

# The Steward's Job

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The steward's most important job is to solve problems, which arise at the worksite, but a union is more than "grievances and complaints" and the steward must be more than a "grievance and complaints" processor.

In carrying out your duties as a steward, you come in contact with people, workers/members, supervisors and management. In the Local, you will work with other stewards and the Local Executive. If you are involved in TWU committees and courses, you will be in contact with other TWU activists.

Here are some suggestions which will help you as a person and as a steward in all your daily contacts with people:

- **Be fair:** listening to all points of view carefully.
- **Be friendly:** prepared to listen to the members' complaints, problems and successes.
- **Be involved:** work with people on their problems.
- **Be enthusiastic:** able to involve people in the union because of your own involvement.
- **Be courageous:** knowing when to tell members they are wrong and saying so (politely); standing up to management when the union has a point to be made.
- **Be efficient and effective:** securing the facts and seeking justice in a fair manner with the least delay possible.
- **Be knowledgeable:** knowing and understanding the collective agreement, the acts and regulations, the TWU Constitution and Policies and the Local Bylaws; knowing about your union, its resources and how it works; knowing and understanding the members and supervisors as individuals.

## What You Need to Do

### Be an Organizer

- Your goal should be to get every member you deal with at the worksite to be members in good standing in the union by having them sign their membership form.
- When a new worker starts, introduce yourself and the union on the first day. Explain what the union is and how it operates. Introduce them to other members of the union. Have the new worker sign their membership form as soon as possible.
- Develop membership participation in their union by encouraging attendance at Local meetings and by encouraging the members you represent at the worksite to volunteer to sit on Local Committees. Help to establish a committee on an issue of interest and importance to some of the members.
- Know who's who at the worksite, their membership standing, their interests and their objections to the union, if any.

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## Be an Educator

- Talk about what your Local is doing and explain why they are doing it.
- Discuss union issues with the members.
- Provide the members at the worksite with union publications, such as the Transmitter, Collective Bargaining Updates, Health and Safety Newsletters and Local Bulletins.
- Inform members about upcoming seminars and union activities.
- Attend union courses yourself and share the knowledge with the members.
- Know how government policies and legislation affect you as a citizen, a taxpayer, a worker and as a union member. Share this information with your members.

Encourage participation in regional committees and various community campaigns that affect members as unionists, workers and part of the community.

## Be a Communicator

- Make sure everyone read notices on the bulletin boards and are informed about management's plans and decisions and their new policies.
- Refer members to the appropriate Local Committee or community social service agency. Know what services are provided and be ready to refer your members to the right person/ agency.
- Listen to the problems which concern your members and be prepared to listen to personal success stories. If you are interested in the members as individuals, they will be interested in you, and through you, the union.

## Be a Leader

- Talk to all the members you represent, discuss issues with them, ask for their advice.
- Don't be afraid to speak on behalf of the members in your worksite.
- Act promptly, decisively and keep your word.

## Be a Problem Solver

- You are the union representative at the worksite and, therefore, you will be the person approached by the membership when they have a problem on the job.
- It is important that complaints and grievances be handled by you, the steward, so you are aware of problems as they arise in the workplace.

As a steward, you are not expected to know all the answers immediately, but you are expected to find the answers. You learn your job through study, practice and discussion with more

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experienced stewards. You learn by reading past grievances and adjudication/arbitration cases, since it is important to know not only what the contract contains, but also how it is interpreted.

When you find the answer through discussion and reading, go back to the worksite and fight the case yourself. By doing so, you will gain the confidence and respect of your members and of management.

## What You Need to Know

1. **The Collective Agreement:** Have your own copy of your collective agreement and read it from cover to cover. Discuss the collective agreement with other stewards and officers so you know how it is interpreted. Research past grievances to find out how the clauses have been interpreted and what the precedent cases are.
2. Know management policies and directives. What bulletin boards and read all the notices.
3. **Labour Legislation:** Have a basic understanding of the labour legislation that applies to your members. Obtain your own copy of this legislation. Contact the Business Agent of your Local for technical advice and interpretation regarding relevant legislation.
4. **Present Working Conditions:** Know your work area and how things should be working. Be aware of conditions that may result in management's violation of clauses in your collective agreement, or safety regulations. Do something about it before an accident occurs.
5. **Supervisors:** Get to know your supervisors and how they manage.
6. **Members:** Talk to the members you represent and get to know them as individuals.
7. **Local Union Activities and Bylaws:** Attend Local meetings and Stewards' Committee meetings. Listen to what is being said. Know your Local Bylaws and keep your own copy.
8. **Read the union literature:** Union update, component newsletters, etc. Attend union courses and apply for advanced courses.

Now, sit back and relax. No one expects you to learn all this information today, or even tomorrow. A basic understanding of the issues at hand and with it a growing expertise as you perform your job is what is required.

## Remember

If you don't know the answer just say so. The important part is that you find the answer through asking questions yourself and that you get back to the member with the information in a reasonable period of time.

## What You Need to Have

In order to perform your job well, you will need your "tools" with you. Have a place at work where you will have ready access to:

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1. **Your Collective Agreement:** Having a general knowledge of the contract is necessary, but when answering a question about the contract, you must look at the entire article, word-by-word, its relation to other articles in the contract and its relation to the contract as a whole. Obtain your own copy of the collective agreement.
2. **Local Bylaws:** Have your own copy of the Local Bylaws under which your Local is covered and learn a basic understanding of its content.
3. **A list of the members you represent:** Their home addresses and phone numbers. It is useful to have an organizational chart of their managers and directors of the department.
4. **Membership applications:** As a union organizer, you will want to be prepared when new workers start to work in your area.
5. **Steward fact sheets, pencils and paper:** When you are approached with a request, complaint, grievance or appeal, get the information down on the Steward Fact Sheet immediately. Don't rely on your memory or the member's memory for details. Ensure that you have a good supply of the Steward Fact Sheets on hand.
6. **Grievance forms:** These are available online at the TWU website. *Time limits have a habit of running out on you before you know it.* Be prepared. If a form is not in use or is not available, *a letter or email is equally valid.*
7. **A list of your Local Executive.**
8. **A list of stewards in your Local** with their addresses and phone numbers at home and at work.