

What follows is a description of what a Steward does, and some of their obligations toward the members they represent. It could be modified or adopted as is by your local union as a guide for Steward conduct, It also contains some important words for the members, who have an obligation toward the Steward, just as the Steward is obligated to them.

The AFGE Steward's Job

The Steward is the AFGE member's first resource for information and representation in the workplace. The AFGE Shop Steward represents union members In a defined department, work area or unit, but may also be asked to assist members In other areas under special circumstances. The Steward's responsibilities include:

The Steward observes and supports the Union's democratic process, inviting all employees to be members, and inviting all members to participate in the Union. In this regard, the Steward encourages, rather than scolds. The Steward freely answers questions regarding the Union's own processes, and gets staff advice when the answer is unclear. The Steward makes every effort to inform ' all members of important votes that are to be taken, that necessary information is presented so that members can make an informed decision, and informs members that a majority vote governs.

The Steward represents all members evenly and fairly, and does not make assumptions on the basis of an Individual's prior record, attitude, popularity, or position on controversial Issues in the workplace.

The Steward does not discourage members' reporting problems or concerns, but does encourage joint effort in solving them. Where a Steward sees a conflict of interest in representing a member or an issue, s/he refers the member to another Steward or staff, and follows up to make sure the contact has been made.

When presented with individual or group problems, **the Steward investigates each matter to the best of their ability** - in conjunction with the member, who must also play an active role in making sure all facts are known - before making recommendations regarding what actions may be taken. In individual problems, especially disciplinary ones, the Steward observes confidentiality unless the member advises otherwise.

The Steward gives honest and responsible advice regarding realistic, responsible and constructive courses of action that are likely to improve the member's situation (rather than make it worse), after concluding Investigation and checking the contract and other relevant documents. Where possible, the Steward discusses the* relative success potential of the various alternative actions. When in doubt regarding alternatives that may be available to the member, consults with Union staff.

The Steward acts with the consent of the members. Where an Issue affects more than one member, the Steward gets members together to arrive democratically at an acceptable solution for proposal to management. Except where general guidelines have already been agreed on with their members (in some areas, that might be: "we always fight contracting out" or "we always fight for internal promotion") and except for civil rights. and individual disciplinary matters, the Steward does not take a position on a new issue that hasn't been decided by the group, and does not settle a problem or grievance without the prior knowledge and/or consent of the members.

The Steward enforces the contract and assists with enforcement of other protections such as Civil Service Rules or policies. Where language is unclear, the Steward seeks advice from Union staff or the local President before interpreting rights or requirements.

The Steward keeps faith with the member in addition to confidentiality, this includes not settling any matter without the member's prior knowledge or permission, never disparaging the member with the employer or co-workers regardless of what is learned during the representation process. This does not mean the Steward is obligated to agree with bad conduct.

The Steward supports the Union with management and does not undermine the Union In the presence of the employer, reserving any complaints for private or other appropriate setting.

The Steward keeps members informed by handing out notices,' keeping up the bulletin board, and willingly sharing Information with members that s/he has learned at meetings, conferences and training.

The Steward is the Union's eyes and ears, keeping track of rumors, new policies and practices, unusual hiring or vacant positions, making sure the Union Is Informed of the situation In their unit or department.

The Steward helps members work together toward common solutions rather than leaving them to make their own, sometimes conflicting deals with management. The Steward respects, recognizes, and engages the many different backgrounds and skills of individual members. S/he works toward group respect and unity among the members In the workplace.

The Steward gets training when it is offered by the Union, and tries to update their skills as needed.

MEMBERS' OBLIGATIONS include:

The member is obligated **to treat the Steward as they would wish to be treated** under the circumstances.

The member gives honest feedback when there are questions regarding Steward actions or failure to act, so the Steward can respond or Improve, rather than undermining the Steward in' private with management or fellow members.

The member helps the Steward with fact-gathering, communication or other tasks that are essential to a strong, united and effective union In their workplace