

No time to waste to organise and win!

Since taking on the role of union rep at the Swansea Waste Disposal Company just over a year ago, David Badger has more than doubled the number of union members in his workplace and succeeded in getting many agency workers at the site taken on in permanent jobs.

David's hard work has not only improved the lives of many of his members. Strengthening the union has also helped to develop a culture of trust and partnership between managers, the union and the workers on the shop floor. The success of this partnership approach has led to a positive change in morale, and a culture where managers listen to and take up ideas from the workers on the shop floor. These ideas have brought about innovative changes in practices and different ways of working at the waste and recycling plant in Moriston. The changes have led the team at the site being recognised with a prestigious UK national industry award, The PEEL People's Cup. As well as being a key part of this award winning team, David Badger's individual hard work and success as a union rep has now been recognised by the Wales TUC with the Union Rep of the Year Award.



When David Badger (pictured right with his award) took on the role of union rep for the Unite union at the site in December 2012, he was determined to make a difference for his colleagues. At the time, morale at the site, which handles the waste and recycling from the Swansea area, was quite low. Many workers were not part of the union, and there were a number of agency workers on zero-hours contracts with low pay and little job security. At this time there were only around 60 Unite members left at the site and the branch had closed, so the union did not have much negotiating strength. It was also a time of real uncertainty for the workers, as there was a change in ownership of the company on the horizon. Many felt concerned about their future.



David recognised the concerns of his colleagues and he wanted to do something "I wanted to help and speak up for people" he explains. Having previously been active as a union rep in his last workplace, he had done some trade union education courses and had experience of negotiating. He decided to step forward to become the union rep at the site. Over the next 8 months, David dedicated himself to encouraging others to join the union. He went around the site and made sure he spoke to everyone in person, he explains "I mapped the workplace... My tools were a clipboard and pen and I made sure I recorded when I had spoken to someone and then when I received the form from them."

David took the time to explain to his colleagues what the union was able to offer them in terms of negotiating on their behalf and offering support during the times ahead, he says "I explained that there were many changes afoot and we needed to be unified in order to have the best negotiating position." David was particularly keen to get the agency workers in to the union, as he was

determined that the union could do something to help negotiate these workers onto permanent contracts. In just over 6 months, David had persuaded 99% of the workforce to join the union, a phenomenal achievement. He now looks after 135 members at the site.

When the company was transferred back over to Swansea Council in August 2013, David negotiated on behalf of his members on the TUPE transfer to make sure that they did not lose out because of the changeover. The City and County of Swansea Unite Branch was reformed in August 2013, and David was elected chair, working alongside Branch Secretary Jason Strannigan (pictured with David, right) who is based at the council offices in Swansea. Jason and David worked closely together on the job evaluation exercise that followed, which had the potential to affect many aspects of their members' terms and conditions, including pay.



Following a series of negotiations, Jason and David got the position of the members at the site reviewed so that they received a more favourable grading than had first been proposed. David explains, "Initially it looked like most of our membership might lose pay, however following a series of meetings we came to a position where the majority of our members did not lose." They have also successfully negotiated many of the agency staff on to permanent contracts. The pair are now working with management to get all agency workers across the local authority who are doing regular hours taken on permanently on in-house contracts.

David has made a point of fostering a good working relationship with the management at the site. Although inevitably there have been times when management and the union had their differences, through constructive negotiation on both sides, David has been able to negotiate the best outcomes for his members. David's professional and dedicated approach has impressed the management. They recognise the benefits that the union can bring in terms of helping to reduce and resolve disputes more quickly, and the increase in staff morale.



Wynn Lawrence, General Manager at the site (pictured above left with David and Jason), has been supportive of David in his role as union rep. He recognises the need for David to have time and facilities to carry out his role, and he sees the benefits that having the union on site brings in terms of the partnership approach and positive working relationship that has developed as a result.

Wynn speaks very highly of David, saying "We've seen a big change in the level of enthusiasm and commitment from staff and I would commend David for his role in this." He explains "There have been huge changes in the last year, but thanks to the good working relationship between the union

and management, we have established common goals and made many positive changes". Wynn explains how this has helped productivity at the site, "Staff now feel more comfortable speaking to management. As a result, many of the best ideas we have had have come up from the workers on the shop floor, and we've been able to put these in to practice. For example the idea of setting up the shop to sell items from the household recycling centre for re-use came from the shop floor, and this is now generating income for the site."

Thanks to many of these innovative changes, in November 2013, the team beat off stiff competition

to win The PEEL People's Cup. This is a national industry award that recognises excellence in the operating team of a waste management facility. The site was recognised for its excellence in many areas, including site supervision, operational features, teamwork, staff welfare, safety and environmental impact. It now aims to recycle almost all of the waste it handles



through continuing investment and new sorting facilities. The judges explained their decision behind the award "The organisation has taken great strides to lift itself from a previously poor operational site to one which is proud to welcome visitors. This is a tribute to the whole team and the efforts that they have made to raise standards to an exemplary level." They continued, "The combined energy and enthusiasm generated within the team has had a clear impact on morale and it is now proud to serve the local community."

David has now received recognition of his outstanding achievements as a union rep and has been awarded the Wales TUC Rep of the Year Award. Marion Burke, Policy and Campaigns Officer for Wales TUC Education, who sat on the panel that gave David the award, explains "The Wales TUC is extremely proud to be able to present this award to David, in recognition of his fantastic achievement in recruiting so many members and representing them so effectively during a difficult time." Andy Richards, Regional Secretary of Unite in Wales, also supported David's nomination for the award. He says "At a difficult time for our members in local government, David has led from the front and doubled Unite membership." Andy explains "David's members are amongst the lowest paid in the council and often the most difficult to organise. His successful organising campaign is a model for others to follow."

David and Jason are keen to continue this success throughout the newly formed branch. Even though it was only set up in August 2013, the branch has already grown to become the third biggest Unite branch in Wales. It is now gaining new members across the whole local authority. However David is not complacent and is keen to go out to other sites and get more workers at the council involved in the union. David explains "Jason and I are working with the support of Unite officers to target areas of the council where there are low paid and undervalued workers to try and build bargaining strength." He sums it up, "We want to get the message out that we care about people and that Unite will fight for jobs and the rights of agency workers. Together we can make a difference. Our door is always open to our members."