

## **What is a Shop Steward?**

Shop Stewards are the backbone of a Union Local and are the key to building a strong, democratic labor movement. Stewards provide a vital link between the OPEIU's elected officers, the Employer, and the Bargaining Unit (BU).

Stewards are working Members who represent the BU at their workplace. They are elected by the BU or appointed in accordance with the BU's regulations. They are advocates for their brothers and sisters in the workplace and, consequently, they must be accessible to the Members they represent. They are expected to act fairly and impartially and, by example, represent the highest principles of the trade union movement.

The duties of Stewards include:

- Educating Members about the terms and conditions of their collective bargaining agreement and answer questions about the collective bargaining agreement.
- Monitoring and enforcing the collective bargaining agreement with the Employer.
- Requiring that Members adhere to the provisions of the collective bargaining agreement.
- Working directly with the Union's Business Agent regarding all grievances and disputes, including the investigation and presentation of grievances and the direct representation of Members who are subject to discipline or discharge.
- Posting all official communications from the Union and/or from the assigned Business Agent on the appropriate Union bulletin board.
- Reporting to Members the activities of the Union --- General Membership Meetings, Steward Meetings, Seminars, Elections, Political Action Programs, etc.
- Advising Members of the services and opportunities provided by the Union, specifically those which come directly from the collective bargaining agreement and those that come from the Union ---- Health and Welfare and Pension benefits, Retiree Benefits, Dues Check-Off, Sick Benefits, etc.
- Endeavoring at all times to create favorable conditions and to maintain harmonious co-worker relationships, but, when not possible, to resolve differences or disputes between or among Members.
- Always conducting himself/herself in such a manner as to set a good example for the Members they represent and all Members of the Union.

Shop Stewards are elected by their fellow workers for specific terms defined by the BU's bylaws. They have no special privileges or rights different from their colleagues. Instead, they have chosen to accept the opportunity to represent the BU. From conducting the monthly BU meeting, to filing grievances on behalf of colleagues, to negotiating and interpreting the contract, Shop Stewards are responsible for making sure processes are followed and all Members are treated fairly in accordance with the contract. It can be a difficult job, but also a very rewarding job. A BU is only as strong as its Members and their Stewards' commitment to - and knowledge of - the contract.

***NEW STEWARDS ARE PROVIDED TRAINING BY OPEIU LOCAL 2***

*Added by Grace, 2/20:*

### **A shop steward's role, as described by Local 2's website:**

A strong shop steward can make the difference between a strong workplace union and a weak workplace union. Shop stewards need to be honest, think critically, and be willing to take positions that are fair - which can be unpopular both with management and with unit members. Local 2's best shop stewards aren't necessarily those who have years of experience. Some of our best shop stewards simply have the qualities mentioned earlier.

If you're nominated to be a shop steward, or you've already been elected to be a shop steward, you might not know what you're getting into. In reading the responsibilities listed below, you might feel overwhelmed. Don't sweat it; you're not expected to know everything. That said, establish a network of support: Keep in regular contact with your staff representative and any other shop stewards at your workplace. Attend Local 2 shop steward trainings. We at Local 2 will support and invest in you in any way we can.

### **What shop stewards need to do:**

Shop stewards are absolutely invaluable to creating strong workplace unions. The following is a list of shop steward responsibilities composed by OPEIU. If you're not sure how to do any of these things, don't worry. Reach out to your staff representative:

#### **Be informed**

- Know your contract, the grievance process.
- Know your workplace. Know your employer's policies and rules. Understand the relationships between your coworkers and management. Keep your ears to the ground on workplace changes.
- Know your rights as an employee, as a shop steward, and as a union member.
- Know what's happening with Local 2. Understand Local 2's policies and bylaws. Attend Local 2 quarterly membership meetings to find out what's happening and to participate in decisions. Report back to your coworkers on Local 2 news, meetings, events and trainings.

#### **Communicate**

- Listen to what members say and ask. You don't have to be an expert in everything, but always get back to folks. Members need to trust you.
- Greet every new member and welcome him or her to your union. The sooner the better.
- Keep in regular contact with your staff representative. You don't need an excuse to reach out.
- Hold regular unit meetings, even if it's just an informal brown bag get-together over lunch or coffee. Discuss what's happening in your workplace. Ask for members to give their thoughts.
- Strive for 100% union membership in your workplace. Get help from your coworkers to make this happen. You can't do this alone.

#### **Empower**

- Encourage members to read and understand your Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). You can hold lunchtime meetings during which you collectively read through a few articles of your CBA. You'll be surprised at the questions and information that members have.

- When coworkers identify problems, help them find their own solutions and voices. You're not a Problem Solver. In fact, you want to empower your members so that they become leaders.
- Involve members. Many of the above responsibilities can be done by other members: Greeting new employees, organizing lunchtime readings of your CBA, and pointing out CBA violations.

### **Represent**

- You are a leader. Be a responsible and credible employee. You're setting an example.
- Don't hesitate to stand up to management. When you're representing a member, and working on union business, you are management's equal. You have power; use it.
- Represent all members fairly. It's not just the right thing to do; it's the law.
- If you see a violation of the contract or an injustice in the workplace, act on it — don't wait for someone to complain.
- Participate in negotiating your CBA as part of the negotiating committee: Survey and prepare your unit for negotiations, understand members' priorities, and develop proposals with your staff representative.
- Investigate disciplines
- Investigate terminations
- File grievances