



STEWARDS CORNER

Monthly Newsletter for Union Stewards

Setting & Meeting Goals

Last month's *Stewards Corner* presented tips on how to create a profile/map of your bargaining unit to use for internal organizing to build participation and power. Whether you're in a large unit or a small one, 'closing the ranks' is a lot of work, but it's worth the effort. Our members feel more engaged and empowered when they are in regular communication with their Local Union, and companies know how active our members are willing to be. Both our actual power—and our employers' perception of our power—impact our ability to organize in our communities, to negotiate strong contracts, and effectively settle grievances.

In addition to building a complete and honest profile of your membership, you need to be clear what you're asking people to do!

A good strategy for setting goals is using the **SMART** criteria. Have you ever brainstormed ideas in meetings but, in the end, had no sense on how to "get the ball rolling"? Let's explore how to apply **SMART** goals for internal organizing, but keep in mind that this technique can apply to most situations.

A SMART Goal Is

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Relevant
- Time-bound

Specific goals are more likely to be accomplished than general ones. Answering the six "W" questions can help you set a specific goal.

- **Who** is involved?
- **What** do we want to accomplish?
- **Where** does this need to happen?
- **When** does it need to take place?
- **Which** resources do we need?
- **Why** do we want this?

In terms of internal organizing, consider these two goals – "increase bargaining unit membership" and "sign up 10 non-members in the extrusion department within the next month." The first one is, of course, a good goal, but it's vague. The second sets a specific number (10) and includes a timeframe (the next month).

Measurable goals set concrete criteria that you can use to assess your progress. Questions like "how much?" and "how

many" can help you stay on track and determine how much time and effort you need to carry something out. For internal organizing, this is where lists come in handy. Suppose your goal is to make sure every member on your shift has a Weingarten card and is aware of their right to representation. With every conversation you can date when it happened and scratch a name off.

Attainable goals will challenge you but they are still possible. This step helps you prioritize what is most important to you with the resources that are available. "Resources" doesn't just refer to material items or money – it's about your initiative, skills, and ability to recover from setbacks. Also, ask yourself whether your goal is *within your power* or if someone else is calling the shots. With regard to internal organizing, getting every member of your 400 member Local Union to attend the next union meeting probably isn't attainable – people have busy lives and travel long commutes to and from the meeting space. It's attainable, though, for a steward to ask all of the members on their shift if they have any questions or concerns to bring up at the next union meeting and then to report back to them any developments and news from the meeting.

Relevant goals are ones that tie into the big picture of what you are trying to accomplish as a local or unit. Is the goal you are considering clearly tied to your "why"? We too often expend resources that don't help us meet our long term goals. Suppose you want to reach out to new hires in the shipping department and you have the flexibility to get down there and talk with them. After your first visit, though, you realize that most of the new hires speak Tagalog and have a limited understanding of English. Your next step, then, will be to find someone who speaks both languages and is willing to talk union with the new hires.

Time-bound or **Timely** goals have target dates. A big reason goals aren't met is because there's no follow-up and no sense of urgency. *What can you do by the end of this week? What can you do by the end of this month?* Establishing a goal within a timeframe requires you to start working on it. For internal organizing, "talk to all 12 new hires" is a broad goal and there's no time frame tied to it. If you think along the lines of "talk to all 12 new hires within their first 30 days on the job" then you know what you have to do and when it needs to be done.

Setting goals is fundamental to the work of the union and the role of the steward. Instead of just reacting to problems created by the employer, goals can help us establish our priorities for bargaining, representing members, and doing the work of the union. Between work and family responsibilities, though, it's easy to get distracted. SMART goals can help you stay on track.



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Representing Members: Sleeping versus Dozing

It's 2:00 am on the midnight shift. Kylie, a maintenance electrician and mother of two young children, is struggling to stay awake. Both kids were home for the day from school due to illness, and she didn't get any sleep. Kylie slams Red Bull to stay on her toes, but she closes her eyes and puts her head down in the break room for just a minute. An hour later, Kylie's supervisor rouses her from sleep and demands that she come to the shift superintendent's office with him. You are called in to represent her. During the investigatory meeting, remember the rights afforded to you and Kylie by the [Weingarten](#) decision.

Once you start your investigation, how can you advocate for Kylie?

First, context matters when it comes to dealing with disciplinary cases that involve sleeping on the job. Generally speaking, cases involving sleeping on the job fall into two categories: sleeping and dozing. Sleeping or "nesting" is when a worker deliberately finds a place to sleep; "dozing" is reserved for cases when an employee inadvertently falls asleep. Dozing off falls into a lesser category of discipline in which arbitrators will look at the underlying reasons for the employee yielding to sleep. Arbitrators will also consider whether the employee has been disciplined before for sleeping and whether the employee falling asleep created a hazardous situation. If the answer to either of those questions is "yes," the arbitrator is more likely to rule with the Company.

The most serious of sleeping infractions, "nesting," involves an employee creating an environment for the intention of sleeping on the job (think of the *Seinfeld* episode in which George Costanza naps under his desk with a blanket, pillow, and an alarm clock). In one real-life case, a maintenance worker who had been moonlighting on the job was found asleep on a blanket in a remote section of the plant, with his shoes off and an alarm clock set to go off before the end of the shift. As you can guess, an arbitrator upheld the discharge.

If you are investigating a situation where an employee is facing discipline for falling asleep at work, you should investigate whether mitigating circumstances might come into play, particularly:

1. Was the member ill or tired for a good reason?
2. Does the member have a condition affecting their ability to sleep?
3. Was the employee on a rest break?
4. Was the member's lack of sleep due to their "whooping" it up while off duty?

When representing a member or handling a grievance involving someone sleeping at work, we must examine the issue from the principles of "just cause." Mitigating factors are very important to arbitrators. For example, an arbitrator will likely have more sympathy for an employee who is ill or going through a difficult time than the employee who was "whooping" it up or has been disciplined before.

Other issues that arbitrators will review are:

- ▶ Does the employer have a rule or policy for sleeping on the job, and does that employer strictly enforce the rule?
- ▶ Does the employer have convincing evidence of the employee sleeping on the job?

Once again, the principles of just cause come into play here. Accordingly, arbitrators will give them due consideration.

Let's examine the case study of our member, Kylie. Assuming that this is a first offense and Kylie has a good work history, we should be successful in arguing for leniency. She has a compelling reason to be exhausted. She was on her rest break, and clearly, a momentary lapse should not carry the harshest penalty of termination.

In cases of sleeping, as in most disciplinary cases, the details matter. In cases of "nesting," do your best, but in other situations, look for any avenue that you can explain away the behavior. After all, we are human beings; we are not machines.



All classes are held at **11 AM (EST)** and **8 PM (EST)**

- June 6: **Just Cause** ([11 AM](#)) ([8 PM](#))
- June 13: **Administrative Officer Training, Part 2** ([11 AM](#)) ([8 PM](#))
- June 20: **Healthcare for EveryBody: A Teaching Tuesday Discussion** ([8 PM](#))
- July 11: **Roles of Union Stewards** ([11 AM](#)) ([8 PM](#))



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