



Tips for Shop Stewards

As a union leader, you are your union's representative in the workplace. For some members, you may be their only contact with your union.

A union leader must be an organizer, an educator, a mobilizer, a sounding board, a communicator and an enforcer of workers' rights on the job.

What a Union Leader Needs to Do

- ✓ Attend union meetings to find out what's happening and to participate in decisions. Report back to your co-workers.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Strive for 100% union membership in your work area. Get help from your co-workers to make this happen. You can't do this alone.
- ✓ Hold regular meetings, even if it's just an informal brownbag get-together over lunch or coffee. Creating community with co-workers is important.
- ✓ If you see a violation of the contract or an injustice in the workplace, act on it — don't wait for someone to complain. Help co-workers find their own solution and voice. You want to empower and seek out new leaders.
- ✓ Represent all members fairly. It's not just the right thing to do, it's the law.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Be responsible, credible and a good employee. You're setting an example.
- ✓ Strong and effective shop stewards make a powerful union. Thank you!

What a Union Leader Needs to Know

KNOW YOUR CONTRACT

- What it says, what it means, how it protects you and your co-workers
- Where to find key provisions
- How to get contracts into the hands of members
- Examine based on your experiences, be prepared to recommend changes

KNOW THE GRIEVANCE PROCESS

- Explore ways to settle problems *without* having to file a grievance
- Know where to find the grievance process described in your contract
- Follow the procedures carefully and be especially aware of timelines

KNOW YOUR EMPLOYER'S POLICIES/RULES

- Watch bulletin boards, check emails and other places notices are posted
- Read your organization's newsletters, emails and other communications
- Have current copies of the policies and procedures and any handbooks
- Learn about any statutory rules/regulations impacting your industry

KNOW YOUR CO-WORKERS

- Learn about their work and working conditions
- Know the various departments, job classifications and other details
- Keep an up-to-date email or phone list of co-workers to more easily mobilize
- Know your fellow union leaders and look for potential leaders

KNOW YOUR UNION'S POLICIES/BYLAWS

- Know your union's constitution and bylaws
- Know your union's policies that impact the membership
- Know how union decision-making works

KNOW YOUR UNION'S PROGRAMS/ACTIVITIES

- Know where and when membership meetings take place
- Read your union newsletters
- Check out your local union website and/or www.opeiu.org
- Learn about other union activities

KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR COMMUNITY AND CONNECT WITH OTHER LABOR AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONS