



CASE STUDY

COMMUNICATING WITH CLARNESS AMID UNIONIZA TION DISCUSSION

INDUSTRY

Manufacturing – Wire & Cable

CHALLENGE

Respond to unionization efforts without compromising company values or alienating employees

SOLUTION

Lead internal communication campaigns at two industrial facilities to elevate employee voice, clarify leadership's stance, and build trust amid rising organizing efforts

EXPERTISE

Change management | Labor relations communications | Crisis response
Internal communications

One of North America's largest wire and cable manufacturers found itself at a crossroads in the mid-1990s. With approximately 4,000 employees, the company faced an unexpected challenge: union organizing efforts at two of its key facilities.

Despite a deep-rooted, family-owned heritage and a founder's directive to avoid unionization, employee frustrations were high. The primary concern was a decade without a pay raise. As employees weighed their options, one of the unions launched campaigns at both the aluminum smelter and the adjacent wire and cable plant.

The team at Arketi Inside was brought in to navigate this pivotal moment with a focus on communication, clarity, and culture.

COMMUNICATING UNDER PRESSURE

Recognizing that employee discontent often stems from feeling unheard, our team embedded on-site at both facilities for months at a time to support internal communications during the union elections. We developed and executed comprehensive communication strategies focused on empathy, facts, and the company's long-term vision.

Our approach included:

- Writing all internal content and executive messaging for campaign communications.
- Equipping managers with clear talking points and legal guardrails.
- Engaging with legal counsel and external partners to maintain compliance.
- Managing crisis response during a severe flood event that threatened operations and safety at the aluminum smelter.
- Handling media relations during a time of heightened public scrutiny.

We treated employees as people seeking answers, acknowledgement, and fairness.

THE TALE OF TWO CAMPAIGNS + TWO OUTCOMES

In the first campaign at the wire and cable plant, our client won the vote. This was a signal that, when given the right information and respect, employees were willing to trust leadership. The company subsequently implemented long-overdue improvements, including salary increases, showing a clear understanding of what was at stake.

But the second campaign at the aluminum smelter ended differently. The union prevailed. That facility was eventually sold years later, signaling just how far the organization was willing to go to uphold its union-free preference, even at the cost of vertical integration.

Whether a company supports unions or not, one truth remains: union organizing efforts are almost always the result of unaddressed employee concerns.

FROM OPPOSITION TO OPPORTUNITY

The experience offered a defining lesson for leadership: avoiding unionization is about relevance rather than resistance.

When companies fail to listen, employees look for someone who will. In this case, the union became that someone.

We helped them recognize that employee silence signals disengagement. When that silence turns into action, it's a call for leadership to examine culture and communication or risk losing not only talent but also control of the conversation.

TAKEAWAYS FROM NAVIGATING WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

Whether a company supports unions or not, one truth remains: union organizing efforts are almost always the result of unaddressed employee concerns.

With us at its side, the company turned a potentially combative moment into an example of how strategic communication can create clarity, demonstrate care, and open doors for cultural improvement. Even under extraordinary pressure.