

## Congratulations on becoming a CUPE Steward

The job of a steward is the most challenging, most rewarding and most important job in our union. That's because you are on the front lines of our fight to develop a strong, active union in the workplace — one that can make a real difference in the lives of our members.

Stewards have an enormous impact on our members' faith and belief in the union. The steward is the one union person our members see every day when they go to work. In the eyes of most CUPE members, you are the union. Because this is so, the CUPE steward, more than any other union leader or activist, has the opportunity to energize and mobilize the source of our union's strength: the membership.

The steward takes on a number of roles in the union:

- you provide leadership in the workplace;
- you organize co-workers to take collective action;
- you communicate with workers, union leaders and management; and
- you represent members.

By performing these steward tasks, you will earn the confidence and respect of your co-workers. This will allow you to carry out your primary responsibility: to reach out to our members and encourage them to become active, involved participants in their union.

This is vitally important because of a fundamental truth about our union: Member involvement in union activities and union actions creates union power in the workplace. A strong union is better able to protect workers' rights and fight for improvements in wages, hours, working conditions and quality of life on the job.

Take great pride in being a CUPE steward. We know you are up to the challenge.

There is a belief by many managers that union stewards are trouble makers who are unhappy with their jobs; do not like the company (not committed to it) and generally look for trouble by finding issues in the collective agreement to argue with management about. Results of this study showed that union stewards are equally satisfied with their jobs and as committed to the company as the rank and file. However, they are more committed to the union and participate more in union activities, and feel more responsibility toward union ideals. It is this responsibility to the union that leads stewards to monitor the collective agreement and feel the need to keep on management to follow it, not that they dislike their jobs more or the company more. Just that they feel this responsibility.

Source: Thacker, JW and Fields, M. (2001) The Steward: Destroying the Myth. Journal of Managerial Psychology, 16. p. 209-16.

# A Shop Steward Needs the Right Tools

Just like a Carpenter, the Union Steward needs the right tools to do the job!

The CUPE Shop Steward should make use of the following tools when performing his/her duties as the Representative of the Union members in his/her workplace:

## 1. The Collective Agreement

The Union Steward should know what the contract says and what it means. You should understand how the contract has been interpreted by past grievances and settlements, as well as having a knowledge of agreements and practices between the Union and the Employer. This does not mean that you must memorize the contract; knowing where to find information is enough.

## 2. Knowledge of the Department or Shop

The Steward should understand the operations of the department or shop that they represent. You should know the jobs, machines, rates of pay, seniority of all members, employer rules, and other basic facts. You should also have a copy of any employer rules and regulations, as well as the health and safety policy of the employer.

## 3. Knowledge of the People You Must Deal With

In handling grievances, a Steward must be aware of personality differences. You must get to know not only the members you represent, but also the management personnel you will be dealing with. Is the member

you represent a cool cucumber or a hothead? Is the manager hard-nosed or reasonable? These factors play an important role in how you deal with issues. Remember in all cases to remain objective. Stick to the facts, and be prepared!

## 4. Knowledge of Union Policies and Activities

The Union Steward should be aware of all CUPE policies, activities, programs, and procedures so that you can better represent members. Keep a copy of the CUPE Constitution and the Local bylaws handy, so you will be better prepared to answer questions brought to you by members in your shop or department.

Other documents you should have: copies of application forms and check-off authorizations; application for withdrawal card forms; grievance forms and grievance investigation forms; insurance forms for health and welfare plans.

## 5. Resources to Find All This Information

The Steward learns his job through day-to-day experience in the shop and through information provided by the Union:

- General membership and Shop Stewards' meetings; Labour Council meetings.
- Informal discussion with other Stewards, Table Officers, or CUPE National Representative.
- Union and employer publications, other union newsletters, employer newsletters.
- Union education courses.

To many of our Members, the Shop Steward is the Union. He or she is the person the member will look to for guidance on interpretation of their Collective Agreement, for honest representation when there is a dispute with the employer over an issue in the workplace, and to help keep the member informed of Union issues.

*Thanks to IAM947*

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## CUPE UNION EDUCATION

Union education helps us develop the tools we need to defend our rights. Union education puts our individual struggles into context and shows us that we are part of larger struggles and movements for change - that we are not alone. Through union education we learn to strategize together, to fight back and win.

For more information about CUPE workshops, contact:

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Fax 403-569-0032**

Check our CUPE Websites

[www.cupe.ca](http://www.cupe.ca)  
or  
[www.cupealberta.ab.ca](http://www.cupealberta.ab.ca)

# How to Deal With a Timid Grievor

**S**ometimes, the steward's challenge is the worker who just can't wait to have the union file a grievance – even in cases where the facts make it clear that no legitimate grievance exists. The worker is so determined and aggressive and anxious for the union to take the boss to task that it'll make you crazy.

But just as difficult for the steward can be the mirror image of that scene: the worker who has been unfairly treated and whose case begs for justice... but he or she just doesn't want to do anything about it.

Stewards who are tuned into their workplaces will find out when something has happened to an employee. The question is, how do you effectively handle this situation?

## Reasons for Timidity

Let's first look at the reasons such workers do not come forward:

✦ **Fear.** A worker fears retaliation from the boss if he or she speaks up. In today's "downsized" economy, many workers think they must quietly endure abuse to keep their jobs.

✦ **Guilt.** The worker believes that he or she did something to provoke the incident. Even if that is true, the "punishment" may not fit the "crime".

✦ **Shame.** The worker is ashamed of what happened and doesn't want anyone to know. This is common in sexual harassment situations even though the worker has done nothing wrong.

✦ **Ignorance.** The worker doesn't realize that what happened is unjust, or doesn't know that the union can help make things right.

✦ **Cynicism.** The worker doesn't believe that the union can do anything.

Secondly, it's important to understand that the union – not the individual aggrieved worker – "owns" the grievance. Because the union bargains collectively for all the workers in the unit, it must take the action which best protects the interest of everyone. An injustice affecting one worker, left unchecked because the worker does not want to file a grievance, could potentially harm others because management likely will repeat it.

Managers sometimes make stewards think that they can't encourage workers to file grievances or that a grievance can't be filed without the signature of the aggrieved worker. But a steward's right to solicit grievances and to file a grievance on behalf of the union are protected activities under Labour Board rulings.

## What to Do

Here are some suggestions for handling these situations:

✦ Talk with the worker and find out what happened and why he or she is reluctant to file a grievance.

✦ Use that opportunity to reassure the worker that he or she is not alone. Educate workers about their rights. For example, it is an unfair labour practice for a boss to threaten or retaliate against a worker for filing a grievance. Also explain that it is the union's responsibility to protect those rights for all the unit's workers. The union can only be effective with everyone's participation.

✦ Explain – particularly to the cynic – your union's record on solving workplace problems. The more participation, the more

pressure on management to stay in line.

✦ Explain that if the union just stands by and lets management get away with the grievance, the worker likely will be targeted again, and the boss will feel free to target other workers too.

✦ Surely other workers have felt reluctant in the past to file grievances. Have them relate their experiences to the worker.

✦ If the worker won't budge, determine if there's a better way to solve his or her problem other than filing a formal grievance. But if filing a grievance turns out to be the best strategy, inform the worker of that decision.

✦ Get the entire unit to sign a grievance as a way to both reassure the worker and drive home the message that participating in your union means you are never alone.

Stewards who involve members in union activities that make the union visible and deal with workplace issues in creative and fun ways are more likely to create an environment where workers will come forward if they are treated unjustly.

*Taken from Steward Update Newsletter*

**Don't let one  
worker's fear  
weaken other  
workers' rights.**

# Ten Biggest Mistakes A Steward Can Make

A good steward is many things – an organizer, a negotiator, a counsellor, a peacemaker and a troublemaker. But there are certain things that a steward must avoid at all costs.

## **Mistake one – Fail to represent fairly**

Not only does this leave the union open to being sued for breaching its duty to provide fair representation, it's just not the right thing to do. It undermines the whole purpose of the union and the very idea of solidarity.

## **Mistake two – Make backroom deals**

Management is notorious for trying to get stewards to trade grievances. "I'll let you have this case if you drop the one we talked about yesterday." Every member deserves a fair shake and every grievance needs to be evaluated on its own merit. Never agree to anything you would be uncomfortable telling your entire membership about.

## **Mistake three – Promise remedies too quickly**

You're hurting both the member and your credibility if you pass judgement on a grievance prior to a thorough investigation. Only after you have spoken to the grievor and witnesses and consulted the contract, the employer's rules and past practices are you in a position to make that determination. Given the frequency of poor and mixed

arbitration decisions, no steward should ever promise victory.

## **Mistake four – Fail to speak with new workers**

The most important way a union gains the support of a new member or a potential new member is by one-on-one contact with the steward. You not only want to provide new workers with information, but need to build a personal relationship and begin to get them involved in union activities from their first day on the job.

## **Mistake five – Fail to adhere to time lines**

Even the strongest, iron-clad case can be lost if the time line specified in your contract isn't followed. Even if management agrees to an extension, it is not in the union's interest to let problems fester and grow. If you do get a formal extension of time limits, be sure to get it in writing.

## **Mistake six – Let grievance go unfiled**

Every grievance that goes unfiled undermines the contract you struggled so hard to win. While most members see changes and problems only in terms of the impact on them, the steward needs to be able to understand a grievance's impact on the contract and the union as a whole.

## **Mistake seven – Meet with management alone**

When you meet with management alone, suspicions may arise as to what kinds of deals you're making. It also allows management to lie or change its story. More importantly, when the steward meets with management alone, it takes away an opportunity for members to participate in the union and to understand that it's really their organization.

## **Mistake eight – Fail to get settlements in writing**

Just as you should protect yourself by not meeting alone with management, be sure to get grievance settlements in writing. Putting the settlement in writing helps clarify the issues and keeps management from backing down on their deal.

## **Mistake nine – Fail to publicize victories**

Publicizing each and every victory is an important way to build your local union. This publicity not only has a chilling effect on the employer, but helps educate your own members on their contractual rights. It also gives you something to celebrate and builds the courage needed to carry on.

## **Mistake ten – Fail to organize**

Stewards are much more than grievance handlers. They are the key people in the local who mobilize the membership, and they must be talkin' union and fightin' union all the time. Each and every grievance and incident must be looked at in terms of how it can increase participation, build the union, and create new leaders.