



# STEWARDS' CORNER

Monthly Newsletter for Union Stewards & Workplace Leaders

Welcome to the *Stewards' Corner*, a monthly publication of the USW Department of Education and Membership Development. Each issue of the *Stewards' Corner* will provide information about the rights, roles, and responsibilities of USW stewards and grievors and, more generally, on how to build the Union.

Stewards are the first line of defense for our members, our rights, and our collective bargaining agreements. You teach members why they

are the union and that solidarity is more than a bumper sticker—it's a way of life. Stewards have always been, and always will be, essential to the USW and our proud tradition of strength and unity for all workers.

In that spirit, please share this newsletter with the stewards, grievors, and anyone else in your Local Union who represents members. Smarter is stronger.

## ROLES OF THE STEWARD

*You Wear a Lot of Hats*

In a basic sense, a steward is a person entrusted with the care and upkeep of something like an estate or item of property; if left unattended, problems start to fester. This is why stewards are so important: they are responsible for the care, support, and representation of their fellow workers. These values are in our DNA. At the founding convention of the United Steelworkers in 1942 delegates approved a set of principles that still guide our mission as a Union:

*To unite in one organization, regardless of creed, color or nationality, all workmen and working women eligible for membership.*

*To increase the wages, and improve the conditions of employment of our members by legislation, joint agreements or other legitimate means.*

Since then, stewards have been indispensable in carrying out this mandate in workplaces throughout Canada and the United States, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Today, the jargon varies in each Local Union. The USW Constitution



"Stewards can make a huge difference in our members' lives. You might help save someone's job. There might be days when members come to you when they are just having a bad day and you listen to them. Whatever it is, helping someone out can be a game-changer for that person."

—Brandi Sanders, Local 13-1, Treasurer

refers to "grievance or other committee members or stewards" in Article IX, Section 6. However, many Local Unions use "shop steward" to designate this role. Whatever the title, though, the tasks and duties are usually the same. Stewards are communicators, educators, organizers, problem solvers, and grievance handlers. The steward is the face of the Union on the shop floor. How you listen to and follow-up on members' concerns will influence the extent to which they identify with the Union. In turn, an employer's willingness to settle issues has a lot to do with how much they think members support their Steward and Union.

The first few issues of the *Stewards' Corner* will cover these responsibilities in more detail, beginning with the steward as a communicator, educator, and organizer. Let's get started! ⇨



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## The Steward as a Communicator—Listening as an Act of Solidarity

"Where does the Union's strength come from?" Member solidarity...and stewards are the glue that build and bind it together.

Every time you listen to a member or educate them about the union you are building the foundation of that power.

Of course, you are supposed to speak up for members but being an effective and active listener is equally important. There's a reason we have two ears and one mouth.

Active Listening lets members know that you care about them and their concerns. These skills are not difficult to develop but take focus and energy. Here are some tips:

### Try to have conversations where there are not distractions and when you have adequate time.

- Can you have these conversations on worktime?
- Where and when can you meet with the member if you cannot talk to them when they approach you?



### Ask follow-up questions and paraphrase what the speaker is telling you.

- Ask the member specific questions to get the details of their concern or issue
- Restate what they have said to you to make sure you are appropriately hearing them
- You don't have to agree with a member to listen. People want to be heard.

### Pay attention to your member's body language, facial expressions and temperament.

### Take notes.

- Carry a small steward notebook with you
- What happened? When? Where? Who was there? What is the member asking for?

### Set a time to follow-up, if appropriate.

- At the end of the conversation, if you have not been able to address the members concern, let them know when you will get back to them.
- GET BACK TO THEM!

Communication is the most fundamental tool in the stewards "toolbox." Active listening and showing empathy to your members creates trust and credibility. When members know you care about them, they are more likely to come to you instead of management—turning problem solving into a collective effort. 📣



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