 percent of workers 55 and older are unemployed.
- ◆ More than one-third of workers younger than 35 continue to live with their parents for financial reasons.
- ◆ 18 million young people ages 18-34 are uninsured.
- ◆ The average male has seen a significant decrease in earning potential over the past 20 years. The typical earnings for all men age 25-34 in 1975 was \$43,416. The typical earnings for this group in 2005 was \$35,100.
- ◆ The median earnings of young workers with a high school diploma have fallen drastically since 1975. Men have seen a 28.5 percent decrease in median earnings while women have seen a 10.5 percent drop in median earnings.
- ◆ Nearly two-thirds of 18-34 year olds have credit card debt.
- ◆ Studies project that this will be the first generation that will not do as well as their parents.

Young workers need the strength and power of the union now more than ever. They need employment that provides job security, health care and competitive wages. Unfortunately many young workers do not know what unions are about. They view the unions as stale and irrelevant.

The Next Wave Program is reaching out to educate, recruit and engage young workers about the union. The program also communicates the importance of the union as a social justice organization, working to improve workplace conditions not just for themselves but for all working people. The Next Wave Program is also using the feedback of these young workers to make the union more responsive to the needs and issues facing this next generation of workers.

## SO, HOW DO WE GET YOUNGER WORKERS INVOLVED IN THE UNION?

- ◆ Work to break down "generational barriers". As experienced leaders, reach out to newer workers and strike up friendly conversations about non-union related topics.
- ◆ Make a commitment at a local level to reach out, train and educate younger and newer members about AFSCME.
- ◆ Establish an orientation program for new employees and pair up new workers with more seasoned and experienced union members.
- ◆ Organize fun events that bring all members of the local together— young and old alike!
- ◆ Identify younger workers who have shown an interest in the union and ask them to get involved as a steward or bargaining team member.
- ◆ Encourage younger workers to participate in the Next Wave Program and attend the Wisconsin Next Wave Conference.

As mentioned, an easy way to get a young member involved is to encourage them to attend the Wisconsin Next Wave Conference. The Conference is a three-day event being held in Milwaukee from September 9th through the 11th.

The three Wisconsin AFSCME Councils are sponsoring the event, so there is no registration fee and all meals are included. Participants will be responsible for securing time off, lodging and transportation, however the Council will reimburse each local that sends a participant \$100 per attendee to help offset travel costs. Scholarship money is also available.

The conference will include large and small group gatherings and workshops, and will offer opportunities to learn from each other. The Conference will also provide opportunities for community service, fun and solidarity. For more information about the Next Wave Conference visit the Council 40 website ([www.afscme40.org](http://www.afscme40.org)) or send an email to [nextwave@wiafscme.org](mailto:nextwave@wiafscme.org)