

State of the Union

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Seth Ford, a partner with Troutman Pepper, is quoted in the *Middle Market Growth* article, [“State of the Union.”](#) The article discusses ways to improve working conditions proactively and how to proceed if workers have already taken steps to organize.

Seth Ford, a partner at law firm Troutman Pepper, believes that the No. 1 catalyst of union formation is poor relationships between management and employees. He suggests managerial training that teaches how to be responsive and proactive with employees. Managers should also plan for how to respond to a potential unionization effort in a lawful and meaningful way.

“(Companies) need to have a union-avoidance practice, where they education their management team on unions and what they should be expected to do if they see signs of a union campaign,” Ford says.

No matter how small the company, it should be aware of what an organizing campaign looks like, according to Ford, who notes that unionization efforts happen in stages. What starts as a grassroots campaign may develop into employees passing around literature via email or messengers. From there, unions begin collecting signatures of supportive employees on union cards.

Ford recommends that companies think about each stage well in advance. Front-line supervisors will likely be the first to hear about employee dissatisfaction or a desire to unionize. Managers often don’t act, which he says is the worst thing they can do.

“They need to be able to quickly communicate with and education employees about the policies and practices of the workplace, and how that could be compromised or impacted by a union commitment,” he says. For example, if a company believes that unionizing may make collaboration difficult, management should inform employees of this potential consequence.

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