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E D U C A T O R

Update for Stewards

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Is There an App for That?



Is There an App for That?

Remember when phones were just for making phone calls, and you couldn't take them everywhere with you because they were attached to a wall? If your answer is yes, you may not be aware of all of the things your smartphone can do for you when you have the right application, or app.

There appears to be a smartphone app for every possible human endeavour: bird watching, stock trading, stargazing, finding the nearest parking space and, yes, even for union activities.

If your union has its own app, you're probably already aware of it. What about other apps, though, that might make your work as a shop steward a little easier?

Time management is essential for shop stewards, and there are dizzying numbers of smartphone apps that will help you get things done.

Because everyone's organizational quirks are different, you might have to experiment to find the right productivity app for you. To get started on that process, begin by trying "Any.do,"

"Remember the Milk" or "Evernote."—they're among the most popular, come in both iPhone and Android versions, and they're free.

But the kinds of apps that may be most useful to busy labour union activists are those that are strictly related to workers' rights.

■ **The OSHA Heat Index for Outdoor Workers**

"allows workers and supervisors to calculate the heat index for their worksite, and, based on the heat index, displays a risk level to outdoor workers," according to the description on the OSHA website. "Then, with a simple tap, you can get reminders about the protective measures that should be taken at

Some apps might make your work as a shop steward a little easier.

that risk level to protect workers from heat-related illness—reminders about drinking enough fluids, scheduling rest breaks, planning for and knowing

what to do in an emergency, adjusting work operations, gradually building up the workload for new workers, training on heat illness signs and symptoms, and monitoring each other for signs and symptoms of heat-related illness." The app is available for Android and iPhone, in English and

Spanish, at osha.gov.

■ **The Department of Labor Timesheet (American App)**

helps workers keep an independent record of the hours they've worked and any money they may be owed. It also calculates overtime pay at a rate of one and one-half times the regular rate of pay for more than 40 hours in a workweek. However, it doesn't include options for tips, commissions, bonuses, deductions, holiday pay, pay for weekends, shift differentials, or pay for regular days of rest—and it's available only for iPhones at dol.gov.

■ **The Department of Labour Stats** application gives you the most recent updates for unemployment insurance initial claims, the consumer price index,

unemployment rates, payroll employment, average hourly earnings, producer price index, employment cost index, productivity. This app could be useful to you and to members of your bargaining committee.

■ **Not Recommended: Grievance Tracker** is an app with a name that sounds appealing, but we don't recommend it for union members or officials. It's offered for free by the Meidh Corporation, which describes itself as a company that helps human resources departments "in optimizing corporate assets" and asks that you submit sensitive information to them, including your name, union, email address, employer and grievance details. (This is probably not a good idea.)

—Joan Collins Lambert. The writer is a long-time labour journalist and activist.



Member vs. Member

A worker, a union member, on a big construction site hangs a noose in the trailer, gets suspended and demands that the union defend his “free speech.” A female worker, a union member, who usually allows her male co-workers to flirt with her abruptly, reports several of them for sexual harassment. Two co-workers, both union members, start to argue because one of them has a Confederate flag on his car in the company parking lot; both get suspended. A white security guard, a union member, is caught on video brutally punching a young black man who is a member of another union on the property. A new member starts work in a department where swearing on the job is common; he complains to management about the coarse language.

In these situations, a front-line steward has some very delicate decisions to make. Instinctively, a steward wants to defend a member against any discipline and to protect the union contract. The challenge comes when a grievance or issue involves conflicts among the members, or involves behaviour that the steward does not—or should not—condone.

When Trouble Brews

What can be done? If a supervisor was proven to have committed some of these offenses the union would quickly demand discipline. An employer, always worried about being sued for problems in the workplace, might readily agree or take action before the union got involved.

But for the union, a member-against-member situation is much more complicated. And it often raises the most basic, bottom-line defensive stance for a steward: Don't let anyone get fired. At the very least, even if the behaviour of a member seems offensive and worthy of discipline the steward has an obligation to make sure that whatever is alleged is backed up by evidence and that the whole story is evaluated.

These circumstances are a great example of the old cliché that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. In the first place, we've got to acknowledge that many of these cases arise because the union membership has been slow or careless about educating itself about the changing workplace. Jobsites that have been traditionally white and male, for example, have seen dramatic changes, and the guys better get used to it. Education of the members—“sensitivity training” as it is usually called—is very important today. Members need to understand that diversity is not only a reality, it is a good thing, bringing workers together. Many unions offer such training.

Don't wait for the boss to do it. Most employers have diversity consultants whose sole purpose is to keep the boss from being sued, not necessarily to get people working together in harmony. So situations will still likely arise, and when they do the boss may simply fire everyone involved.

While this may be some sort of “solution” for the employer, it leaves the steward with a real mess: groups of angry workers, each of them demanding both justice and union representation.

It's best to keep these situations away from the boss and out of the grievance procedure. Try to settle things internally.

Stories Will Differ

The stories you will be told by each party are very likely to differ widely, so credibility becomes an issue. Go on a fact finding mission. Find out what really happened. Look around for witnesses. Check for any documentation—preferably without asking the boss for anything. Bringing the employer in can only make it worse.

Find out, if possible, what is really going on. Look for the “back story” or context that might explain or at least shed a different light on the situation. Were there misunderstandings based on what was once common and tolerated?

Gather this information on a “one on one” basis, rather than at a group meeting: in that kind of setting you're likely to find members getting together and just repeating various accusations rather than calmly trying to settle the dispute.

Become a kind of mediator, trying to resolve things to the satisfaction—and *continued employment*—of all members. Rather than allowing positions to harden, try to get the members to work out some agreement—but without excusing conduct that is inexcusable.

Everyone must understand that the union stands for certain principles: fair and equal treatment for every worker. If we demand it from the boss, then union members, and the union as a whole, must also demonstrate the same qualities.

Remember the Goal

One of your goals should always be to help members understand the importance of building up and strengthening the union. For this, it is best to bring workers together as a group. After all, a union is a collective organization, not just a collection of individuals.

A union-sponsored education program is a kind of second chance for many members. In the best case, members may not realize that something is offensive to others, so the program will broaden their understanding. Combine this proactive approach with a stern warning that certain actions in or related to, the workplace are simply unacceptable, both by union policies and by law. We don't stand for certain things from the boss. We can't allow our members to do these things and expect to have full protection.

And, oh yeah, how would you like to be the steward to handle this grievance: a star professional quarterback, a union member, allegedly gets an equipment manager to deflate some footballs so that his team of union members can beat another team of members from the same union?

—Bill Barry. The writer is the retired director of labour studies at the Community College of Baltimore County.

The Overworked Steward

At one time or another, every steward feels as if he or she has more to do than any human being can manage. Between attending grievance meetings, helping to prepare cases for possible arbitration, passing along information from union leadership, trying to increase participation in the union's political action committee, and dealing with member emergencies and phone calls at all hours of the day and night, one can feel overwhelmed. Stewards may get resentful, stop answering the phone, complain a lot, and generally blame the members. In more extreme cases, they may become depressed or even quit.

The reality is that an individual steward can't effectively be responsible for an infinite number of members. When you, the steward, have a lot of members clamouring for your attention, you run the risk of being controlled by whoever is loudest or whoever most recently crossed your path.

Form a Committee

Consider a different strategy: Think of your job as being an organizer, delegator and educator, rather than primarily serving as a grievance writer, an amateur lawyer and a clerk.

The bottom line is getting help. Different unions operate in different ways. In many unions, with the OK of the officers, the solution can be to form a committee. Unions may be able to bargain for "union time" for committees to meet and do their work with the same protections afforded to others doing official union business. Whether it's called a "union department committee," a "shift committee," a "study group" or an "assistant steward committee" is not important. Whatever the union wants to call it is fine. What matters is that it lets you delegate many of your tasks to other people, with accountability.



Now, building a collective becomes the steward's main job, rather than doing everything yourself.

Selecting Committee Members

How are you going to find these people?

First, which unit members are active in the union, have a general understanding of the contract and feel some "loyalty" to the organization?

Second, who has the union helped? These are the people who received compensation or whose job was saved thanks to your intervention. Many of them will respond to you if you ask them to perform a distinct task or to assume a defined role.

Third, who are the complainers? Who are the people who take up most of your time? If you treat them as a resource instead of a burden, you may be surprised. People who criticize the union openly may actually want to help fix it. Here is their chance to put their energy where their mouth is and get recognition for it. *Note that complainers have already proven their ability to gripe and be heard. Now, they have to learn how to be effective problem-solvers.*

Qualifications

The most important qualification is not knowledge but courage. Knowledge can be learned. The courage to stand up for what's right is necessary and works best when combined with persistence, good judgment and reliability.

Assigning Work to the Committee

The job of your committee persons can be structured in a number of different ways:

- Divide the list by location or shift and give each committee person or assistant steward that manageable group to oversee.
- Perform a map-the-workplace exercise to see who has access to whom.
- Organize by language if you have a linguistically diverse workplace.
- Make a list of things that require some research when new regulations come out: health and safety, disparate treatment or discrimination, for example.
- Group by specialties such as politics, community action and labour solidarity.

People's life events—from birthdays and bereavements to helping someone get into an Employee Assistance Program—can provide opportunities for committee members' involvement. Watch out for too much specializing, though; a narrow job gets boring, and people may get territorial. Be careful about making assumptions concerning who can work with who based on race or gender.

To keep the learning flowing through your group, meet regularly and always have real work to do or issues to discuss.

Develop New Leaders

Under this strategy, your focus is not to randomly serve whatever member comes in with a problem, but to build leaders and new stewards. Maybe someone "built" you when you were starting out. Do you remember what that was like? Were you a natural activist, or were you someone whose job was saved? Or—it happens all the time—were you a complainer who got nudged in the right direction by your steward?

—Helena Worthen and Joe Berry. The writers are veteran labor educators.

The Art of Persuasion

Stewards spend a great deal of time trying to persuade others. Whether it's convincing management to settle a grievance, motivating members to get involved or recruiting volunteers for a campaign or some other task, being persuasive is an extremely valuable skill.

Advertisers, academics and others have studied how to get people to buy things, vote for someone, donate money or support a cause. Professor Hugh Rank, who wrote about this issue decades ago, identified a framework that can be helpful to stewards who are attempting to convince people to see things a certain way. Rank's framework is simple and has four parts:

- Intensify the good points of your position
- Intensify the weak points of the opposition's
- Downplay the weak points of your position
- Downplay the good points of the opposition's

Intensifying Points

Three techniques have proven to be effective when intensifying your good points or your opposition's weak points:

Repetition

Hearing and seeing something repeatedly helps people remember it and tends to convince people to accept it as true.

Used responsibly, repetition helps those hearing your message to understand its importance and reduces the chances it will be ignored. In a grievance meeting, for example, you may want to repeat a key statement such as, "Your argument doesn't change the fact that the contract clearly says you can't do that." Keep going back to what the contract says, even if you sound like a broken record.

Of course, repetition can also be used irresponsibly. Sometimes people in power convince citizens to believe hateful things by frequently repeating a lie. Contemporary falsehoods, including "unions aren't needed anymore," "immigration hurts the economy" and "tax cuts for the rich trickle down to benefit working families" become credible through repetition in the media or by politicians and others.

Association

Association can be used to promote or downplay an argument presented by your opponent by linking it to an emotional issue—something people either strongly want and support or strongly fear and oppose.

For example, you might motivate members to vote by explaining what happened to union members in Canada where a hostile MP and legislature took away their right to collective bargaining. Be prepared with some facts about the negative impact on workers and unions in their community and then assert, "If we don't vote, that could happen here."

Association can also be used to link management's goals to the union's goals. For example, you might say something like, "We know how much you want to meet your production goals. By agreeing to our proposal, you will improve morale and get the results you're looking for."

Composition

Using composition means contrasting an argument with its opposite. Imagine advertisements you've seen for detergent that show a dirty shirt that becomes extraordinarily clean after being washed in the product.

A steward might use composition similarly, by looking at a "before" and "after" scenario. See if you can convey to your newer members the true value of the union by asking more senior members to describe a bad situation at work that was improved after they worked together in the union to address it.

Downplaying Points

There are three techniques for downplaying your own weak points as well as the opposition's good points:

Omission

Advocates of each side of an argument will downplay their own weak points, usually by not bringing them up. If you have weak points you should try to redirect discussion to your strong points. For example, "Yes, our member may have used poor judgment, but if you look at his/her work

record, you will see years of excellent job performance."

Of course, each side will focus on the other's weak points. You might do this, for example, if you're in a labour-management meeting and can point out, "You haven't said anything about the recent report that showed that since you cracked down on absenteeism; people are coming to work sick and infecting others."

Diversion

Let's say you just refocused that labour-management meeting on how management's attendance policy is backfiring. Watch out for a diversion tactic, like someone from management arguing, "Last week, three of your members were sick on the same day. It was a mess!" Don't get sucked into that argument. Instead, stay with the evidence that shows the attendance policy isn't working by saying, "We can talk about that later if you want, but what are you going to do about your policy that's causing people to come to work sick?"

Confusion

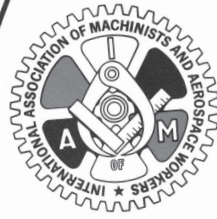
Continuing with that labour-management meeting, an example of confusion would be if management said, "You obviously don't care about the services we provide the clients/customers because you are saying it's OK for employees to use sick leave when they aren't really sick." You might counter by using your own confusion tactic and say, "We resent your implication that our members are dishonest and uncaring."

The effect is usually to evoke an emotional reaction and derail the problem-solving process. Both sides should instead look for a fair resolution of the issue by refocusing on the facts of the situation and seeking solutions.

Remember, the purpose of using persuasion and argument is not to make the other side look bad or score "gotcha" points—it's to resolve problems and make improvements for your members.

—Ken Margolies. The writer is a senior associate with the Worker Institute at Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labour Relations.

**International
Association of
Machinists and
Aerospace Workers**



9000 Machinists Place
Upper Marlboro, Maryland 20772-2687

Area Code 301
967-4500



OFFICE OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT

Dear IAM Shop Stewards,

Another year is coming to a close, and 2016 is shaping up to be a busy one. We will start the year, hopefully with a worker-friendly Canadian government and with the presidential primary races, continue in September with our 39th Grand Lodge Convention in Chicago and go right into the U.S. elections in November.

The 2016 elections will be our chance to keep the White House in worker-friendly hands and reverse the anti-worker majorities in Congress and too many state legislatures. Voters have already given the thumbs down to Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker's radical anti-union message and he withdrew from the Republican presidential primary race. But there are many extreme anti-worker candidates left in the race.

If the cascade of corporate money prevails in 2016 and extremist candidates win, working families in North America will be in deep trouble. Extremists will be able to implement their corporate-backed agenda to weaken labour with right-to-work (for less) laws, privatize Social Security, dismantle Medicare/ Healthcare and get rid of pensions.

But change is happening. In Canada, the pro-worker New Democratic Party has made steady gains and at the time the Educator was being prepared, Canadians were voting in federal elections that could finally oust the anti-worker Harper government. In England, a pro-working family member of parliament upset the status quo and now heads the Labour Party.

Between now and November 2016 literally billions will be spent to try and convince workers to ignore the important issues and vote against their real interests. As Stewards, you play an important role as a source of information about what issues really matter, such as keeping unions strong to fight for better wages and benefits, protecting Social Security, Health Care and pensions, and fighting for North America's working families.

Thank you for all you do and best wishes for a peaceful and joyous holiday season,

In Solidarity,

R. Thomas Buffenbarger

R. Thomas Buffenbarger
International President

