

STEWARDS ORIENTATION

Steward as a Point Person



Steward as a Point Person

This orientation should take no more than 15 minutes

You can download the full Stewards orientation series at <https://opseu.org/member-education/>



Dealing with the boss

The steward-supervisor relationship

As a union official, you have the right and obligation to deal with your supervisor as an equal when you are doing union work.

Avoid personal rivalry with your supervisor. Focus on the job to be done. Follow the workplace rules. If you expect supervisors to follow them, you must too.

Never go over your supervisor's head without telling them. If you intend to appeal a decision, say so.



Dealing with the boss

The Steward-supervisor relationship

Try to understand the other side's point of view, but never lose sight of your own.

Don't brag about your victories. Let the supervisor save face; you may want to save yours some day.



Dealing with the boss

Putting the heat on an uncooperative supervisor

Managers don't always know which supervisors:

- are good;
- get along with employees;
- boost morale;
- get the most from their staff.

Bad supervisors keep their jobs when the employer does not know they are bad – or do not care.

To make matters worse, poor supervisors rarely co-operate with the union.



Dealing with the boss

Putting the heat on an uncooperative supervisor

Uncooperative supervisors do not handle grievances properly, do not treat people fairly, or will pass the buck.

If you are stuck with a bad supervisor, you must persuade them to mend their ways – or get rid of them.

Getting rid of your supervisor is a last resort tactic. Try your best to develop a decent working relationship before you use it.



Stewards and Grievance tactics

Question: Can a Steward use grievance tactics?



Answer: Definitely! Stewards can organize grievance tactics, in collaboration with the members.



An organized grievance tactic

Grievance as a tactic should be discussed between Stewards and workers at the work unit level before embarking.

This tactic requires cooperation and a collective attack.

In essence, it involves snowing the supervisor under with grievances. All the workers in the department file legitimate grievances, with the supervisor as the cause for complaint.

As a Steward, you push the grievances through. They probably won't be resolved in the initial steps – and you don't want them to be.



An organized grievance tactic

You want the grievances to reach the higher levels where real management authority lies.

There, the union can hammer away at the supervisor who is responsible for the flurry of grievances.

You prove that the supervisor can't get along with employees, and as a poor supervisor can't get the most from the department.

The employer may find the grievances petty, but still be concerned because the incompatibility and wrangling between supervisor and workers has been exposed.



An organized grievance tactic

Tip: You can emphasize the volume of your department's grievances if members in other departments restrict their grievances. The target supervisor will appear even worse in comparison.

What will happen? Management never likes to give in to union pressure, so it will support the supervisor – to a point.

The employer may try to out-wait the union. You may have to continue the flow of grievances for months.

Make sure your members don't expect instant results and are prepared to keep the heat on.



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An organized grievance tactic

When the pressure becomes too great and the situation too costly, management will solve the problem.

The supervisor will be told to make peace, or be transferred.

The employer will disguise the change to hide any relationship between the move and the union pressure.

When you win your important point, you can pull the grievances. They have done their job, and you don't need to process them to arbitration.

And it lets management save face.



An organized grievance tactic

This tactic sets an example for other supervisors. They know what's going on. When the target supervisor "smells the coffee" – or is moved – they know it could happen to them and they become more careful.

Workers often think supervisors are entrenched, with the complete backing of management.

But they are really caught in the middle – between the employer and the union. Supervisors are human. They respond to pressure.

With no union protection, they fear for their job security. That's why almost any immediate supervisor or lead hand has good reason to co-operate with the union.



Enforcement of Work Rules

Question: Whose job is it to enforce work rules?



Answer:

It is the employer's job to enforce work rules, not the workers' job.



Enforcement of Work Rules

Make management enforce the rules.

Suppose a supervisor says: “Staff are spending too much time in the rest rooms. Tell them if they don’t cut it out, I’ll have to issue some suspensions.”

The boss is trying to prevent trouble; to stop violations before discipline is imposed. Almost everybody benefits: the employer, because the violations stop; and the workers, because discipline is avoided.

Everybody benefits – except you.

Suppose you pass on the word. What will the workers think?



Enforcement of Work Rules

Make management enforce the rules.

You are bringing a message from the employer. You are explaining the employer's position.

If this happens often, your members will wonder which side you're on. You are the fall guy.

There's an easy answer. Tell the supervisor it's the employer's job to enforce work rules.

If the employer wants to warn workers, the employer should give the warning.



Steward as an Organizer

For more information:

Visit the OPSEU Member Education web page at <https://opseu.org/member-education/> and download the other Stewards orientation sessions.



Feedback?

Please take a moment to share your feedback.

1. Did you find this orientation useful?
2. Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

Thank you for your time. Please share your insight by sending a quick email to education@opseu.org





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