

IATSE Steward Tips + Best Practices

Stewards are the “*eyes and ears*” of the union. They are the first line of defense in the workplace.

As a union leader, the IATSE steward has four main roles; to act as problem solvers, organizers, communicators, and educators, in order to support their fellow workers. To accomplish these roles stewards must remain in direct contact with the union office whenever a workplace incident occurs. Their main goal should always be to strengthen the union by properly enforcing the contract and union policies.

Problem Solver

Your number-one job as a steward is to be vigilant and report all issues to your union office—this will ensure that you and the worker(s) involved are adequately protected. The Business Agent or other union official may have knowledge not available to a steward, about whether a problem is an isolated issue, or one affecting other workplaces. The BA may also know about ways this problem has been solved in the past. The steward should do their best to carry out the instructions received from the union.

To fulfill their role as a problem solver, the steward must:

- ***monitor*** working conditions
- ***report*** all workplace issues to the union
- ***enforce*** union policies

Organizer

Keeping workers united is extremely important, and the steward’s role as an organizer plays a significant part in building solidarity. Remember, stewards are expected to ***monitor*** the working conditions and strive to create a safe and healthy work environment that encourages members to support their fellow workers and the union.

To be an effective organizer, stewards should work towards these three goals:

1. Building solidarity between members
2. Encouraging union activity/combating anti-union activities
3. Recruiting new members

Communicator

Stewards are also responsible for ***reporting*** all workplace issues to the union. This responsibility makes the steward the designated communicator for their worksite and requires that stewards be a direct link between the union and the workers.

Educator

By educating the members that they represent, the steward can better *enforce* union policies.

This includes:

1. Explaining and protecting union goals/policies by encouraging members to share these goals.
2. Understanding key provisions in the contract and having the ability to teach members how to find and interpret those provisions.
3. Informing workers about their legal rights, with guidance from the union office.

Weingarten Rights

The 1975 United States Supreme Court held in *NLRB v. J. Weingarten*, the employee's right to have a union representative present during an investigatory interview about a possible disciplinary infraction.

Union representatives are not automatically entitled to be present during an investigatory interview. Workers must *explicitly ask* for union representation before or during the interview. Management does not have to remind the worker of this right; therefore, it is best practice to make sure your workers know of their rights ahead of time. If a worker requests union representation and their request is denied, then the employer has committed an unfair labor practice.

As a steward, you must understand your own local union's policies regarding what happens when a member requests representation. It is your job to report any issues that occur on the job, therefore, it is essential that you remain in communication with your union office. You may or may not be the one at the disciplinary meeting with a member. Often the Business Agent will handle this roll.

If you or a worker are called to a meeting with the employer, and representation is necessary, refer to the following statement:

“If this discussion could in any way lead to my being disciplined or terminated, or affect my personal working conditions, I request that my steward or union officer be present at the meeting. Without representation, I choose not to answer any questions.”

On a day-to-day basis, workers have a right to expect the union steward to:

- Listen to their concerns. This is the best service you can give a worker. Stewards can suggest appropriate times and places for this.
- Thoroughly investigate their concerns, be they grievances or other union matters. Stewards can and should involve the worker in the investigation process.
- Communicate information on union programs, services and contract benefits.
- Relay worker concerns and opinions to union leadership.
- Enforce the contract with the employer.

And in every encounter, workers have every right to be treated fairly and without discrimination based on race, sex, ethnic background or union membership. In open-shop situations, you must represent members and nonmembers in grievances. It's the law.

Excerpt from pg. 13 of "The Union Steward's Complete Guide: A Survival Manual," By: David Prosten

