



STEWARDS CORNER

Monthly Newsletter for Union Stewards

What Makes A Leader?

by Fred Redmond, USW Vice President for Human Affairs

Stewards are labor leaders. You are problem solvers, communicators, educators, organizers, and grievance handlers. You have one of the toughest and most important jobs in the union.

Through my work with the union, I have met some remarkable leaders and been taught valuable lessons about leadership.

I began working at Reynolds Aluminum in 1973 and immediately became active with Local 3911. I knew the value of the union...it had already changed my life... and I knew I had to do my part. You see, my father got a union job in the early 1960s and it transformed everything. His union negotiated health insurance, so now we could see a doctor when we got sick instead of having to go to a free clinic; because of the union, my parents could put more food on our table and even buy a car. So many families like mine experienced positive changes in their material well-being because of the labor movement's accomplishments at the bargaining table and in the community.

A solid group of leaders led Local 3911, including civil rights activist Rayfield Mooty. They taught me about the importance of good shop-floor representation and following up with members who came to me with concerns. A few years later, I attended a class in local union leadership where I learned something that's inspired me from my very first term as grievance committee member to today. The teacher was Ray Pasnick, a longtime educator and organizer in the USWA. He grew up in a Steelworker family and worked hard to mentor young local union leaders.

I want to share with you what Ray taught and what I have tried to practice because developing these qualities will help you be successful and stay the course:

- A leader is **tough**: leaders have to be tough to fight for people who don't have the knowledge or ability to stand up for themselves. Be persistent, consistent, and insistent. When you are acting as a union representative, remember

that you are equal to your employer and should expect nothing less than their respect.

- A leader is **tender**: people are going to approach you at difficult and stressful moments in their lives. As Ray Pasnick told my class, "you've got to feel the hurt." Just listening to someone can make a big difference. A little empathy goes a long way and people won't forget it.
- A leader is **human**: stewards are problem-solvers and that involves an element of risk. Find a mentor to seek advice from or bounce ideas off someone whose counsel you respect, but don't be afraid to follow your head, your heart, and your gut.
- A leader is **humble**: good leaders learn from their mistakes and what went wrong. Failure isn't something we like to talk about, but we lose an opportunity to learn if we don't reflect on it. Own your mistakes and move on.
- A leader is **resilient**: don't let setbacks get you down and keep on moving. You're going to have tough days, but every victory and every time a member says "thank you" will make it all worthwhile.

Stewards can make all the difference in how members feel about their union. It's not the title that matters, it's how you do the job. If you're tough but tender, human, humble and resilient you will earn the respect of your members and management counterparts.

Thank you for what you do. Now go build the union!



Fred Redmond, USW Vice President for Human Affairs and currently also serving as the Secretary-Treasurer of the AFL-CIO.

Building the Union: Mentoring New Stewards

As a leader and steward in your workplace, your job is to identify and mentor new stewards; but, recruiting members to serve as stewards can be one of the most challenging tasks in union-building. How can you know if the person volunteering is the right individual for the job? Are they a natural leader? Do they have a unique set of skills? Do they have the right motivations? Can you find individuals that are representative of your entire membership--job classifications, age, race, gender? Choosing the right person is both about them and their ability to help all members feel they have a voice in the union.

All prospective candidates, those that volunteer and those coaxed into the role, need to feel that they are up to the task. One way we can help with this is to mentor, offer resources, and give support to help them grow into their new role. Ask yourself: What concerns did you have when you first became active in your local union? What do you wish others had told you? (Other than don't do it!) What was the best piece of advice you ever got? It's a big step for a member to take on this role, so a bit of help goes a long way. Here are a few basic resources and bits of advice that can help on the journey:

- 1. Make sure prospective candidates receive basic steward training before starting in their new roles.** The USW Education department has an [Online Basic Stewards Course \(education.usw.org\)](https://education.usw.org) available that allows stewards to learn the basics of representing their members. If you are interested in steward education for your local union, talk to your President or Staff Representative about available classes in your District.
- 2. Provide the tools for them to do the job.** Provide each new steward a binder, current CBA, copy of the USW Constitution and bylaws, calendar, notepads, and pens. A carpenter needs the necessary tools to build a house, and our stewards need the tools to do their job as well. Your Local could consider offering copies of The Steward's Handbook.
- 3. Follow up frequently and listen to their concerns.** Meet with the new steward regularly. This allows you to give guidance and for each of you to share your experiences.
- 4. Be supportive.** This goes hand in hand with the previous bullet point, but being supportive means showing empathy. These are difficult jobs; a pat on the back and telling someone "good job" can make a big difference to a new steward. If they make a mistake, help them learn from it and don't let it discourage them.
- 5. Have stewards-only meetings.** Stewards learn the most from each other. Organizing regular stewards-only meetings creates a space for other stewards to share their knowledge and experiences in a group setting. Plus, it makes it harder for the Company to divide the Union if we are all on the same page and ready to confront them.
- 6. Distribute educational materials, new arbitration awards, and precedent-setting grievance settlements.** Stewards need to know what is going on to do their jobs effectively. Nothing will frustrate a person more than to find out they are giving out wrong information because they were not notified of a recent settlement or award. This is an excellent way to lose good people.
- 7. As they grow into the job, ask them to join a committee.** Many of our great Union leaders started as Stewards, and as they gained more experience, they took on more roles and responsibilities. Serving on committees in addition to the Steward job allows them to grow and learn different aspects of the Union.

And remember that as a mentor, you will likely learn much from those you are mentoring. So be ready to be open to those lessons. Working together makes us all better.

We are not just filling an empty Stewards position; we are building a stronger Union. Our role as leaders is to make sure that happens and that the future of the Union will continue to grow after we have stepped down or retired from our positions.

Online Education Opportunities

11/2/21: Roles of Union Stewards ([11 AM EST](#)) ([8 PM EST](#))

11/9/21: Duties of Union Officers ([11 AM EST](#)) ([8 PM EST](#))

11/16/21: New Hire Orientation ([11 AM EST](#)) ([8 PM EST](#))

12/7/21: Legal Rights and Responsibilities of Union Stewards ([11 AM EST](#)) ([8 PM EST](#))

12/14/21: Building Local Union Committees ([11 AM EST](#)) ([8 PM EST](#))

- All classes are held at **11 AM (EST)** and **8 PM (EST)**.
- Click on the time slot that you can attend to register for the classes you want to take.
- **All classes' times are in Eastern Standard Time**
- Steward Training Classes are on the 1st Tuesday of every month.
- All Classes are being held via Zoom.
- Classes are 1 hour 30 minute sessions.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO GET MORE INFORMATION
<http://education.usw.org/blog/nov-dec-21>

