



January 2020

Stewards Are Organizers: Peoria County Workers Mobilize for Fairness

Members of AFSCME locals negotiating with Peoria County are gearing up for negotiations and they know that one key to securing a good contract is pressure on the boss. So local union leaders and stewards created a plan to both demonstrate member support in the workplace and turn out members for a county board meeting.

Local 3586 President Kevin Kennedy credited stewards with playing a key role in turning members out. The local bought polo shirts for all members, and they were distributed by the stewards. Stewards stressed the importance of visual signs of solidarity, like wearing buttons and shirts.

“Everyone was excited about the campaign, and we signed up 12 non-members who wanted to participate,” Kennedy said. Some 40 members packed the County Board meeting; the highlight of the demonstration was remarks by Steward Jill Hoover. Sister Hoover had mobilized all 14 members in her office to attend and told the board about the difficulty county workers have living on existing County wages and benefits, often having to take a second job to support their families. The demonstration had a big impact on the board as negotiations continue. Stewards are organizers!

Steward Resources: Fillable Forms

This fall Council 31 began emailing fillable forms that can be used for grievance handling to stewards who complete the Certified Steward training program. These forms are attached for the benefit of those who took the steward training class in earlier years. **(Please note that stewards in State of Illinois locals will need to secure an original grievance number (a number never used before) from their president to complete the fillable State grievance form.)**

It is also possible that your local uses its own grievance form; so please check with your president or chief steward.

Tips for Effective Stewards “Never Say “There is Nothing I Can Do”

The following reflections come from Ralph Palladino, 40-year member/steward of AFSCME Local 1549

When members come to you with problems, showing them that you care and will make a sincere effort to help them is extremely important. Even if a member doesn't have an actual grievance, you can still approach management to try to resolve the matter. Members always appreciate a sincere effort.

If the member's problem doesn't involve a violation of the contract, policies and procedures, etc., you need to find another way to help; advising them or meeting informally with management to solve their problems. You might win your argument or work out a compromise satisfactory to the member and it costs you and the member nothing to try. The point is to try. Sometimes you can learn something to help you file a grievance. Or you may learn that what the member says is not accurate and so there may be no reason to proceed.

Stewards should never tell a member “There is nothing I can do” about a problem. Even if there is no violation of the contract there is often something that can be tried to help the member. The bottom line: be as meticulous as possible and creatively deal with members' problems.

Quick Tip: What if You Don't Know the Answer to a Question?

Some stewards who don't know the answer to a question from a member are embarrassed. Some take this to an extreme and avoid the member. That simply aggravates the problem. If a member asks you a question you cannot answer you should:

- Not be embarrassed.
- Tell the member that you don't know but will look into it and get back to them.
- Consult with your chief steward, president or staff representative.
- Get back to the member.

No one expects stewards to know the answer to every problem and the longer you work as a steward the more comfortable you will become. But even in your first week, there is no reason to hide from a member because you don't have the contract memorized! Be straight with the member, do your research, and your credibility will be maintained.

Going the Extra Mile: “Politics Ain’t Beanbag”

In an 1895 newspaper column, "Mr. Dooley," a character created by the Chicago writer Finley Peter Dunne famously observes: "politics ain't bean-bag." That is as true today as it was back then and it's crucial that our union be involved in political action. Politicians make decisions about the types of services the public receives and the way the services are provided. No one wants to relive the Rauner years, with virulent attacks on collective bargaining; demands to privatize and reduce pensions; reductions in funding for local governments, universities, private sector homes for the developmentally disabled: the list goes on and on. We fight back with political endorsements, contributions and volunteers.

Stewards can play a key role in helping to mobilize support for union endorsed candidates and legislation. Mark these important dates in your calendar and be sure to coordinate your efforts with your local's president and PEOPLE chair:

- Council 31 Legislative/Endorsement Conference: **January 31- February 1**
- Primary Elections: **March 17, 2019 (early voting March 2-16)**
- Fall Council 31 Endorsement Conference: **August 28-29**
- General Election: **November 3 (early voting October 19-November 2)**

Terms You Should Know: Good Faith Bargaining

Obligation of the employer and the representative of the employees to meet at reasonable times and to negotiate in good faith over wages, hours, and other conditions of employment with the intent to reach an agreement.

Test Your Knowledge: Presenting a Grievance

True or False?

1. You cannot be disciplined for your actions when you're serving as a Steward.
2. Stewards should encourage grievants to jump in any time they feel that it is necessary during the steward's grievance presentation.
3. If the grievance relates to discipline, management presents last.
4. It's not a good idea to embarrass a supervisor; instead help the supervisor to "save face" if you can. But not at the expense of the contract or the grievance.
5. It's a good idea to have any settlement at the meeting committed to writing.

Answers are below

This Month in Labor History: Samuel Gompers

January 26, 1850: Samuel Gompers is born. Gompers founded the American Federation of Labor (AFL), and served as the organization's president from 1886 to 1894, and from 1895 until his death in 1924. He created the first permanent labor federation and promoted through collective bargaining shorter hours and higher wages and benefits for American workers. He also encouraged the AFL to take political action to "elect their friends" and "defeat their enemies."

What does labor want? Gompers said, "We want more schoolhouses and less jails; more books and less arsenals; more learning and less vice; more constant work and less crime; more leisure and less greed; more justice and less revenge; in fact more of the opportunities to cultivate our better natures..."

Answers to "Presenting a Grievance"

True or False?

1. **"You cannot be disciplined for your actions when you're serving as a steward."**

True: Union stewards are equal in status to management when acting in an official union capacity. You cannot be disciplined for your actions when you're serving as a Steward. You can openly disagree and argue vigorously with management during grievance meetings; question management's authority; and demand certain actions of management, all without risking disciplinary action. (Of course, threats of violence are prohibited, as are extreme profanity, name calling/personal attacks.) But remember that the Equality Rule is in effect only when you are acting as a steward on behalf of a member.

2. **"Stewards should encourage grievants to jump in with information any time they feel that it is necessary during the steward's grievance presentation."**

False: The steward is the spokesperson. The grievant may be your "witness," called upon by you to provide information in response to specific questions. (If you are planning to have the grievant speak, go over the questions you will ask and the information you expect the grievant to provide.) Any discussions, deliberations and/or decisions between you and grievant must take place "in caucus," away from the supervisor.

3. “If the grievance relates to discipline, management presents last.”

False: If the grievance relates to discipline, management presents first. If the grievance relates to any other violation, the union presents first.

4. “It’s not a good idea to embarrass a supervisor; instead help the supervisor to “save face” if you can. But not at the expense of the contract or the grievance.”

True: Your goal is to solve problems at the lowest possible level, and you will be presenting grievances and working out problems with the supervisor many times. Treat the supervisor with respect and expect the same treatment in return. But always protect the contract.

5. “It’s a good idea to have any settlement at the meeting committed to writing”

True: State your understanding of what resolution has been reached and ask that the settlement of the grievance be put in writing.

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