



STEWARDS CORNER

Monthly Newsletter for Union Stewards

The USW Convention at a Glance

This month the USW is holding its Constitutional Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada. Members elected by their Locals are coming together from all across the union to set our future direction.

Since 1942 the International Convention has served as the highest decision-making body in the United Steelworkers. Our Convention is an important part of our democratic, member-driven union. At these events, members debate, discuss, and vote on resolutions that determine the direction and policy of their respective organizations. As the convention begins this week, Locals from across the union have already submitted resolutions that range from organizing, collective bargaining, and health and safety to a broad range of issues promoting workers' rights, building legislative strength, and expanding our educational program. Resolutions are measured against the core principles our Union adopted at its founding convention eighty years ago, which include:

1. *To unite in this industrial union, regardless of race, creed, color or nationality, all workers and workmen and working women eligible for membership...*
2. *To establish through collective bargaining adequate wage standards, shorter hours of work and improvements in the conditions of employment...*
3. *To secure legislation safeguarding the economic security and social welfare of the workers in the industry to protect and extend our democratic rights and civil liberties and thus to perpetuate the cherished traditions of our democracy.*

As Local Union officers, grievors, and stewards, you daily play key roles in carrying out convention resolutions. At the most basic level, as stewards, you enforce our collective bargaining agreements (CBA) and represent your coworkers before management. Good stewards who do this work make a difference in how members feel about and identify with their Local Unions.

But Convention reminds us of other key roles you play:

Educator and Communicator:

As officers, grievors, and stewards you can also educate your coworkers about the resolutions that pass at convention and why they are essential to the work of the Union. Perhaps as importantly, you can remind our members that their representatives at convention set the course of the union by voting on resolutions. Afterall, this is EVERYBODY's UNION! And every member should feel like they have a voice in what

happens. Of course, you may also need to spend some time explaining why things may not have gone the way they wanted!

Organizer and Mentor:

The International Convention is also an occasion to rededicate ourselves to building the Union. This work takes a lot of time and energy, and members hired into USW-represented workplaces between the 1970s and 1990s are retiring. They have earned their stripes and are off to well-deserved retirements. The flip side is that they are taking an incredible amount of experience and knowledge with them. Good leaders teach those who will follow in their footsteps, so if you have a lot of time under your belt, start thinking about whom you can mentor, and if you're starting out, look for someone to help you along.

You are also likely leaders in your community. Do you know others that would like to have the same protections and voice that we have? Reach out and invite them in; talk to your staff rep about organizing opportunities. The labor movement is seeing a surge in organizing: Starbucks, Amazon, Education, Health Care. Our own union organized thousands of new members last year. Let's work together to grow our strength, create better futures for our children, and build more vibrant communities.

Resources to Support You

What do you need to effectively represent your coworkers and carry out your roles as a steward? Do you want to learn more about your rights in representing members in investigatory interviews or how to talk with new hires about the Union?

Our website, <https://education.usw.org/>, is a good place for new stewards to learn the basics and for seasoned veterans to brush up on things they learned long ago. Currently, this platform offers classes for **Union Stewards, How to Write Grievances, Local Union Officers, and an Introduction to Drafting and Interpreting Contract Language**. The classes are accessible to all members in good standing, and you can take them on your own time and at your own pace.

The Department of Education and Membership Development also offers standing classes called **Teaching Tuesdays** (see the link below). These courses are held from 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM (EST) and 8:00 PM – 9:30 PM (EST) on Tuesdays via Zoom. The topics vary, but the class will be on Steward skills on the first Tuesday of every month. Members from across the Union participate in these calls, which is a great way to learn with and from your Union siblings. In addition, if you would like to hold an in-person training for your Local Union, please contact your Staff Representative to discuss your educational needs.



To get future newsletters in your email use the QR code or go to: www.usw.org/StewardsCorner

Take the time to check out our free USW courses on-line at: education.usw.org



How to Explore Grievance Settlements

In past newsletters, we have written a lot about grievances: how to write them, the types of grievances, and investigating them. In this article, we are going to discuss the best practices when it comes to exploring settlements.

The grievance process is designed to resolve grievances at the lowest possible level. Early settlement allows for the parties to find resolutions that are mutually beneficial, while in many cases not having to worry about setting precedent. Accomplishing this depends on both parties' willingness to resolve issues in this way.

We should consider every reasonable offer to resolve a grievance.

Consider reasonable offers. Settlement talks are negotiations and, like contract negotiations, often neither party gets a hundred percent of what they want. But this isn't a game of football where every yard we gain is a loss of field position for the other team. Situations that result in grievances are often very nuanced, and sometimes, there is room to reach a decent settlement that addresses both parties' concerns. Know your bottom line but try not to get locked into hardened positions. Even when Labor/Management relations are rocky, we can still get settlements that are negotiated in the best interest of the Union and to the satisfaction of our members.

Settling non-precedent versus seeking to settle with precedent

Settlements, especially settlements resolved in later steps and arbitration awards, can be citable on a precedential basis. This means that they can serve as evidence for future arbitrations to determine what constitutes a fair and reasonable settlement. Sometimes, it is in the interest of both parties to settle grievances in this way to clear up gray areas of the agreement or to codify a mutually accepted practice.

However, many grievances are settled on a non-precedent basis. This means that both parties agree to a settlement that is not admissible in future hearings or arbitrations. Typically, this is done to get the best settlement for our member(s) at that given time, without either party feeling that they gave up something. When the Union withdraws a grievance, it is a good practice to

state and write on the grievance that the "Union is withdrawing the grievance on a no-fault/non-precedent basis."

Follow up with the Grievant on all offers.

As Union Representatives, we must keep the grievant informed on what is going on with their grievance. Even if the Company makes a ridiculous offer, we should share that information with the grievant. If we take the case to arbitration and lose, those previous offers may start looking pretty good and lead the grievant to blame the Union for the loss. Always give the grievant(s) the opportunity to reject those offers.

What to consider when evaluating a settlement offer

When considering a potential settlement, consider the following questions:

- ▶ What are the potential benefits of winning and the potential costs of losing if we do not accept the settlement? Does the risk justify the reward?
- ▶ What do you think the odds of winning the case are?
Be truthful with yourself and the grievant about the strengths and weaknesses of your case.
- ▶ Does the settlement only deal with money? If so, what is a reasonable amount to settle?
- ▶ Is this issue too important to the membership to not arbitrate?

Typically, as a grievance progresses through the steps, we can get a better sense of our chances. This is the time to discuss settlement options with the grievant(s). Determining the odds of winning at arbitration is difficult, to say the least, but it is a necessary exercise.

When we settle a grievance, we retain control over the settlement; when we arbitrate, we get a resolution crafted by an outsider with little understanding of the parties involved. Thus, we should strive to reach settlements in the earliest steps possible and use arbitration only when necessary.



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

- ▶ August 9: **Contract Language Basics** [11 AM](#) | [8 PM](#)
- ▶ August 16: **Care Infrastructure** [11 AM](#) | [8 PM](#)
- ▶ September 6: **Investigating Grievances** [11 AM](#) | [8 PM](#)
- ▶ September 13: **Past Practice** [11 AM](#) | [8 PM](#)
- ▶ September 20: **Building Solidarity around Grievances** [11 AM](#) | [8 PM](#)
- ▶ October 4: **Writing Grievances and Presenting them to Management** [11 AM](#) | [8 PM](#)
- ▶ October 10: **FMLA Part 1** [11 AM](#) | [8 PM](#)
- ▶ October 18: **Developing an effective safety program** [11 AM](#) | [8 PM](#)

Scan the QR code to get more information



<http://usw.to/teachingtuesdays>