



# STEWARDS CORNER

Monthly Newsletter for Union Stewards

## Stewards as Educators

“Working union” is a life-changing experience for people who’ve never worked under a collective bargaining agreement. Their wages, benefits, and working conditions are better and in writing, and they are members of a Union that represents their rights and interests on the job. However, it’s not always clear how everything works.

That’s where your role as an educator comes in.

### You’re a Steward of Information

Think of yourself as someone who has access to information and can explain it. You don’t have to be an expert, but you need to know where to look for answers.

Members may be reluctant to approach you with questions, so go to them! Stay in regular contact with the members in your department or shift and over time they’ll become more comfortable with asking you for help.

When there are issues you don’t have answers to, tell the member you need time to find one and tell them when you will get back to them. It’s also a good practice to ask the member what he or she thinks about the matter; every interaction between a steward and member should be educational. And don’t forget to follow up!

### Here are some items you will want to become knowledgeable about:

- Right to representation: do the workers on your shift or work area know about their right to Union representation? In private sector workplaces these are known as “Weingarten Rights.” In public sector workplaces the name and extent of these rights vary from state to state. Check with your Local Union leadership for advice about these rights.

- Collective bargaining agreement (CBA): What are the essential parts that members should be familiar with? For example: seniority, health care, probationary period, bidding, call-in, and grievance procedures.
- Employer policies or handbook: Are there policies on attendance, social media, drugs and alcohol?
- Relevant laws: Basic knowledge of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), and state workers’ compensation laws will be useful. Future issues of the Stewards’ Corner will cover key points of these laws.
- Health and Safety: What should workers do if they have a health and safety concern?
- Union Questions: You are the face of the Union so members will ask you about the Local Union structure, meeting times and procedures, and dues, among other things. The USW Constitution and your Local Union bylaws can help with these kinds of questions.

Education is a two-way street; you will learn something new every time you handle a member’s issue or respond to a question. Always respect the members who come to you, and their questions and concerns. Having access to information and being able to teach members what it means for their jobs and paychecks will show the “union at work.”



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## Steward Skills: Note-Taking

A **pen** or **pencil** and **notepad** are tools that stewards should have available at all times. Good notes help you track issues and are the building blocks for effective grievance-handling. This is especially important when you're representing co-workers in investigatory and disciplinary meetings.

Note-taking is more than just scribbling words on paper; it's a skill that requires preparation, writing and post-writing. Here are some best practices for you to keep in mind:

- Specify the subject of the meeting, the date, and beginning and ending times. *For example:* Re: Keith Ricks attendance mtg - 6/21/20; start: 2:10 PM; end: 2:40 PM.
- At the top of your notes document who was present for the Union and for the Employer; record who and when someone leaves or joins the meeting.
- Identify yourself as the note-taker.
- Number the pages. *For example:* 1 of 10, 2 of 10.
- Use quotation marks to indicate exact quotes and use initials to indicate the speaker. These can make a big difference in grievances. *For example:* FT [Fred Taylor] "you are always late for work; we should've done something a long time ago." However,...
- ... it's difficult to write everything word for word, so try to capture the essence of what was said. *For example:* FT [Fred Taylor] absent four days in three weeks; what's going on?
- Try to write as legibly as possible. Leave space to make corrections or add additional notes after the meeting ends. Don't erase mistakes. Draw a line through them and initial your corrections so it doesn't seem as if you are altering evidence.
- If you use a computer to retype your notes keep a printed copy with your handwritten ones to confirm their authenticity.
- Make note of any props, documents, schedules, letters, policies, etc. that are cited or produced as evidence and who did it.
- if u use lot abbr thy mght nt mke sens latr & oths cnt rd thm...so make sure your notes are legible and make sense to you and others who might need them if the issues escalates into a grievance or goes to arbitration.



**"My go-to people in every situation, whether preparing for bargaining or arbitration, are the stewards. They are the bedrock of every Local Union that serve as guardians of our collective bargaining agreements and people who members can go to for advice." —Luis Mendoza, Chairman of National Paper Bargaining**



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