F right flight attendants at your airline are organizing the jobs of millions of airline Flight Attendants-CWA (AFA) to make your job better and more secure. You want to succeed. That’s why flight attendants like us, who have already joined AFA, want you to know what to expect from your airline executives during your campaign.

Not every airline management uses all the same tricks and tactics to prevent us from exercising our legal right to join AFA, but you need to know — ahead of time — that there is a pattern or script that most follow. Most will do something to prevent you from joining AFA.

- Make empty promises or threats.
- Tell lies about AFA.
- Spread rumors to discourage or divide you and your flying partners.
- Refuse to have open, honest debate on the issues that prompted you to seek AFA representation.

The first thing our executives did was try to confuse us by claiming that AFA is in cahoots with a union-busting group that intends to be a barrier between us and our airline, or that AFA will make all of the decisions about our job for us. This is false. Our executives didn’t want us to organize together in AFA because with professional representation we got collective bargaining rights. Ask yourself why your employer hasn’t responded to you and your coworkers the way that your union and your coworkers do to organize for flight attendants? They view it as a long-term investment; not a risky one-off investment that means that they have to lose their jobs if employees vote in a union. They also believe that a legal contract would prevent them from playing favorites or criticizing workers. Remember, supervisors generally don’t have unions, so they can do things that unionized flight attendants can’t do because organizing a union means that your executives would have to negotiate with you and your coworkers over the terms of your pay, benefits and working conditions. They prefer to keep for themselves that control and the ability to set your pay, benefits, etc.

This is why executives portray AFA as an outside party — they want you and your fellow flight attendants to forget that when you join AFA, you become the union and you will have rights that you don’t have today.

A Checklist: What Your Airline Executives Might Do?

✓ HIRE A UNION-BUSTING CONSULTING FIRM. Airlines and labor-management “consulting” firms make millions advising airline executives on ways to keep us from exercising our legal right to form unions. They can spend as much as $2,000-$3,000 per flight attendant to keep you from organizing. Most airline executives hire consultants to run their anti-union campaign. They also send supervisors to union-busting seminars and during campaigns they follow scripts prepared by consultants. They call it “union avoidance.” In your airline following a consultant’s anti-union script? If so, ask yourself why your employer hasn’t responded to you and your coworkers’ needs or invested the same amount of time and money into workplace improvements for flight attendants? They view it as a long-term investment; not a risky one-off investment that means that they have to lose their jobs if employees vote in a union.

✓ PRESSURE SUPERVISORS TO PRESSURE YOU. Airline executives usually order supervisors to take the lead in campaigns against flight attendants seeking AFA representation. Typically, supervisors are told to hold “one-on-one” meetings with individual flight attendants. Executives often tell supervisors that they will lose their jobs if employees vote in a union. They also believe that a legal contract would prevent them from playing favorites or criticizing workers. Remember, supervisors generally don’t have unions, so they can do things that unionized flight attendants can’t do because organizing a union means that your executives would have to negotiate with you and your obey a contract. Not every airline management uses all the same tricks and tactics to prevent us from exercising our legal right to join AFA, but you need to know — ahead of time — that there is a pattern or script that most follow. Most will do something to prevent you from joining AFA because they want to treat you better; instead, they use the meetings to claim that they are worried about “what will happen to you.” (You may wonder why they suddenly care so much about you now.) They will claim that bad things will happen if you join AFA — that you will lose benefits or be “forced out” on strike. You can expect to see these tactics expand to your crew lounge and your In-flight sign-in area as your campaign grows. If you hear about an upcoming captive-audience meeting, do some research in advance. Ask good questions your employer will probably not give straight answers — and they may even stop allowing questions. AFA supporters are often kept out of these meetings so they won’t be faced with questions they can’t answer, or that will embarrass company executives.

✓ DENY YOUR RIGHTS THROUGH DELAY AND VIOLATIONS OF THE LAW. Union busts always advise airline executives to delay every step of the way when flight attendants have organized together to join AFA. By finding loopholes in the law, they can delay your union election or, later, your collective bargaining contract negotiations after you vote in a union. Employers often deliberately violate the law (i.e., telling you about the elections or not telling you about collective bargaining rights) even though they realize that they might later be forced to post a notice stating that they violated the law and your rights, and that the company will be forced to reduce union support at your workplace, any penalties are viewed as an acceptable and necessary risk, or simply “the cost of doing business.”

The best way to defeat these illegal tactics during your campaign to get union representation is to expect them, anticipate them, and to let management know that such tactics will only make you more determined to vote for a union. AFA organizers and lawyers will assist you in fighting any delays or illegal actions. Our union has made a commitment to help you and will stick by you.

✓ SPRING A LAST-MINUTE SURPRISE ON YOU. Just before flight attendants are scheduled to vote in the AFA representation election, union-busters often urge airline executives to spring a special event, or issue an unfounded attack because it will be too late for AFA supporters to respond. (These surprise actions might be encouraged by the “No-Union” consultants.) These surprises might be:

- A captive-audience meeting featuring a speech by an executive the airline flies in from corporate headquarters.
- An unfair labor practice charge about AFA or its supporters.
- A rumor about a possible raise or base closure.
- A flyer or letter with distorted “facts” about a flight attendant contract, strike, or the AFA’s activities at your airline.

Expect a last-minute surprise aimed at keeping you from making a free choice — then it won’t work because it won’t be a surprise after all. If your airline executives use any of these tactics, check with your AFA flight attendant organizers and your union professional organizers. If you feel you are being pressured to vote no by company executives, use the checklist inside to keep track of such efforts to mislead or misinform you during the campaign.
Here’s What Your Executives Might Say …

**Union Dues**

- "You can’t afford to pay AFA union dues."
  - Your executives may do things like:
    - Giving you two checks on payday (one being a phony check with union dues taken out).
    - Passing out a mock check that shows how much dues you will pay as a group each year.
    - Brining in a basket of groceries with a label: “What you could buy with one year’s dues.”
  - Remember, union dues are not collected until you get your first union contract. And, you get to vote on that contract so you’ll decide then whether it’s worth the cost of union dues or not.

- "AFA is only interested in you for your money."
  - Your executives may give you “documents” or newspaper clippings which are supposed to show that AFA needs your dues money to survive because it is losing members.

- "AFA will just spend your money on corrupt schemes and big salaries for union officials."
  - Your executives may distribute reports which show union salaries and expenses. You may also be shown clippings about charges of corruption in other unions.

- "AFA can raise your dues or charge you other assessments whenever it feels like it."
  - Your executives may try to make you think you will be charged with additional fees once you get a union. Any such increases or fees must be approved by the membership, or by the annual convention of AFA leaders from all AFA carriers, including your own representatives.

- "AFA love strikes."
  - Your executives may talk as though the whole purpose of AFA is to call strikes.

- "AFA can force you to strike."
  - Your executives may suggest that, soon after you vote for AFA representation, you will be forced out on strike whether you like it or not — either for your own contract or to support other workers.

- "If you strike, AFA will not support you."
  - Your executives may scare you about strikes by asking how you and your family could survive during a strike without your income.

Here’s What Your Executives Won’t Say …

**Union Dues**

- You can’t afford not to have AFA.
  - The improvements in pay and benefits which we gained in our very first AFA contract more than offset the dues we paid — plus we got the improved treatment and respect that comes with the many services AFA provides. As the saying goes, “You get what you pay for.” No organization can be effective without money to pay for services and supplies. Remember: You will not begin to pay any AFA dues until you vote to approve your first contract.

- AFA is a non-profit organization and is financially strong — it exists only to serve us, the flight attendant members.
  - AFA membership has grown recently and these statements are simply untrue. And, again, you pay no dues until you ratify a first contract. We want to help other flight attendants organize because every time a group of new flight attendants joins AFA and wins a new union contract, it puts added pressure on all airline executives to improve pay and working conditions.

- AFA members decide how we spend our dues.
  - All decisions about AFA’s budget — including salaries for our elected union officers and professional staff who serve us — are made by flight attendants. AFA’s financial reports are provided every year to the federal government which can bring charges if union money is being misused. In more than 80 years since AFA was founded, it has never been accused by the government of misuse of funds.

- AFA dues are set only by us, AFA members who we elect as members of our board of directors.
  - For the first time in many years, AFA’s elected flight attendant leaders voted to raise dues. They are now set at $50.00 per month per flight attendant member.

**Strikes**

- We joined AFA to improve our jobs — not to strike.
  - In over 99 percent of cases, AFA has succeeded in negotiating new contracts without a strike.

- Only AFA members can decide whether we want to strike.
  - In AFA, a strike can only be called by a majority of flight attendants who would be directly involved, and only after a majority of the affected members vote to support a strike in a secret-ballot election.

- AFA members decide what kind of support we need in our strike plan.
  - In the few situations where a strike becomes necessary, AFA members set up a local CHAOS™ strike fund to support flight attendants who strike.

**Your Rights**

- You will not be told what to do by AFA.
  - If you want a strong union to represent you, you’ll probably decide to participate in AFA activities — but that is completely up to you. No one can force you to come to an AFA meeting or vote for certain candidates.

- Signing an AFA card simply means you want a union.
  - All decisions at AFA are made democratically. There are no “union bosses.” We, the flight attendant members, run our union.

- AFA will help you talk to management only if you ask for help.
  - In AFA, you will elect fellow flight attendants to lead your local executive council (LEC) at each of your bases — flight attendants who are trained to represent you on the job. If you decide that you can get results from your supervisor without union representation, that is fine. But if you can’t, we will have AFA to turn to.

  “Uh-oh, another management funded picnic … our AFA organizing campaign must be getting stronger.”
When You Organize

Threats

- **“WE WON’T EVER SIGN A CONTRACT EVEN IF YOU VOTE FOR AFA.”**
  
  Since it is illegal for the employer to say this directly, you may be told this instead: Remember, we don’t have to agree to what you want in your union contract. Your executives may circulate news clippings about another group of workers who voted for AFA and didn’t immediately get a contract.

- **“YOU WILL LOSE THE WAGES AND BENEFITS YOU ALREADY HAVE.”**
  
  One common tactic is to distribute a leaflet with two columns – one showing a list of what you have now, the other showing a huge question mark and the question: “What will you get with AFA.” Another tactic is to show AFA contracts at other airlines with pay levels or other provisions that are not as good as what you have now. This is without telling you what those workers had before they organized AFA at their airline or what improvements they won. Your executives may also threaten that if you join AFA their “hands are tied” and they cannot grant you raises, or that you will have to “start from scratch” in negotiations.

- **“WE WILL SHUT DOWN COMPLETELY.”**
  
  Some executives even go so far as parking empty moving vans near their corporate headquarters just before the election. You’re supposed to assume that the vans will be used if you vote union.

- **“AFA SUPPORTERS WILL LOSE THEIR JOBS.”**
  
  Your executives may hint that it plans to take some action against those who support AFA representation even though that would be illegal.

- **“WE WON’T BE ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY IF YOU VOTE IN AFA, WE WILL BE LESS FLEXIBLE.”**
  
  Your executives may warn that if you join AFA, there will be new rules and reduced flexibility, say, in scheduling and in other areas. They may even make some changes and try to blame them on the union.

Promises

- **“PLEASE GIVE US ANOTHER CHANCE — WE’LL MAKE THINGS BETTER.”**
  
  Before the AFA election, your executives may say that because you have shown that you are dissatisfied, it will be able to work out all of the problems so there will be no need to vote for AFA.

- **“WE’LL SET UP PROCEDURES FOR HEARING YOUR COMPLAINTS.”**
  
  These may include:
  
  - A new or improved “open door” policy or a worker “participation” scheme so you can talk to management when you have a suggestion or complaint.
  - A “grievance procedure” that is set up much like the system established by union contracts — except executives have the final say and there is no binding arbitration clause as there is in AFA contracts.

- **“WE’LL CHANGE A FEW THINGS THAT ARE BOTHERING YOU.”**
  
  Your executives may transfer one unpopular supervisor or make changes in certain working conditions that have caused a lot of dissatisfaction.

- **“GETTING AFA REPRESENTATION AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING RIGHTS IS THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE CONDITIONS IMPROVE — AND STAY THAT WAY.”**
  
  If your company is really willing to change, it can agree to go along with your bargaining demands during contract negotiations. When flight attendants have heeded executives’ promises and pleas “to give us another chance” they find out the hard way that most if not all of their promises are forgotten soon after workers decide against representation. This was illustrated at Delta Air Lines recently, when after rejecting AFA representation, Delta flight attendants took the deepest pay and work rule cuts in the industry.

- **“UNLESS YOU HAVE AFA, YOUR EXECUTIVES WILL HAVE THE LAST WORD.”**
  
  New procedures for hearing complaints may sound good at first, but without AFA your employer can simply ignore your ideas. AFA contracts provide for the mandatory arbitration of disputes, so that if you and the employer cannot agree on a resolution, the problem is resolved by an impartial third party chosen by both AFA and management. If your executives are so interested in what you have to say, why then are they so opposed to your getting a stronger voice through AFA?

A s you can see from our checklist, joining AFA and obtaining collective bargaining rights won’t be easy. It will take patience, hard work, and commitment from your flight attendant organizing committee to overcome your airline executives’ likely opposition. In addition, the gains we make as AFA members don’t come overnight — progress comes in steps and we keep building upon what we have gained. As an AFA member, you have the support of 55,000 flight attendants as well as 700,000 CWA workers just like you. We made organizing pay off for us. You can too!
Our Airline’s Executives Said
We Didn’t Need the Association

Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, AFL-CIO
501 Third Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
www.afacwa.org

What Will Yours Say?