



# STEWARDS CORNER

Monthly Newsletter for Union Stewards

## Stewards & Public Speaking

Nothing strikes fear in a person like the prospect of public speaking. Whether it's an audience of 30 or a crowd of 3,000, it's not easy to stand in front with everyone's eyes focusing on you. *They'll think I'm an idiot*, you tell yourself. Then your heart starts pounding, your upper back stiffens, and sweat pours out of you. Fear of public speaking is so profound that there's a clinical name for it: glossophobia. So, let's face this fear and talk about it!

Believe it or not, most people have spoken in public at one point and did fine. If you've ever stood in a circle of friends and swapped stories, you've spoken in public. If you felt comfortable in those situations, it's because you were around people you're familiar with and, more importantly, you knew the stories you shared. These are two basic principles to effective public speaking: 1) knowing what you will speak about and 2) not stressing over what people in the audience might think about you.

### Where do Stewards Speak in Public?

One of the likely places a steward will publicly speak is by reporting on grievances at their Local Union meeting. As a steward becomes more active in the union, they might wind up on the bargaining committee and speak at a parking lot rally during negotiations. At a later point, they could testify before lawmakers about the impact a piece of legislation could have on their workplace. Or they may talk to groups of new hires during the Local Union's orientation every few months.

As different as these settings are, the steward has the same role in each space: they speak as educators and talk about what they know. Of course, the volume and energy will be more intense at the rally than at the new hire orientation. However, they are still drawing from their experience and knowledge.

### How to Organize Your Talking Points

The most powerful orators in history practiced and failed before they succeeded. Walter Reuther, a famous labor leader from the 1930s to his death in 1970, used a simple yet effective method to organize his public talks. On a piece of tablet paper, he listed three categories:

1. Problems to solve (ex: grievance, bargaining, public policy)
2. People to involve (ex: union members, management, the general public)
3. Action to be taken (ex: organize a rally, make calls to lawmakers, wear union shirts to support bargaining)

If you listen to speeches by any public figures, they follow a similar arc. Start with the problem, and end with the solution that you need the audience to help bring about.

### TEN Tips for Public Speaking

1. One look/one point: look at a different person or part of the room as you make each point and then shift your view.
2. If you make a mistake, keep talking; don't apologize. Your audience might not even know you made a mistake unless you tell them.
3. Taking a pause feels really long when you're speaking, but they're only a second or two to your audience and my actually help emphasize a point.
4. Talk with your audience - don't talk to them! Ask questions: "The company always wants us on call. How do you feel about that?" This can make it a conversation instead of a one-sided lecture.
5. Anchor yourself by holding a pen or keychain: it can help channel your nervous energy. Don't let it become a distraction by clicking the pen or jingling your keys.
6. Think about what's important to your audience. Thinking about this question will help you take the pressure off of yourself.
7. Use short bullet points on note cards as a memory aid. Pre-writing a speech is a good practice, but keep in mind that looking down to read long passages affects your eye contact with the audience and sounds robotic. If you write a speech, practice it so that you can present with expression.
8. Personal stories have power and resonate with people a lot more than statistics do.
9. Think about why you're speaking upfront. One of our primary goals as union leaders is to move people to action.
10. Accept the fact that you'll be nervous, and remember that your audience wants you to succeed. Put those nerves to work and practice as much as you can.

Stewards can deliver important information and messages when they are speaking in front of groups. It's an excellent opportunity to show your leadership and build the union. Go forth and speak the truth!



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## USW Leadership Spotlight: Leeann Foster



In 1997, Leeann Foster went to work as an attorney for the United Paperworkers International Union, the same union that her dad had been a member of for 45 years. Leeann worked in the paper mills during the summer to put herself through college and law school. Like so many of us, good union jobs have allowed us and our kids to go to college. Leeann believed she had to give back to the union that gave her those opportunities, so just out of law school, she went to work for the UPIU.

In 2019, Leeann became USW International Vice President and was re-elected in 2021. Among her many roles in the union, she served as a key leader and strategist in collective bargaining in the paper sector. As head of that sector, Leeann coordinated 30 bargaining councils and oversaw bargaining in several hundred Local Unions. Leeann retired this June but found time to talk with the Stewards Corner about her insights into the roles of stewards and the importance of making manufacturing jobs accessible to women.

**SC:** *A lot of your work in the USW has involved workplaces in right-to-work states. What insights can you offer on the importance of front-line stewards and grievors in representing members and enforcing the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) in these settings?*

**LF:** When members see the language of their contract being effectuated, they see value in the Union. Front-line stewards and grievors are literally the union at work at its most basic and fundamental level. In a right-to-work-for-less state, people still must be represented even if they do not pay dues. The grievance process shows what the union brings to the table every day. It is a real-life representation of why it pays to be union. The role of the steward or griever cannot be underestimated in how we maintain a very high percentage of the workforce in right-to-work for less states – it is a key way to engage the employees in the workplace and demonstrate the value of having a union contract. Understanding the contract, communicating with those you represent and following through is absolutely critical – even if it is not the result the employee wanted it shows the union at work. Conversely, if a steward or griever fails to do these things, it creates a gap in understanding about the union that makes it easier for an employee to justify being a freeloader and puts the union in that workplace literally at risk.

**SC:** *You've also devoted a lot of time to breaking down barriers that women experience in manufacturing workplaces. Can you talk about how CBAs can help address some of those issues?*

**LF:** It is critical to survey the leadership prior to contract time and also ask women workers as part of that survey how the workplace is working for them in the key issues they face as a worker.

Language that addresses the challenges of being pregnant and working can help make working while pregnant easier; maternity leave and lactation facilities assist women workers in transitioning into being successful and thriving working mothers.

Women face a host of challenges just working in some of our facilities – from making sure that they have the personal protective equipment that fits so that not only are they comfortable, but the equipment does not create additional hazards to having adequate access to bathrooms. Bargaining labor-management health and safety committees that require at least one female member can help address these issues.

Domestic violence leave is also key not only in retaining women workers who may face domestic violence but also in attracting women workers into our workplaces by having policies in place recognizing the challenges women face in this area.

**SC:** *Do you have any anecdotes on when a steward's fundamental skills—for example, taking notes or conducting a thorough investigation of an issue—made a difference in settling a grievance or winning an arbitration?*

**LF:** As an attorney, I cannot overstate the need for good notes in any setting, especially in collective bargaining. Everyone should take notes, and caucuses should be used to review the official record for the notes with everyone's input. I had a contract language arbitration over a pension issue where every committee members' notes reflected our position, and so did the official record. It was impossible for the company to overcome that evidence that the issue was discussed and that was the intent despite the contract language being unclear on the subject.

**Vice-President Foster, Leeann, congratulations on your upcoming retirement, and thank you so very much for your dedication and service to our members, the USW, and the Union movement.**

**TEACHING  
TUESDAYS**

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

- ▶ July 11: **Roles of Union Stewards (11 AM) (8 PM)**
- ▶ August 1: **Legal Rights of Union Stewards (11AM) (8 PM)**



Scan the QR code or click the link to see our upcoming schedule of classes.

<http://usw.to/teachingtuesdays>