



STEWARDS CORNER

Monthly Newsletter for Union Stewards

Stewards as Organizers: Part One

Organizing is a job that never ends. It doesn't stop after Workers vote to form a Union, and it doesn't end once a collective bargaining agreement is ratified.

'Talking Union' is an ongoing, day-to-day task.

Stewards who approaches their work from an organizing perspective are most likely good communicators, problem-solvers, and grievance handlers. By effectively listening to what people care about, stewards can engage more members in the work of the union, and everyone is better off.

Great Stewards Build Relationships

Good organizers build deep, intentional relationships with those around them. Get to know your coworkers; learn about their families and the things they care about. This is as essential to solidarity as eggs are to omelets. Bosses thrive by dividing workers; it's the oldest play in their book. Organizers counter this division by seeking people out and finding common ground with them, so try to talk with everyone in your department, shift, work area, etc. If someone is in an isolated location, make sure that they know how to contact you or another steward.

Widely-Felt, Deeply Felt, and Winnable

What issues do your coworkers talk about? If it's an individual matter, think of ways that you can engage the person in trying to solve it. However, problems that affect more than one person are good opportunities to build the Union and give members a sense of their power.

The boss's willingness to resolve issues has a lot to do with how much they think workers support their Union.

Organizers are always on the lookout for widely-felt, deeply-felt, and winnable problems. Does something impact people across job classes, the seniority list, and in different work areas? Then it's widely-felt. Is the issue a minor annoyance, or does it insult and affect people to their core? If so, it's deeply-felt. What do the members want, and how can they show management that they want it? They organize!

Members of Local 675 in California wore Hawaiian shirts, baseball hats, and sunglasses to protest a supervisor's order that such attire was "unprofessional" for a refinery (spoiler alert: they got the supervisor reassigned; [see page 17 in USW@WORK](#)).

No Third Party – You are the Union

How do your coworkers talk about the Union? Do they feel like they are part of it? Or do they compare it to fire insurance? Hopefully, you never need it, but you should always have it. That analogy is wrong. The Union isn't a third party or service you keep on retainer: You are the Union. Stewards can influence how members answer that question. Through attentive listening, following up, and engaging members in solving problems, you will function as an organizer, and your coworkers will feel empowered because of it.



“Agreements don’t enforce themselves – that’s why we need stewards. In my Local Union stewards educated members about the contract and organized members around grievances that affected large groups of members. Mobilizing the membership is a vital part of problem-solving, protecting our rights on the job, and in all other aspects of our Union.”

Cathy Drummond, Assistant to the Director, District 11



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Build Strength By Organizing Around Grievances and Workplace Issues

We say that the Union's strength is in our members, but are we using that muscle? This article sheds light on how stewards can tap that power when dealing with grievances and workplace issues.

Let's say that a clause in a collective bargaining agreement says that "supervisors shall not perform bargaining unit work unless it's an emergency." However, there was a layoff recently, but instead of recalling Union members, supervisors continue to perform bargaining unit work. How could a Union mobilize around a grievance to show the Company that this is unacceptable?

Bosses are always assessing the Union's solidarity; show our power

The first step could be as simple as having every department member sign a petition and attach it to the grievance. This shows management that it's not only the steward who is sick and tired of management violating the collective bargaining agreement, but all of the members in the workplace.

This tactic educates the members on how the grievance process works and engages them in problem-solving.

Most importantly, if the Union reaches a good settlement, then the members share in that victory. Not every issue is right for this tactic; good organizers are always on the lookout for solid cases that the members will rally around.

Other effective techniques that show solidarity are stickers, buttons, and t-shirts about specific issues. Asking members to come up with slogans is also a good way to build the Union and engage them in problem solving.

Finally, share and promote the Union's victories. When a Union is successful, it should celebrate with its members. Draw attention to what we can achieve when everyone works together as a Union.

If you have Union victories, we want to know about them! Please share them with us so we can share them with others. Your success may help another Local Union have one too.

Send your Union victories to education@usw.org.

Resources for the Steward

There are many different steward roles and a variety of things that stewards should know, but nobody can know it all. Being a good steward means that you know when you need help and what resources are available.

If you have a question about an issue that you are not sure about, reach out to your Local Union President or a member of the

Grievance Committee. If needed, they can reach out to the District Staff Representative. Your Staff Representative can help guide the Union based on their experience and expertise.

As you grow as a steward, you will develop your toolbox to include items such as the collective bargaining agreement, previous settlements, governmental websites,

and educational resources that will help guide your future decision-making.

We hope over time that these newsletters will become part of your toolkit as well. If you have any questions about the content in these newsletters, please email education@usw.org.



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