

Steward News...

A PUBLICATION FOR CUPE ACTIVISTS IN ALBERTA

Volume 4, Number 1

Stewards are the CUPE's frontline.

Stewards help members deal with workplace problems. Stewards play many roles: grievance handlers, organizers, educators, leaders and communicators.



To be an Effective Steward:

Members must come to you with their problems

Members must know who you are and how you can help solve problems

You must know your collective agreement and enforce it

You must be able to involve members in union activities

You must be able to handle grievances

Stewards...
AS UNION REPRESENTATIVES,
KEEPERS OF THE
COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT
AND
GRIEVANCE HANDLERS



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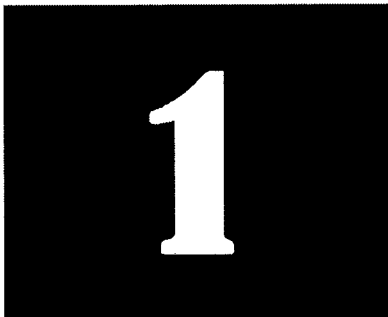


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Stewards are Union Representatives

For most workers, the steward is their first contact within their union. The steward is often the only union "official" that members ever talk to. As a union representative, you will need to make sure that your co-workers understand their union and their role in it.



As union stewards –

- Make sure all members you represent have a copy of the current collective agreement
- Approach new workers right away and welcome them to the workplace and to the union – be ready to answer their questions
- Know your local's collective agreement, by-laws and the CUPE constitution so you will know where to find answers to questions about the running of your union
- Learn the basic structure of your union and how dues are determined
- Keep up with what is going on in your union
- Attend meetings, talk to other stewards and schedule regular stewards meetings in your local
- Pass on complaints about the union and about any barriers to union activity to your executive
- Remind members to attend meetings – encourage them to get involved in your local union's activities

Stewards are Keepers of the Collective Agreement

Your collective agreement is what separates union workers from non-union workers. The terms and conditions of your collective agreement form a contract between your union and the employer. As stewards you must make sure the employer follows the collective agreement they agreed to when they signed the contract.

To enforce your collective agreement, you need to:

- Know what's in it
- Keep a copy on hand
- Know where to find answers to questions
- Keep current with how the contract is being interpreted in light of grievances
- Encourage your members to study the agreement so they will recognize a violation and be able to report it to you
- Don't let any violation of the collective agreement go unnoticed
- Be persistent in seeing that violations are corrected

Being an effective steward means that you actively enforce your contract. Watch to see that the employer is not taking action that might weaken your union at some future time. In addition, you need to be prepared to file grievances if you see that management is violating the collective agreement.



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Stewards as Grievance Handlers

Grievances are the most common method used by stewards to resolve problems when informal methods fail.

Stewards, as representatives of the union, play an important role in the grievance procedure.

Definition:



The word "grievance" is usually defined in your collective agreement. A simple definition of a grievance is a "violation of one or more provisions of the collective agreement".

Grievance Procedure

Every collective agreement has a grievance procedure. The Labour Relations Code, Section 135 says "Every collective agreement shall contain a method for the settlement of differences arising between the parties to or persons bound by the collective agreement". Every grievance procedure is unique to the collective agreement so study your grievance procedure very carefully.

Your union "owns" the grievance procedure and only your union decides which grievances will go to arbitration. With this right comes the duty to fairly represent everyone covered under the collective agreement. This means the union or any of its representatives are not to act towards a member in a manner that is arbitrary, discriminatory or in bad faith. Every member is given equal access to the grievance procedure.

Time Limits



Almost every collective agreement specifies the maximum time that can elapse between when an incident occurs and a grievance can be submitted to management.

If you submit a grievance after that deadline, your employer is usually not obliged to deal with the issues. When you find out about an incident, always note the number of days you have to submit a grievance.

Never miss a deadline for submitting a grievance because you are trying to resolve the issues by other means.

If you do miss a deadline, submit the grievance anyway. It will be up to an arbitrator to decide if the grievance can be dismissed because of a missed deadline.

Investigating Grievances



In conducting a thorough investigation, stewards should interview all witnesses, ask for relevant information from the employer, and review the contract to see what violations occurred.

Every interview has an introduction, a body and an ending.

Introduction:

- establish a relationship with the member
- outline the purpose of the interview and inform the member of the process

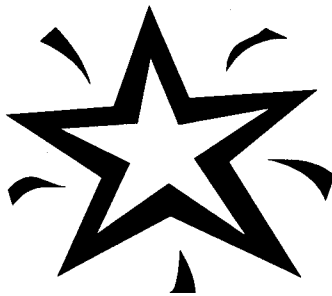
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Body:

- establish and confirm the facts
- clarify and discuss options
- probe for further information



In this stage, use the 6W's

- **Who** was involved – Who are witnesses to what happened?
- **What** happened – What are those affected prepared to do?
- **Where** did it happen?
- **When** did it happen?
- **Why** is this incident a grievance?
- What do those affected **want** done?

Take good notes. Ask the member to repeat what they said if necessary.

Don't volunteer information unless it is to get the member going or to get the interview back on track – follow the **80/20 rule** – **listen 80%** of the time and **talk 20%** of the time

Obtain all the information needed before ending the interview – if necessary review your notes with the member.

CUPE has developed a fact sheet to help with interviews. By answering the questions on the fact sheet, you will have a written record of your investigation. These forms are available from your local union or your CUPE National Representative.

Ensure **confidentiality** and store your notes securely.

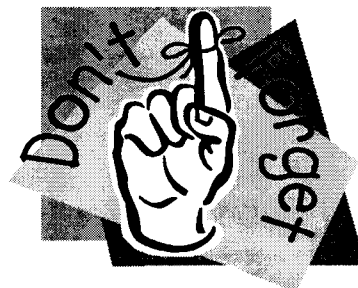
Conclusion: Close the interview by:

- summarizing key points
- answer member's questions
- explain follow up
- thank the member



Be prepared. Before you speak to the manager. Write up the facts clearly and concisely. This is not just the notes you took while investigating but is an organized summary of all the facts you have collected.

No grievance is easy to handle. If you are unsure about how to proceed, get advice from other stewards, your local union executive or your National Representative.



Union Education for Stewards:

Here are a few examples of workshops for stewards:

- Effective Stewarding
- Advanced Stewarding
- Conflict Resolution
- Face-to-Face Communication
- Facing Management

Contact your National Representative
or
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