



# The Shop Steward Development Program

<http://www.seiu925.org/stewards/> & <https://www.seiu.org/cards/the-complete-stewards-manual>

## SEIU 925 Shop Stewards

Stewards are mentors and advocates for union members with questions or concerns at work. We organize members to address issues as a group instead of dealing with them alone. We accompany and support members in meetings with management or state licensors to endure a fair process in which everyone is heard. Our training program gives stewards the skills, knowledge and resources to make us effective advocates and organizers at work.

## Your Role as a Shop Steward

As an SEIU steward your job involves much, much more than handling grievances. Grievances are important. They are often the most visible and dramatic aspect of the union's presence. Sometimes they'll take up most of your time.

But grievances should never be confused with your chief responsibility as steward: **to build a united, organized, and involved membership in your workplace.**

Without this involvement and solidarity, no union in the world can protect and serve its members. As a leader in the workplace, you'll have your hands full. That's because SEIU stewards are...

**Organizers.** This is the big one. It doesn't just mean signing up new members, although it means that too. It means SEIU **stewards are responsible for organizing the whole workplace to deal with problems as a united group.** Which is, when you think about it, what labor unions are all about.

**Problem Solvers.** You're the person workers turn to with their problems. It might be a worksite hazard. Maybe someone's been fired, or perhaps layoffs are threatened. It might be just a new employee with a question. Perhaps you can solve the problem with a friendly word, or maybe you'll organize a worksite action or file a grievance. Problems don't go with your territory. They **are** your territory.

### **Educators & Communicators.**

The contract. The health insurance plan. What's a "ULP?" How can I do this? Why did they do that? It's a complicated world, and your members are counting on you to help them make sense of it. Equally important, your union officers are counting on you to help them keep in touch with your coworkers. You work with them every day. They don't.

**Worksite Leaders.** You're the one who keeps it moving. You're the one who is not afraid to speak up to management. You make unity happen, and you never let anyone forget that there is a union at your worksite. (Nobody said this job was easy.)

**A steward's responsibilities are wide.  
Your primary duties are to *organize* and solve *problems*.**

## Things You Need to Have

You'll need to have a lot of information close at hand, both at work and at home. (Some stewards carry a notebook or a planner back and forth.)

You and your chief steward or union representative/s should check out your materials to make sure you have everything you need. Here are some possibilities:

- A list of the workers you serve as steward, including name, address, telephone number, email address, job title, and shift schedule.
- A seniority list of your workers (if applicable).
- The contract and any side letters.
- Local union constitution and bylaws.
- Management's personnel manual, if there is one (or any other employer policies in printed form).
- Civil service rules (if applicable).
- An organization chart of managers and supervisors.
- Organizing materials for new members, including authorization cards, copies of the contract, your union's constitution and bylaws.
- Grievance investigation forms.
- COPE (political action) materials.
- You probably know the different occupations in your unit, but if not, you'll need some job descriptions.

Of course, your union staff will have other valuable information:

- Federal and state health and safety regulations.
- Federal and state labor law regulations.
- Records of past investigations, grievances, and past arbitrations.
- List of references, resources, and other helpful materials available from the International Union.
- Internet resources, such as SEIU.org for the latest updates across the country, shop Steward educational links.

## Your Protections as a Steward

When you're dealing with management on union business, you deal with the employer as an **equal**. You can imagine how happy that makes them. That's why the National Labor Relations Act and state labor boards specifically protect you (and other union leaders) from punishment or discrimination by management **because of your union activity**. It's illegal for an employer to:

- Deny you promotions or pay opportunities.
- Isolate you from other workers.
- Saddle you with extra work or unusually tough assignments.
- Deny you overtime opportunities.
- Enforce work rules unfairly against you or harass you with extra supervision.

Your contract may also spell out your rights, and perhaps you're covered by state and local ordinances if you're a government worker. If your employer tries to discriminate against you in this way, it is a violation of federal law.

## Fairness: A Big Responsibility (this is really important)

Labor unions are required by law to represent all workers in the unit fairly and completely. This includes non-members as well as union members. It is legally known as the duty of fair representation (DFR.)

Of course, you don't need to be told that you must represent all workers fairly regardless of their race, religion, nationality, age, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.

You may find that you have to represent workers that oppose the union, as well as those who are unpopular, difficult to work with, or who create discord in the union or the workplace.

No matter. Fair is fair. This doesn't mean the union can't lose a grievance or make a mistake. It does mean that every action you take must be free from bias or the appearance of bias.

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### Case must be based on **facts**, not **personalities**.

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That's why it's so important to keep records of your activities as a steward including phone calls, interviews, letters, contacts, and decisions. Without documentation, it's far more difficult for your union to defend a DFR case if one should occur.

## Your Duties as a Steward

No one can list all the different duties you'll be asked to perform. What follows are some of the most important things SEIU Stewards do.

**Not all stewards do all things.** Some unions elect negotiators and stewards separately. Some ask staff reps to handle the final steps of grievances. You'll find these things out as you go along. *You don't have to learn your duties all at once.* And you'll have more experienced stewards and staff reps to help you get started.

- Get to know all the workers in your unit.
- Greet & help new members get oriented.
- Organize coworkers to join the union.
- Recruit and lead volunteers.
- Play a lead role in meetings.
- Keep the members informed.
- Help with balloting, elections, and reports.
- Get committees going and attend committees, guiding them when need be (and when possible).
- Keep updated phone, addresses, and email lists of your members.
- Learn the problems in the workplace.
- Investigate grievances.
- Interview members.
- Write and file grievances.
- Negotiate with management. This can range from informal talks with supervisors to arbitration hearings, formal contract bargaining, and labor/management committee assignments.
- Maintain files and records. (We know it's boring, but it's really important.)
- Work on contract campaigns.
- Organize rallies, vigils, work actions, petitions, parades, demonstrations, and other activities.
- Work on newsletters, leaflets, press releases, picket signs, buttons, stickers, bulletin boards, whatever.
- Attend steward trainings

### ***Duties of a Steward Continued...***

- Work on COPE (Committee On Political Education), legislative, and get-out-the-vote activities where applicable.
- Do a lot of different things with our union's coalition partners in the community.
- Inspect the worksite for health and safety problems.
- File federal and state OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) violation reports and accompany inspector on site visits.
- You don't have to do this all yourself. Don't be shy about asking individual members to help out. It's one way to get them involved.
- And remember, the MRC and Field Organizers are here to support you!

## **Welcome New Workers**

Remember your first day on the job? Not exactly a day at the beach. That's why one of your foremost tasks is to welcome new workers. We issue welcome packet to new workers for this purpose, but this is not a substitute for getting to know new workers.

Be prepared that some workers may be hostile towards their union because they don't want to pay union dues or an agency fee. This doesn't let you off the hook. It means you'll have to grit your teeth and put forth an extra effort to be friendly and helpful.

Here's a checklist of some things you might want to include in your conversation:

- Get to know each other. (Ask where they worked before, where they live now, do they have family? Hobbies? Sports? Start off by listening.)
- Explain some of the main benefits provided by the union contract, not the benevolence of the employer: wages, health care, holidays, a voice on the job.
- During the conversation, remember that you want the employee to begin identifying with the union. Whenever the worker has a problem, you are the person to see, not the supervisor/manager. The union is the members, the people right there all around you, not some unknown outsiders. If you get these two ideas across, you've done your job.
- If your union is doing its job, there'll be a meeting coming up you'll want to invite the new worker to. In fact, why not take them with you? They'll feel more at ease with someone they know. (Remember your first one?)
- Make sure the worker has your name and phone number, and encourage them to call if they have problems.

