

LiUNA! LOCAL
737

Feel the Power

STEWARD'S MANUAL

LIUNA Local 737 Steward's Manual

SHOP STEWARD

Union Stewards are an essential part of any labor union. The Local can negotiate the best contract in the world, but if it is not enforced or followed it doesn't mean anything. Stewards meet with members who are having problems on the job, sometimes because of management's violation of the contract, and help them to get these problems worked out and the contract properly enforced. This can be done through the grievance process, but is also often done more informally.

Grievances should never be confused with your chief responsibility as a steward. Your chief responsibility is to build a united, organized, and involved membership in your workplace.

JOB SUMMARY

Shop Stewards have three main responsibilities: advocacy, organizing and leadership. A Steward has specialized knowledge of their worksites and the employees in their work.

Duties and Expectations

Advocacy

Know the contract: You cannot advocate for you members unless you know the contract and how it should be applied, particularly the Grievance procedure and time lines. Be prepared to suggest changes to improve the contract based on your experiences.

Know your co-workers: Stewards are the link between Local Union Staff and the members; take the time to learn about the hobbies, interests and problems of every member in your area.

Know your shop: Be familiar with all of the various jobs in your area, the chain of command, and how work in your area gets done.

Know your managers: Stewards should know their managers' personalities, their pet peeves, their communication style, and be able to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

Know how to be an effective representative: Be able to investigate issues, know how to present problems to management, know how to fill out a grievance form and who to file it with (Business Representative of Local 737). Watch for new policies and information that may have an impact on your work area, or another member's work area. Remember that you are there to represent the interests of your co-workers to management and the Union Executive Board.

Organize

Recruit new members: Talk to new hires and "Fair-share" members. Inform them about the Union and encourage them to sign membership cards. Look for people who do not have Union representation and inform them about the benefits of a Union.

Recruit new leaders: Help members become more involved with the Union. It can start by getting someone to read the newsletter or attend a meeting. Recruit members to be politically active, and contribute to the Union's Political Action Committee (PAC).

YOUR ROLE AS A STEWARD:

To build a united, organized, and involved membership in your workplace. Through communication. If your members don't know what's going on, they can't very well mobilize and they can't make decisions. As stewards, we're working for the members. That's why it's our job to keep them informed. How? Any way you can. The best way is continuing, one-on-one, face-to-face communication with every member at breaks, at lunch, and when you're working. You should also have regular meetings. Distribute the Union newsletters. Use those bulletin boards we negotiated to get (but not as a substitute for personal contact). Post notices and facility updates on your Local Web site and create group email lists as a way to keep your members informed. Do whatever it takes. Be creative.

If stewards and other leaders fail to tell the members what's going on, you'll soon find yourself in serious pain. If you've never seen a bargaining unit torn by doubts, wild rumors, resentment, bad morale, cynicism, and warring factions, take our word for it: it's ugly. Worse yet, you'll lose the accumulated experience and knowledge of your members—which is probably your greatest resource.

Some workers won't volunteer even if they have important things to say. It's up to you to reach out. As you'll see on the following pages, there are many ways the Union can solve problems other than formal grievances. It's up to the members to decide, but it's your job to suggest courses of action based on your investigations and problem-solving experience.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

- When you involve the members in solving problems or winning improvements, a lot of avenues open up. Mobilizing your members requires continuing, direct personal communication with every worker.
- If management chooses to play dumb, show unity through workplace actions.
- With member support, you have a better chance of getting your message to the news media. You might be able to generate good publicity about the Union and the work your members do. Check with your Local Union leadership before going to the media.

THE STEWARD AS EDUCATOR

As a steward, you have an opportunity to educate our members every time you come in contact with them. You will want to make sure members know enough to participate in making Union policy. That they know where the Union came from and where it is heading. Members need to know how the Union makes decisions and carries them out, what its policies are, and what the challenges are that the Union and its members are facing. Educated members support the Union when it fights for improvements and defend the Union when it is under attack.

Hone your skills and get a Union education through your Union. Use the workshops that are available from the Local or that the Local offers for you to attend.

One thing to remember is that education for our members is not what you think of as traditional teaching. Education for Union members is often action-oriented. Union members learn by sharing their experience, accomplishing tasks, analyzing and discussing what has happened.

This means it can happen any time, anywhere. Take the time to explain the Union's political program while gathering together a crew to staff phone banks one night. Or talk about worker solidarity when the members have won an important grievance fight through workplace demonstrations. Even when you lose a grievance, there can be a lesson on the importance of fighting for better language in upcoming contract negotiations.

Keep Members Informed

Keeping members informed is one of the most important parts of your job as educator. Make sure members know what the Union is doing--and make sure the Union leadership knows what the membership thinks about what the Union is doing. Letting members know when a meeting or other Union activity is taking place is an

important part of your job. Explaining the reasons for the meeting or the activity and how it fits into the overall Union program is another opportunity to be an educator.

Getting members involved in Local Union and the International's campaigns to protect workers' rights and to maintain decent standards of living in the community is also an educational activity.

Develop Leadership. The steward develops leadership by getting members to help with the work of the Union. Ask people to volunteer for Union committees or Union action programs. Take note of the useful skills people have. If someone isn't ready for a committee, give him or her a specific task--but be sure you discuss what the task means and why doing the task is good for the Union.

Recommend Training

Keep track of the kinds of grievances and concerns members bring up, and let the Local leadership know what training programs are needed. Ask the state Council or the regional staff to run health and safety programs if there are dangerous work stations or indoor air problems. The Local can also request anti-racism or anti-sexual harassment training from the International if there are complaints or if cronyism leads to favoritism on the shop floor. The Local Union offers steward training. And the International Union's Public Employee Department offers a series of classes for our public sector and non-construction members. The class descriptions can be found here: www.liuna.org/PED-academy. The Public Employee Department also offers an on-line Steward Training module and other resources on our website: www.liuna.org/documents-and-resources.

The most important educator, though, will continue to be the steward who is able to define the real educational needs of the membership in the day-to-day life of the Union, by relying on the experience of the members, taking action, and then analyzing those actions.

THE STEWARD AS POLITICAL ORGANIZER

Many of our rights and benefits are negotiated at the bargaining table and included in our contracts. Much of your role is making sure that contract is enforced at the workplace.

But nowadays our communities are bigger than they used to be, major changes happen almost overnight, and no person or organization can exist as an island. Like it or not, society is more and more interdependent all the time, and so are we.

A lot of what all workers have today (overtime pay, food and drug laws, Medicare, Social Security, health and safety regulations, even the public education system) we wouldn't have had without political action by organized labor.

As a steward, sooner or later you'll be working with coalition partners. Which, depending where you are, can be almost anybody--other Unions, civil rights and civil liberties organizations, community activists, social or charitable organizations, political coalitions, whatever it may be.

There are many rights and benefits that are determined by laws passed at the national, state, or local level. To protect our members' interests, the Union must be involved in electing candidates who will pass and enforce laws which will increase and protect our rights and benefits. That will not happen without you and our members getting involved and being informed.

Many LIUNA members are public employees, or work in positions funded through government agencies, so politics is especially important to us. When politicians cut services, everyone loses the services, but some of us lose our jobs.

Our success in building a strong political organization that stands up for our members' interests depends on you and your ability to mobilize our members. LIUNA depends on you, the steward, to get the workers involved in political and legislative action. You know the members, you see them every day at work, and you're persuasive enough to get things rolling (or you wouldn't be a steward).

Think of what you can do at your workplace or in your community that will make a difference.

Register voters

It's simple. If you aren't registered, you can't vote. Learn the procedure for voter registration in your district. Then act to make sure your members register. Better yet, recruit members to participate in a voter registration drive. GOTV (Get Out The Vote). Make phone calls, or recruit other members to participate in phone banks and other activities before an election.

Educate the members

Talk to your members (and listen) about candidates and issues. Keep them informed about the election. Become informed about LIUNA's political and legislative program that fights to reclaim America for our jobs, rights, and quality of life so you can educate and involve your members. Your role in building your Union's political and legislative power is important. It can also be rewarding and fun.

THE STEWARD AS ORGANIZER

Stewards also play a key role in recruiting new members. This is perhaps the most important thing the Union does, because the more workers the Union represents in your own sector, the more power the Union has and the better it can represent you. The more workers that are organized in an sector, the higher wages and benefits will be for all.

And it's vitally important that you succeed. Your Union will thrive only to the extent that other workers in your sector, your agency, or your geographic area are organized.

If you work in an open shop, also known as a so-called Right-to-Work job place, where workers don't have to pay dues but the Union has to represent them anyway, you'll be doing "internal" organizing. This requires convincing the free riders to join the Union. Promote members-only benefits like Union Plus.

But if you've done all the other things you've read about in this booklet--especially your role in making the Union a vital presence in the workplace--then you've already done most of the hard work. Build the Union and they will come.

But whether you have a Union shop or open shop, you're bound to get involved in outside organizing. Why? Because as a worker and leader, you have the kind of credibility no paid organizer can match.

You know the work. You know the turf. You speak the workers' language. And you can see problems and potentials that outsiders can only guess at.

In an organizing campaign, you and other member-organizers are worth your weight in gold. And the more workers you organize in your sector, the more power you will have to fight for better pay, benefits, and respect. If your Local Union finds itself an isolated island in a sea of unorganized and exploited workers, it won't be around very long.

THE STEWARD AS HEALTH & SAFETY ACTIVIST

Worksite health and safety is a crucial part of your job as a steward.

If your unit has a health and safety committee, it may be your job to help lead it. If you don't have one, start one.

The problems many LIUNA workers face are widespread, increasingly complex, and often highly technical.

Office work was once thought to be completely safe and healthy. Asbestos, radon, carpal tunnel syndrome, video display terminals, and indoor air pollution have laid that myth to rest.

That's where you come in. As a steward, you'll have an important responsibility to organize around health and safety. If you find you need help, you can get all the assistance you need from the LIUNA Health and Safety Department or its regional coordinators in your area.

Here's a "bill of rights" for workers the LIUNA Health and Safety Department finds useful:

- Workers have a right to a safe and healthy workplace. The law says the employer must provide a safe place to work. It doesn't say anything about the cost.
- Workers have a right to information about workplace hazards, Substances they are being exposed to, and injuries and illnesses (OSHA 2000 Log).
- Workers exposed to chemicals, bloodborne diseases, hazardous materials, and certain other workplace hazards have the right to training on how to protect themselves.
- Workers have the right to bring in Union health and safety specialists to help identify hazards in the workplace.
- Workers have the right to organize in order to secure protection from workplace hazards.

Management has to post the State of Oregon health and safety law posters necessary. You need to check, and make sure they are posted where members can see them and know their rights.

THE STEWARD AS RETIRED MEMBER CONNECTION

LIUNA believes in keeping members involved in the Union after they retire. The Union needs all the help it can get, and retired members are the people with the experience. They've seen it all.

If your Local Union has a retired members club, you've probably seen them in action, especially in community service, picket lines, voter registration, and get-out-the-vote drives. (Retirees are especially helpful in political and organizing campaigns.)

As the person in daily contact with the members at the worksite, you can help a lot by letting the Union know when workers are going to retire. That way, we can be sure to let them know about LIUNA's retired members program as well as honoring their service as an employee and Union member.

THE STEWARD AS COMMUNICATOR

This may be your most important role. You are the vital link between the Union and the members. It's up to you to explain to members what the Union is, what it stands for, how it works, what its goals and programs are. And it's you who listens to members to find out what they feel and want, and then carries this information back to the Union leadership.

Our studies have shown that today our members, like the general population, are reading less and less; and yet they value communication with the Union more than ever. The best way to do this is to talk to the members personally.

THE STEWARD AS ADVOCATE

There will come a time when your role will be to represent workers in a grievance. Most contracts have similar definitions for what a grievance is. In general, the employer must have violated:

1. The contract
2. Federal, state, or local law
3. The employer's own rules or policies
4. Past practice
5. Equal treatment.

If you decide the employer has committed a violation, then you must next determine which of the following categories of violation is involved:

Discipline Grievances

If the employer has imposed discipline on a worker, the burden is on the employer to prove "just cause." Just cause for discipline is a requirement in most Union contracts. Even if it isn't spelled out, most arbitrators require employers to follow progressive discipline and have just cause to discipline an employee.

All Other Grievances

If no discipline is involved, then the burden is on the Union to prove the violation has occurred. These are typically CBA violations.

These different types of violations call for different approaches. You're doing more than investigating now. You're building a case.

- Did the employer investigate properly before imposing discipline? Or did they shoot from the hip? Where did they get their information?
- Was the investigation complete? Fair?
- Was the evidence convincing? Or was the worker punished on the basis of suspicion and hearsay? Did the worker receive fair and equal treatment? Was discipline imposed without bias or discrimination?
- Did the worker have reason to know an infraction was being committed? Are workers properly instructed on workplace rules and policies? Had any warnings been given by management?
- Has the violation been permitted or overlooked in the past? Is the punishment a sudden reversal of past policy?
- Did management apply “progressive discipline”? For example:
 1. Oral warning
 2. Then a written warning
 3. Then a suspension
 4. Finally, termination

Even if there was cause for some discipline, was it excessive? Were “mitigating” circumstances (such as long service or no previous discipline) ignored?

Does the punishment fit the infraction?

Any of the questions above can be used to show the employer acted without just cause.

Thank you for being a LIUNA steward. Feel the power!

STEWARD PITFALLS

1. Going it alone

Stewards have many resources available, including fellow Stewards, Union staff, members, training materials, etc. Use them as needed!

2. Over-reliance on others

This is the flip-side of going it alone. Eventually, every Steward should be capable of handling most issues on their own, without passing the heavy lifting to other folks.

3. Failure to communicate with your member/grievant

Every time you represent a member, you have a chance to reinforce what the Union is about, and how dues are being spent. If your communication is good, you are building workplace strength. The best way to do this is follow-through (see No. 6): let the member know what you plan to do, do it, and then set them know what you've done and why.

4. Failure to communicate with your Local

Stewards are a vital link between the membership and the Union office, including staff and the Local's elected leadership. Be sure to share information in both directions.

5. Failure to communicate with Management

Good communication with managers is essential to being an effective Steward. Keeping Management informed of what it needs to know builds respect and trust. There will be times when you will need to trade on that relationship with Management in order to serve the Local.

6. Lack of follow-through: it is critical for every Steward to be reliable

Members, Union staff, managers, and others all need to know that when you say you will do something, it will happen as promised, and in a timely manner. But there is always more work than time. Experience teaches us that no matter how diligent we are, things will slip occasionally. When something does get dropped, be accountable: face up to it, apologize, and repair it as best you can. Then, move on.