



The Value of a Big Mac and a Living Wage

Shouldn't 60 hours of work a week bring enough home for your kid to dream the American dream? Unfortunately, the math no longer adds up. Low income workers are working twice as hard these days than 10 years ago, and they can't keep afloat. Is this a struggle between service workers and owners - or is the middle class implicated?



THE ISSUE:

Today's dominant economic struggle is about full time service workers trying to make enough money to keep their families alive. What was once seen as temporary employment is now a livelihood for many, and wages need to reflect that changing reality. Movements of organized service workers are growing in strength - whether it's fast food workers, supermarket workers, car wash workers or others.

WHY IS YOUR STORY IMPORTANT?

We'd like to ask consumers to be our allies. Every time you buy something that seems too cheap to be true, it is. If it's cheap, the workers probably aren't being treated too well, and the environment probably isn't being treated too well. It is likely that what you are buying isn't all that great for you. We'd like to paint the picture of a changing economy and what that might mean for both workers and consumers.

NOMINATED BY:

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The Issue

Background

Full-time service workers are challenged to make enough money to keep their family afloat and achieve the “American dream” for their children. Movements of low-income workers have gained prevalence as those employed in fast-food, supermarkets, or car-washes organize and protest.

When hundreds of fast food workers in New York City went on strike in November of 2012, it was the largest strike in the fast food industry at the time. Since then, the movement has spread across than 40 cities. In NYC alone, low-income workers have gone on strike 4 times in the past year. In August of 2013, these protests made it to the front page of USA Today, breaking into mainstream America.

There are a number of well-researched stories and reports that have come out on the topic:

- <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/08/more-than-a-quarter-of-fast-food-workers-are-raising-a-child/278424/>
- <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/29/fast-food-workers-low-pay-nationwide-walkout>
- Colbert report did a great satire on MacDonalds’ minimum wage budget:
- Highlights from these articles:
- Low-wage, part-time, service sector jobs are growing at the fastest rate of any sector in our economy.
- The average salary of a fast food worker in NYC is only \$11,000 per year - below the federal poverty level income for a single person (\$11,490).
- Fast-food workers’ demographics are changing: “If you had to guess, what would you say is the average age of a fast food employee in the United States? 18? 20? Older? Younger? The answer? 28 This is up dramatically from 2000, when the average fast food worker in the US was 22 years old. (Source: <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2013/08/28/trying-to-raise-a-family-on-a-fast-food-salary/>)



- The average age of minimum-wage workers is 35 (<http://articles.latimes.com/2013/aug/29/local/la-me-ln-fast-food-protests-hit-los-angeles-thursday-20130829>)

The full set of Fast Food worker demographics are here: http://www.bls.gov/cps/occupation_age.htm (ctl-F Food Preparation)

Meanwhile,

- Fast food companies like McDonald's actually grew during the recession (http://www.slate.com/articles/business/moneybox/2009/08/who_won_the_recession.html)

How might the public currently be viewing your issue? Can you estimate what the public's current thoughts are on the issue?

Common criticisms of the movement are that fast food jobs are not "real" jobs and that workers should get "real" jobs if they want to be paid a living wage, and that because of the franchise structure the low wages are the fault of the franchisees not the corporations.

Are there a deeper reaction that people have when they are confronted with your issue?

(it's these reactions that we'll eventually have to confront and try to dislodge)

There is hostility at the idea that if the campaign is successful, that fast food jobs would pay better than "real" jobs in traditionally middle class industries.

What's unsaid in the public about your issue?

That our economy is markedly different than the pre-recession economy and is now based around the traditionally low-wage service industry. Rebuilding a middle class in this country will require organizing to make jobs that were traditionally jobs taken early in life or to supplement the income of a financial breadwinner, jobs that can support a family.

What are their unsaid reactions when being presented with your issue? Workers in the fast food industry don't deserve to be paid a living wage because they are lazy or uneducated or both.



Goals

We'd like to tell this story from two perspectives - the facts and the people. And we'd like to burst the bubble of middle class shoppers who think that they are innocent in the struggle for a living wage.

This is a campaign to raise the profile of this issue - again! - and to connect it with middle class consumers, generating a group of allies.

The challenge

Everyone instinctively knows that bad stuff is happening. They don't want to be hit over the head again with it. We need a clever way to give them a chance to be a hero in this story.

What attitude shifts need to happen among which target groups.

Fast food workers need to feel empowered to take action and stand with their fellow workers to demand higher wages and representation.

Middle class moderates need to become allies to the actions that workers take - whether it's for changes in the minimum wage or for the right to form a union.

Specific Ideas/Hooks/Concepts

To tell this story, we could comb through the stats around the changing workforce, and then figure out how to put a human face on it. What did a MacDonaldis look like in 1980? What does it look like today? What's it like to work on your feet for 8 hours a day.

How many hours does the average person working at minimum wage work? We suspect that there is a large group of people working at two minimum wage who work as many hours as investment bankers.

What's it like trying to raise your child when you're working two jobs? What dreams aren't coming true? What do you worry about with your kids?



What happens when you ask for more? How do large corporations systemically undermine workers asking for their rights?

How much extra are you willing to pay for your Big Mac? A decent wage means X cents for a big mac. You in? (apparently this was calculated: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/08/01/the-mcpoverty-calculator.html>)

Every time you buy something that seems too cheap to be true, it is. If it's cheap, the workers probably aren't being treated too well, the environment probably isn't being treated too well. And probably what you are buying isn't all that great/great for you.

So we'd like through this to help you cure your addiction to cheapness, which is harming employees, the earth, and you.

Extra information

What are other groups doing? Progressive organization, labor unions, community groups, elected officials and clergy members from across the country have joined the movement, standing in solidarity with workers on strike days, walking workers back to work after strikes, and talking with their members, constituents and congregations about the fight for \$15 an hour and the right to form a union without retaliation.

There are some great reports from economic think tanks:

<http://www.cepr.net/index.php/blogs/cepr-blog/slow-progress-for-fast-food-workers> and <http://www.epi.org/publication/work-dignity-unfinished-march-decent-minimum/>

These have a lot of the data and links you could use to build a case.

One issue that received a lot of press attention was McDonald's release of a budget plan to supposedly help its workers save. Instead, this showed that it is nearly impossible to live off a McDonald's wage: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/laurashin/2013/07/18/why-mcdonalds-employee-budget-has-everyone-up-in-arms/>