

What does a union steward do?

1. Make the Contract work. It's the steward's job to turn the contract into a living protection of our members' rights. Stewards see that the contract's provisions are honoured. They enforce it when they find violations.

2. Provide effective, democratic leadership in the workplace. Members often judge the union by their steward. That's the only union representative they see. An effective steward will promote member involvement and encourage employer respect for the union and the collective agreement.

3. Build the local union. The steward keeps in touch with the members and educates them. A well informed local is a strong local. The steward makes sure everyone he or she represents has signed a union membership card. The steward also represents OPSEU outside the workplace and looks for contacts in unorganized workplaces who might want to join OPSEU.

Tips for stewards

- Listen to your members. They are the union. Get to know new members.
- Encourage your members to attend union meetings, classes and social events.
- Tell your members about union policies, services and activities.
- Have accurate information to fight rumours and anti-union propaganda.
- Handle grievances promptly, but don't promise to win.
- Treat all members equally.
- Be politically aware; seek support for candidates who back your union issues.
- Reach out to temp workers, and newcomers to the union.
- Encourage workers of colour, young workers, workers with disabilities to be involved in the union

What does the steward have to know?

- 1.** Know your contract, and keep it handy. Every clause is important, especially your grievance procedure. Know how it works and what it can do.
- 2.** Know the seniority and job classification lists for the members you represent.
- 3.** Know your employer. Know the policies, rules, regulations and practices of your workplace.
- 4.** Know your supervisors. Know how they operate and how much power they have.
- 5.** Know the diversity of your members. Understand their concerns and issues.
- 6.** Know your local union. Attend local meetings, and know what the local is doing.
- 7.** Know labour law. Know how it affects your members and the union.
- 8.** Know what OPSEU is doing. Keep up on union activities through the OPSEU Website and union publications. Share this knowledge with your members. Know where you can get help
- 9.** Know your strengths and limitations. If you have a question, seek answers and advice from other local leaders and your OPSEU Regional Office.

What is a Grievance?

When a member comes to you with a problem, you have to decide whether it is a legitimate grievance. Ask yourself the following questions:

Does the problem involve a violation:

1. of the contract?
2. of the law?
3. of an employees rights? (unfair treatment)
4. of a past practice?

If you answer, "Yes" to any of these questions, it's a grievance.

Follow the four steps for dealing with grievances.

When dealing with a supervisor

- Know the facts and stick to them. Don't get side-tracked.
- Listen carefully. Be calm when arguing your side.
- Avoid personalities. Deal with the issues.
- If you must disagree, do so with dignity.
- Don't bluff or threaten.
- Don't horsetrade. Settle each grievance on its merits.
- Record the employer's arguments for future reference.
- Tell the grievor what happened.

Four steps to deal with a grievance

STEP 1 – GET THE FACTS.

- Listen to the people concerned.
- Write the answers to these questions:
 - Who is involved?
 - What are their classifications?
 - What happened?
 - When did it happen? (time, date)
 - Where did it happen?
 - What part of the collective agreement or Law has been violated?
 - What does the grievor want to settle the Grievance?
- Get copies of any relevant letters, memos e-mails or other documents
- Get the names of potential witnesses

STEP 2 – ADVISE THE UNIT OR CHIEF STEWARD

- Discuss the problem with the unit or chief steward in your local

STEP 3 – HELP THE GRIEVOR

- Discuss the merits of the case with the grievor.
- Help the grievor handle the first stage with the immediate supervisor.
- Help the grievor complete the grievance form. Make sure it is filed within time limits.
- Go with the grievor to any meetings under the Grievance procedure.

STEP 4 – FOLLOW THROUGH.

- Ensure that the grievor gets written replies from management on time at each stage.
- Send copies of all correspondence to your OPSEU Staff Representative.
- Tell your regional office as soon as a grievance is settled or withdrawn.

Be fair, firm and friendly.
A problem that may not be a grievance today could justify a demand at negotiations tomorrow.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Refer to notes from your steward's courses. Look in the Stewards' Toolkit. Ask your unit or chief steward, your local president or your OPSEU staff representative. They can advise you.
My unit/chief steward is:

Phone number: _____

My local union president is:

Phone number: _____

My OPSEU staff representative is:

Ontario Public Service Employees Union
100 Lesmill Road, North York, ON, M3B 3P8

OPSEU Direct – 1-800-268-7376

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