



# Leadership & Shop Steward Guide



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# **OPEIU Leadership/Shop Steward Guide**

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# 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](http://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**

# Know Your Weingarten Rights

## Did you know?

“Weingarten”\* rights apply when a supervisor is questioning an employee to obtain information the employee reasonably believes could be used as grounds for discipline. If the meeting is solely to inform about a discipline without an investigation, these rights may not apply.

\*From a 1975 U.S. Supreme Court decision NLRB vs. Weingarten, Inc.

You have the right to union representation any time you face a meeting or discussion with management that could lead to discipline. Your employer usually has no obligation to inform you of your right to have a union representative present.

**You must ask for your rights!** Your employer must give you time to contact a union representative and allow the representative to be present at the meeting.

### Here’s what you can say:

“If this discussion is an investigation that could in any way lead to discipline or termination, I request that my steward or union representative be present before continuing.”

### Your employer may:

- (1) agree to your request and wait for the union representative to arrive or reschedule the meeting;
- (2) deny your request and end the meeting immediately;
- (3) give you the choice of ending the meeting or continuing without representation (not advisable!), or
- (4) deny the request and continue to ask questions. **You should then repeatedly, but respectfully, ask for union representation and protest the denial of your rights.**



Check out the award-winning **Weingarten Rights Shop Steward Training Video** at [www.opeiu.org](http://www.opeiu.org) under Local Union Resources.

Contact Your Local Union Representative:



# THE SHOP STEWARD'S ROLE IN A WEINGARTEN MEETING

The rights of employees to have a union representative present when they “reasonably believe” that an investigatory interview is to take place are called “Weingarten” rights, named after a Supreme Court case. Investigatory interviews occur when a supervisor questions an employee to obtain information which could be used as a basis for discipline. A steward can help workers to assert these rights by:

- Helping an anxious and inarticulate employee explain an incident.
- Raising extenuating circumstances.
- Advising an employee against a blanket denial, and, as a result, avoiding an appearance of dishonesty and guilt.
- Preventing an employee from making “fatal admissions.”
- Helping an employee to refrain from losing their temper in a potentially stressful situation.
- Serving as a witness to prevent supervisors from giving a false account of the investigation proceedings.

Stewards do not simply have to be passive observers during an investigatory interview, they can take an active role in the proceedings by assisting and counseling an employee.

## **For example, the steward:**

- Should expect to be briefed by the supervisor on the subject matter of the interview, before the meeting begins.
- Must be allowed to take the employee aside for a pre-interview conference.
- Has the right to speak during the interview; however, does not have the right to bargain over the purpose of the meeting.
- May ask for clarification of a question.
- May counsel the employee on how to answer a question.
- May provide supplementary information to the supervisor.
- May call for a caucus to speak with the employee in private, outside of the room.

If the “Weingarten” rights of an employee have been observed, stewards have no authority to advise an employee to withhold answers or to answer falsely, since the worker may be disciplined as a result of such action. Moreover, employers have no obligation to inform employees of their “Weingarten” rights – this is the union’s job.



# SUPERVISORS AND STEWARDS AS EQUALS

When stewards are performing union functions spelled out in the contract or acting in their official capacity, they are considered *equals with management*. The law provides that stewards must be free to challenge management statements without censorship. The NLRB describes this relationship as: “a relationship between [employer] advocates on one side and union advocates on the other side, engaged as equal opposing parties in litigation.”

Stewards act in an official capacity when they:

- Investigate grievances
- Request information
- Present a grievance
- Act as a *Weingarten* representative
- Participate in a labor/management meeting

Stewards act in an individual capacity when they discuss their own work assignments, performance or evaluation.

## GREATER LEEWAY ALLOWED

A vigorous or heated argument between an employee and a supervisor might lead to a charge of insubordination against an employee. However, stewards are allowed greater leeway than the average employee in discussions with management because they are acting in an official capacity as an agent or representative of the union.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: Can a steward be penalized for refusing a management order or telling a co-worker not to obey a supervisor?

A: Stewards should follow the universal rule of “obey now, grieve later” or they may be subject to discipline.

Q: How about an order to do something unsafe?

A: Answer these questions before refusing an order you believe is unsafe: (1) Do you have a reasonable belief that there is a real danger of death or serious injury? (2) Did you ask management to eliminate the danger and it refused to do so? (3) Is the danger so urgent you cannot wait for a safety inspection, and (4) Is there no reasonable alternative?

Q: Are stewards protected if they speak up during staff meetings?

A: As long as management has not clearly prohibited all employee comments, stewards have a legal right to speak up (but not be disruptive), including criticizing or challenging employer policies.

# THE UNION'S DUTY OF FAIR REPRESENTATION

Federal law requires the union to represent the interests of all members fairly, impartially, and in good faith. The duty extends to all employees in the bargaining unit, regardless of whether they are members of the union and/or participate in union activities. The duty applies to all aspects of representation, including negotiation, administration, and enforcement of the contract.

Unions do have a wide range of discretion in grievance handling, including the right to not process every grievance through all the steps of the grievance procedure, as long as its decision is not motivated by bad faith or discriminatory reasons and the union does not act arbitrarily.

Arbitration is the final step if the grievance is not settled between the union and the employer. A neutral third-party arbitrator is chosen from a list. That arbitrator's decision is final and binding under most contracts.

A union is not responsible for taking every case to arbitration, but it must be able to show a rational reason for not pursuing the case further. Some typical reasons include: (1) The nature of the violation and the degree of seriousness of the penalty or action. (2) How the case could affect the whole unit. (3) Cost may be considered in a decision, but should not be the primary reason for dropping a case.

Unions may decide whether to take a grievance to arbitration, through a decision of a Grievance Committee, Executive Board, or through a vote of the body. Any method is acceptable to courts, as long as it is uniformly applied.

## **Tips on Making Sure We Comply with the Duty of Fair Representation**

- Carefully investigate each possible grievance to determine the merits.
- Keep good records of your investigation (notes from interviews, copies of documents you've reviewed).
- Keep in touch with the grievant about the progress of the grievance and the concern of the union in his/her case.
- Process the grievance in a timely manner, following the procedures set out in the contract.
- Represent all members of the bargaining unit equally.
- Decide whether to pursue the grievance, including arbitration, on the merits.
- Communicate any decision to withdraw a grievance and the reason (simply stated) to the grievant in writing. Explain any grievance appeal process that may be available.



# JUST CAUSE STANDARDS

The following questions should be asked to establish whether a situation meets the standards of Just Cause. The questions reflect the seven standards frequently applied by arbitrators.

1. **Was the employee warned in advance that certain behavior could result in discipline?** The rule and penalty must have been communicated to the employee in advance. Employee must be told of the consequences of his or her actions. Certain offenses, i.e. major theft or violence on the job, may not require forewarning.
2. **Were the employer's rules reasonable?** Could an employee be expected to follow the rule or policy in question or would this be impossible? Are the rules available and understandable? Remember, unless you believe obeying a rule or order will seriously and immediately jeopardize your personal safety and/or someone else's, it's best to "obey now, grieve later."
3. **Was there an investigation before the discipline?** Did the employer, before administering the discipline, make an effort to discover whether the employee did in fact violate or disobey a rule or employer's order?
4. **Was the investigation conducted fairly?** Was the investigation done fairly and impartially or was there evidence of an effort to "burn" or "trap" an individual employee for practices that are generally unchallenged? Did the employer talk to all witnesses? Was the grievant given a chance to explain the incident? Are there extenuating circumstances behind the employee's action? There might be physical or medical reasons underlying absenteeism or poor work performance. A fight might have been provoked.
5. **Did the investigation turn up substantial evidence of wrongdoing?**
6. **Are the rules enforced uniformly and consistently?** Is there evidence of discrimination or harassment? There may be others with similar or worse work records who have not been disciplined. This can often, but not always, be used to show unequal treatment. The employee's past disciplinary record, however, may be used to justify a more serious penalty.
7. **Does the punishment fit the "crime" and the past record of the employee?** Discharging an employee for a single absence or for a minor violation of management rules is generally considered inappropriate. Was there progressive discipline? An employee's record of good behavior may form the basis for a lesser penalty. The burden of proof shifts to the union to demonstrate that a penalty is too severe.

# HANDLING GRIEVANCES

## 1. What is a Grievance?

Grievances are defined under the contract. **Be sure to know your timelines for filing a grievance and moving the grievance to the next step, if necessary.** Generally, grievances are limited to violations of the contract and violations of an employer's rules. Types of grievances include:

- **Discipline**  
An employee might be disciplined for insubordination, gross misconduct, or something more general. Most contracts require that discipline must be for just cause and grievances allege that the discipline was not given for just cause.
- **Contract Interpretation**  
The grievance alleges that a provision of the contract, other than the just cause provision, was violated.
- **Violation of Federal, State or Local Laws**  
Here you might have the option of filing a grievance or going to the appropriate government agency to get redress or both.
- **Past Practice in the Workplace**  
This can be the basis for a grievance, particularly in areas where the contract is silent or unclear, where a past practice has been violated by management, an employee may have a real grievance. But, to be considered a past practice, the circumstances must have been repeated over an extended period of time; accepted explicitly or implicitly by both workers and management e.g., by verbal agreement or in writing, without either side formally objecting; or while violating the contract, neither side has demanded that this part of the contract be enforced.
- **Employer's Rules**  
The grievance alleges that an employer's rule was violated.
- **Complaint**  
Employees often have individual complaints that don't always rise to grievances. Complaints about fellow employees, personal troubles, complaints about a bad supervisor and other workplace concerns. A formal grievance may not be the answer, but the complaint should still be addressed, and other action, if warranted, should be explored.

## 2. Investigating a Potential Grievance

- **Investigate with an open mind.** Don't personalize issues or prejudge the grievance's merits. Maintain an objective attitude.
- **Interview the grievant** and listen carefully to the grievant's story. Interview witnesses and management. Get a written statement from witnesses, if possible. Keep written records of the interviews.
- Make **information requests.** Ask for all relevant information and documents from management. Request a copy of the personnel file. Request any other management records needed.
- Review **relevant contract provisions**, side letters, relevant law or regulations, and the organizations policies or rules.
- Check **previous grievance settlements** for precedents. In past practice cases, identify as many examples of the past practice as possible. Obtain first-hand accounts.
- Determine if the **problem impacts others** in the workplace.
- Determine the **remedy.**
- Determine **who can resolve** the issue.
- Determine the **best strategy** for resolving the issue (informal discussion, filing a grievance, demand to bargain, a group action, an organized protest, going to the board of directors, filing a complaint with a regulatory body).
- Check **experiences of other stewards** in similar cases.

## 3. Good Language to Use When Interviewing

"I'm taking notes to help me understand and remember facts."

**"If I ask questions management will ask, it's because I need to know the answers to represent you well."**

"Can you tell me more about what happened?"

**"What do you think management will say happened?"**

"I'm not sure I know what you mean by that."

**"How do you know that?"**

"Are there any rules about that where you work?"

**“Did that happen before or after \_\_\_\_\_?”**

“How do you know what time it was when that happened?”

**“I want to be sure I understand the sequence of events, is this right....”**

“What were the exact words you (they) used?”

**“Tell me about anything like this that happened to you or someone else”**

“Who saw what happened?” “Who else should I talk to?”

**“Why do you think this happened?”**

“Can you give me an example of what you mean?”

**“How many times did it happen?”**

“Exactly where were you (and others involved) when it happened?”

**“How do you get along with \_\_\_\_\_ in general?”**

“Is there anything else I should know?”

**“Let me summarize what I heard.....Is that a good summary?”**

#### **4. Recording the Grievance**

When an employee comes to you with a complaint you should always make a note for your files listing the person, problem, date, supervisor and workplace. Also, you should request the employee to write down the facts and keep an ongoing log of events that take place pertaining to the complaint. This is a safeguard in the event the complaint becomes a legitimate grievance and proceeds through the various steps of the grievance procedure. Trying to recall times, places and actions from memory is highly ineffective in grievance handling. Should you fail to settle the grievance at the first, informal step, you will need these records in drafting the formal grievance statement.

A complaint formally enters the grievance procedure when it is presented in writing. When submitting the grievance, the steward should check carefully to make sure the Six W's – WHO, WHEN, WHERE, WHY WHAT and WITNESSES of the grievance are covered.

WHO: Refers to the employee filing the grievance and the supervisor (if any) involved.

WHEN: Refers to the time element. Often information regarding more than one date is needed to complete the form properly: (1) the date on which the grievance is officially written; (2) the time and date on which the grievance actually happened; (3) the date on which the grievance was submitted to the immediate supervisor (first or informal step of the grievance procedure); and (4) the date on which the immediate supervisor gave a decision.

WHERE: Refers to the exact place where the grievance took place – the department, aisle, office, terminal or plant.

WHY: Refers to the reason the complaint is considered a grievance.

WHAT: Refers to what should be done about the grievance - the remedy desired and what adjustment is expected.

WITNESSES: If a particular incident took place which gave rise to the grievance, the names of any witnesses who say what occurred should be listed on the grievance form. This should include the address and phone number of all witnesses.

Both the employee and the steward should sign the grievance form. The employee's signature verifies the facts of the grievance.

## **5. Presenting the Grievance**

Whether you are at the informal or formal stage of the grievance procedure, the way in which you present the grievance can have significant effect on the outcome. Keep the following points in mind when you present the grievance.

a. Know Your Facts – Be Confident

When you are ready to go into a conference with the supervisor, don't carry a chip on your shoulder, and don't anticipate being outsmarted or outwitted. Know your contract and your rights under it. State the facts plainly. Avoid opinions or hearsay evidence. Too many grievances are lost because the steward did not have the facts. Be prepared!

b. Stick To The Point – Be Assertive

As discussion progresses on a grievance, the supervisor may try to sidetrack the real issue and lead you into a discussion of irrelevant issues or inject additional complaints against the employee. Insist on discussing the issue raised by the grievance only, nothing else.

c. Settle The Grievance At The First Step

Try to settle the grievance at the first step, when possible. This prevents the bogging down of a grievance procedure and permits the steward more time to spend organizing and dealing with issues of concern to all members.

d. Take A Positive Position – Not Defensive

Don't be timid or convey the feeling to the supervisor that you are presenting the grievance because it is an obligation on your part. Avoid being apologetic; show the supervisor there's no doubt in your mind that the grievance has merit and should receive a fair settlement.

e. Disagree With Dignity

Disagree with the supervisor in a calm, firm, positive manner. Avoid pounding the table, blowing up or making empty threats. Declare your intentions of taking the grievance to the next step. As a rule, supervisors prefer to settle complaints before the complaint is carried to a higher management level.

f. Maintain A United Position

Be sure to have the grievant with you. This is necessary and prevents mistrust and establishes confidence in the steward. But, make sure you are both in accord on the facts and issues!

g. Be Prompt and Know Your Timelines – Follow The Grievance Through

Refer the grievance to the chief steward or next step when not settled. Give him/her all the facts. Give him/her the argument used in your discussion with the supervisor. Be sure to follow timelines. Keep a constant check on the progress of the grievance at what step it is in. Report back to the grievant in a timely manner.

*REMEMBER, the only time you present a grievance is after you have gathered all the facts!*

## **6. Failure to Reach Agreement**

If the steward is unable to obtain a settlement, he/she should tell the supervisor that the grievance will be taken to the next step in the grievance procedure.

The steward should inform the employee of what has happened. In addition, the steward should brief the chief steward or the union representative who is involved in the next step of the grievance procedure, as to the main line of argument taken by the supervisor.

The way in which the steward has handled and documented the grievance up to this point will have quite an impact on the way the union representative at the next step will proceed. The union representative has very little to go on other than the background information received from you - the first line representative.

The steward should be careful never to guarantee the employee a successful settlement of the problem. What appears to be an airtight case is sometimes completely destroyed upon further investigation. It may be difficult to convince the employee why the case was lost.

The steward should be prepared to process vigorously the grievances of all the employees he/she represented regardless of their personal feelings about them. This should be done both as a matter of justice and as a method of ensuring that dangerous precedents involving contract violations are not established.

Since the employee wants their grievance settled "today," or "tomorrow at the latest," it is important that he/she be kept informed on the progress of the case. Sometimes it may take months before a grievance is completely processed. Therefore, an employee should be informed of the various time limitations in the procedure which make a more rapid settlement impossible.

**Tips:**

- Determine the needs of all concerned. Address needs not positions.
- Make sure everyone has the same reliable information.
- Look for solutions – not just winning.
- Consider multiple options for settlement.
- Separate out issues addressable in other ways (another grievance, take an action, etc.).
- Identify first whether you have agreement on the concept of what you want before working on the details.
- Be hard on the problem, not the people (unless the people are the problem).
- Don't automatically take the first offer – keep bargaining, if warranted.
- Measure settlements against the strength of your case.
- Address whatever blocks a settlement – face saving, dispute over facts, etc.
- Be aware of the role of timing (determine when the other side is ready to settle – Is it too early? Are they ready to walk away if there is not settlement now? etc.).
- "Show" management settlement is in their best interest (with words and actions).
- Put any settlement agreement in writing.
- Look for settlements that resolve the problem for the future.
- Use any grievance victories as an organizing opportunity when possible.



# Strategic Grievance Handling Checklist

**Based on your investigation, is this a good grievance?**

- Did things happen the way the member claims?
- Was the contract or something else clearly violated?
- Based on past grievances, how likely are we to win this one?
- How is an arbitrator likely to rule?
- Is there enough of a case to file a credible grievance?
- Is this better solved informally or by counseling the member?

**Has this been grieved before?**

- If so, what happened?
- What can we learn from previous grievances on how to write or present this one?
- Who can give you advice?

**Is this a purely individual problem or does it affect others?**

- Should you file a group grievance?
- Can we call together affected members to discuss best ways to address the issue?

**What opportunities does this grievance give us to educate members and build our union?**

- Does it highlight a part of the contract that members should know more about?
- Can we keep the members informed of the progress of the case?
- What actions can members take to support the grievance?

**Is this a continuing problem or a one-time occurrence?**

- If management is violating the same contract provision repeatedly, your grievance and the requested remedy should be broader than if it is a one-time occurrence.
- Look for additional ways to pressure management to honor the contract.

**What is the source of the problem?**

- Is there a bigger issue behind the incident that caused the grievance?
- Try to address the problem at its source so it doesn't happen again.

**Who has the power and authority to resolve the issue?**

- You don't want to spend a lot of time and energy talking to someone who does not have the ability to resolve the issue. Once you find the person with the ability to resolve the issue, you can think about the best way to approach and persuade that person.

**Besides a grievance, how else can we resolve this problem?**

# The Right to Information to Represent Members

## A Checklist for Getting the Facts to Help Prepare for a Grievance

- Worker's name, location, shift, job title, wage rate, seniority, contact information, including email address and cell phone.
- Names and contact information of any other workers involved or potential witnesses and their relationship to the worker.
- Name and contact information of immediate supervisor and other management staff involved.
- Explanation of circumstances from the worker including: What happened (or failed to happen)? When did it happen? What did management say?
- Contract and the sections that apply to this situation. Possibly other contracts if they work in a multi-union workplace.
- Policies and procedures that apply.
- Look up any laws that might apply or help.
- Work record, past disciplinary actions or warnings.
- Check with other stewards to see if issue has come up before. Look at past grievances or past practice.
- Inspect any equipment or material involved.
- Walk through location of where event took place, if relevant.
- Copies of any documents involved, such as time sheets, attendance records, emails, witness statements, patient or client complaints, management notes or any other supporting documents.

# Union Strong Checklist

Ideas for activating co-workers.



- Reach Out to Every Member and Non-Member.** Have an “ask” ready i.e. join a committee, attend a rally, be a worksite leader, provide an email address, “like” our Facebook page, sign a petition.
- Update the New Member Packet/Materials.** Would you be excited to be an OPEIU member if you got this packet? Are the materials welcoming, helpful and do they encourage ways to become active? Will the materials provide Shop Stewards with the tools to do a 1:1 introduction to new co-workers?
- Sponsor a Worker Rights Training** or an industry focused training at the worksite to make connections with community allies and to involve a diverse group of members. Partner with other unions, universities/colleges, labor councils, church groups to broaden outreach.
- Attend New Employee Orientations.** Develop a plan with help from co-workers to present information about our union at every new employee orientation. Use an outline to make sure all information is covered.
- Create a Short Video** with testimonials from our members. Feature on website and/or YouTube, Facebook or other social media. Use the video to build support for a particular workplace issue or action.
- Organize a Community Service Action** that will involve a lot of members and provide a service in the community. Form a committee to help decide what kind of group action might be most involving.
- Establish a Shop Steward or Organizing Committee** that meets at least quarterly and takes on actions and projects in the workplace to tackle issues and report back to members.
- Build a Member Email List** to quickly communicate with and mobilize members. Create a contest to get email addresses. Develop a template to be able to send out “email blasts” easily.
- Survey Members** about what issues are most important and get ideas for making improvements. Survey 1:1, at brown bag lunches and other face to face settings.
- Look for Opportunities** to create new leaders and a strengthen solidarity when working through grievances, contract negotiations, or other workplace situations.
- Take a Stand** and organize activities to support important political campaigns and initiatives that benefit working people and their families.
- Your Great Idea.** Whatever that is, figure out the necessary resources and take action!

# What Holds People Back? Fear, Hopelessness, Division, & Confusion

What holds people back from confronting the boss about workplace issues? Instead of blaming “apathy,” it’s important to find out the actual reasons. You have to diagnose the problem before you can write the prescription.

This chart shows four common obstacles the boss relies on to keep us from getting organized—and how you can help your coworkers get past them:

The boss relies on ...	The steward organizer ...	Coworkers find ...
... <b>fear</b> of conflict and retaliation.	...taps into <b>righteous anger</b> about workplace injustices.	...the <b>courage</b> and determination to act.
... <b>hopelessness</b> , the feeling that things can’t change and we have no power.	...helps develop a <b>plan to win</b> , and shares examples of victories elsewhere.	...hope that change is possible and worth fighting for.
... <b>division</b> , pitting workers against each other.	...identifies <b>common ground</b> and builds relationships.	... <b>unity</b> to act together.
... <b>confusion</b> , passing around messages that will alarm or distract us.	... <b>interprets</b> and shares information, fitting it into a bigger picture.	... <b>clarity</b> to see through the boss’s plan.

# It's Not Apathy: Identify the Real Problem

**Look for fights you can win with the people you have on board.** Your workplace may feel like it's bogged down in "apathy," but under the surface, there's always something else going on. Here are some ways to understand what looks like apathy, and respond to it.

The problem:	What's going on:	What to do:
<b>"No one seems to care."</b>	Everyone cares about something—but the something might not be what you expect. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The issue you've focused on might not be a priority for your coworker.</li><li>• The co-worker may feel strongly about other issues that haven't caught your attention.</li><li>• The co-worker might assume the problem isn't your issue, or isn't a union issue.</li></ul>	Listen. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pick a few coworkers you'd like to know better. Make a point out of talking with them to find out what's on their minds.</li><li>• Show respect and understanding for the issues your coworkers care about, and they'll be more likely to do the same for you.</li></ul>

The problem:	What's going on:	What to do:
<b>"It's hard to see how things could change."</b>	Your coworkers don't believe that they have the power—yet. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Most people have always felt powerless and disorganized at work. They've never felt strength in numbers.</li><li>• Problems seem too big to tackle.</li><li>• The boss has cemented the idea that his/her decisions are final.</li></ul>	Show your coworkers that change is possible. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bring people together.</li><li>• Start small. Look for fights you can win with the people you have on board so far.</li><li>• Develop a credible plan to win. Ask, "What's our solution?" "Who has the authority to say yes?"</li><li>• What could we do together to get that person to say yes."</li><li>• Share stories of tactics that have worked elsewhere.</li></ul>

The problem:	What's going on:	What to do:
<p><b>“No one comes to meetings.”</b></p>	<p>People won't be motivated to attend unless they feel their participation matters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If a meeting is just to “get information,” it's easy to skip it.</li> <li>• An email or a notice on a bulletin board won't inspire people to attend.</li> </ul>	<p>Give your coworkers meaningful roles. Let them know how their presence or absence will affect issues they care about.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the meeting pleasant and productive. Prepare a clear agenda, a time limit, and a reason to attend, such as a hot issue.</li> <li>• Face-to-face invitations are best. Divide up your workplace and find several other people to share the work of inviting people individually.</li> <li>• Consider ways to make meetings more accessible: scheduling, location, childcare, translation, transportation.</li> <li>• Be flexible. Sometimes people simply can't make it to meetings, but they can still play crucial roles when they're at work.</li> </ul>

The problem:	What's going on:	What to do:
<p><b>“No one's willing to do anything.”</b></p>	<p>Many people won't initiate activity, but they might respond if asked directly by someone they trust.</p>	<p>Figure out small, specific requests. Approach coworkers personally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect the time constraints in your coworkers' lives.</li> <li>• Show lots of appreciation for anything they're willing to do.</li> <li>• Make it clear that any victories were won by the whole team.</li> </ul>

## Additional Resources for Workplace Activists

- <http://www.labornotes.org/>
- <https://aflcio.org/>
- <https://labornotes.org/store/books/work-rights-press>
- <http://www.jwj.org/>