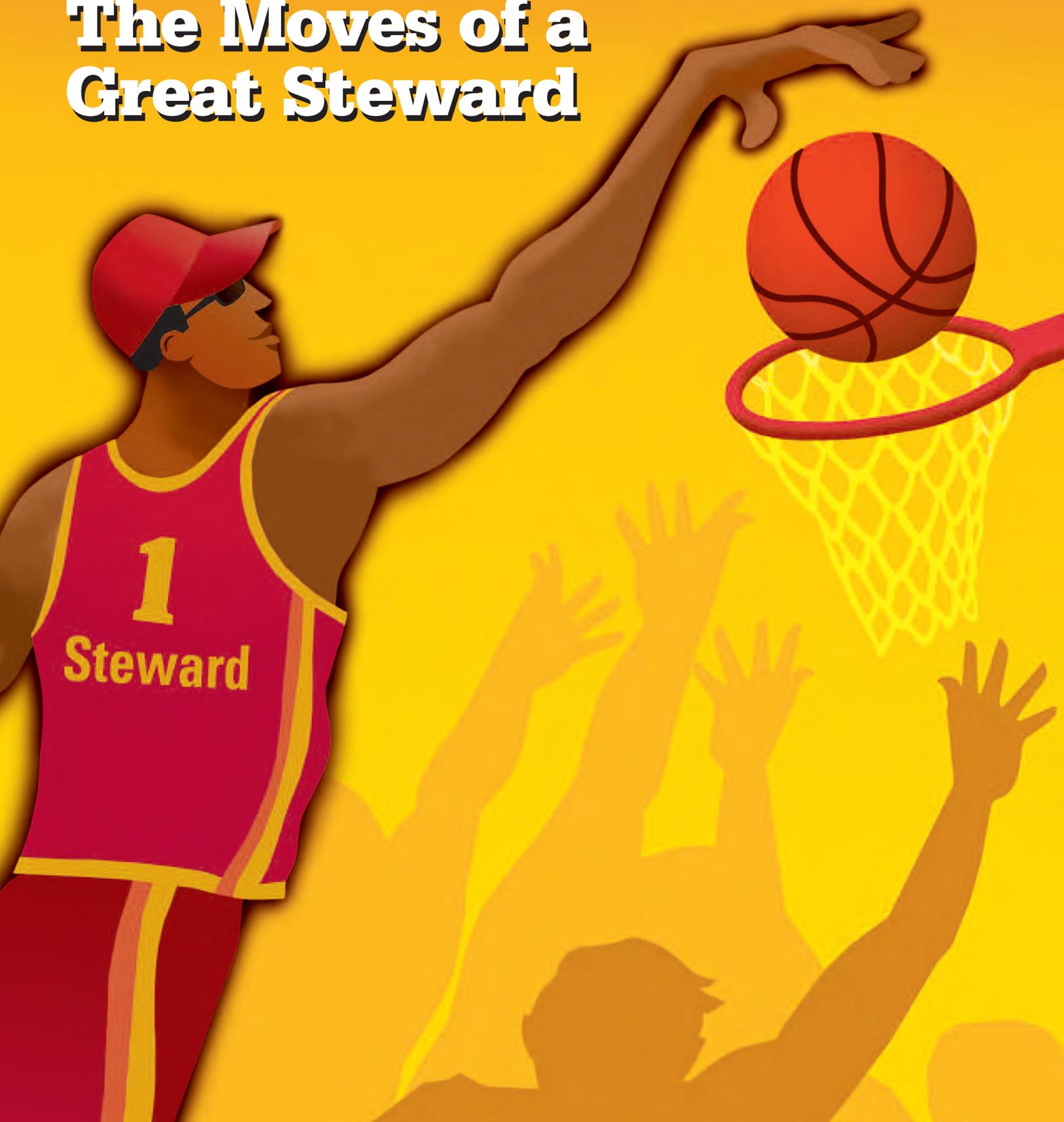


The Moves of a Great Steward



Good Stewards and Great Stewards

What's the difference between a *good* union steward and a *great* one? A lot of skills go into the mix of being a steward, some of them intangible and hard to acquire. But so many are just basic, like truly believing in what you're doing, working hard, and paying attention. Here are some qualities and skills shown by good stewards — and some ideas for those good stewards who want to be great.

■ A good steward keeps up on activities throughout the union and makes sure that members get enough of the Big Picture to understand what's happening and be ready to pitch in as needed. A great steward takes the time to make sure that important information goes *both* ways, that union leadership knows about problems and concerns in the steward's work area. A great steward understands that the goal is to build the union, not just process grievances or pass along benefits information.

■ A good steward deals responsibly, conscientiously and in a timely way with problems that surface in the workplace. A great steward does all that, but also looks for problems that are about to surface on the job and heads them off *before* they even become problems.

■ A good steward sets an example by participating in all the union projects and programs, like giving to the political action fund and helping out on organizing efforts, picket lines and demonstrations in the community. A great steward convinces co-workers to participate as well.

■ A good steward makes it a point to establish contact with every new worker, introducing him- or herself as soon as the worker shows up on the job. A great steward does that and more: he has a whole packet of information ready to turn over. Included: contact information for the steward and union leaders, copies of union publications, a copy of the union

contract, and anything else appropriate to the workplace and the union's role there. And a great steward follows up, holding regular, brief worksite meetings to keep members engaged and on top of issues — and to build group spirit.

■ A good steward always reports back to a grievant with the results of a case. A great steward keeps grievants updated throughout the process and, whenever possible, brings the grievant along to meetings with management.

■ A good steward knows every member of his bargaining unit. A great steward not only knows everyone, but is always thinking about how each individual can contribute to the work of the union. For example, Ellen's a good writer; she could help with the newsletter. Sam is really friendly and gregarious; he would be great for the social committee. Hector is always talking about computers; maybe he could help with a union website.

■ A good steward wins grievances. A great steward doesn't just win, but also makes sure everyone knows the outcome of grievances, win or lose. He discusses cases that are won, so the union can take credit and be seen to be performing. And he discusses cases that lose. In this way workers will understand that not every grievance is a guaranteed winner, and they will join with you in looking for ways to resolve problems outside the

grievance procedure.

■ Good stewards maintain regular contact with everyone in their workplace.

Great stewards establish a telephone or e-mail tree so there can be immediate contact with the entire crew if a problem arises.

■ A good steward maintains a union bulletin board. A great steward goes out of his or her way to make the bulletin board so attractive and interesting that workers regularly come by to



check it out. Post meeting notices, updates on workplace issues, community events, cartoons, interesting quotes — anything that will draw your co-workers. One internet source for worker- and union-friendly cartoons and other appropriate content you can print out is www.biglabor.com. Your national union website is another. And, as well, a great steward looks beyond the bulletin board to other, 21st Century ways to communicate: by website, by email, by text messaging. A great steward is always looking for new ways to get the union message out and engage his or her members.

■ A good steward gets the job done. A great steward recruits others to help do the job.

— David Prosten. The writer is editor of Steward Update.

Sleeping on the Job

There are many reasons people get tired at work — a late night that didn't leave enough time for a good rest, a boring job, illness... it's a long list. Whatever the reason, though, napping on the job could bring a bad reaction from the boss, who has every right to expect a fair day's work. And to get a fair day's work, most workplaces have rules calling for discipline or discharge of sleepyheads. As a steward you're going to find yourself called on to defend workers caught dozing, so a look at how arbitrators react in a range of cases can provide you some guidance on tactics and what to look for to guard against unfair disciplines.



The Employer's Rules

First off, make sure you are familiar with what the workplace rules say, and whether they call for progressive discipline or immediate discharge. Are workers entitled to a warning before the rule is invoked? Has the employer condoned people sleeping on the job before, and if so, under what circumstances? Under what conditions will a worker be forgiven for falling asleep on the job? All of these questions, if investigated carefully, may suggest a way to save someone's job. All employees must be notified in writing of the rule concerning sleeping on the job. It's not enough for the employer to say that the policy is cited in the union contract or employee manual.

Intentional Naps

If a worker seeks out a hiding place, or decides to cover him- or herself with a blanket or other cover, he can probably kiss his job goodbye. An individual worker on the second or third shift, where the job is not immediately demanding, may

think he or she can get by with some snooze time, and may indeed have gotten by with it undetected before. But arbitrators don't like such behavior and usually rule in favor of the employer in these cases. If a worker leaves his or her work post without permission to go off and sleep, it could mean serious trouble.

Dozing Off for a Minute or Two

If an employee "just dozed off for a moment" and happened to get caught, you have a better chance of getting him back to work. But, you will need to show that the worker was not shirking, the employer was not injured, and production didn't suffer. And, check to see if the employee is entitled to a warning or lesser suspension before being fired. If it's a matter of over-medication, the worker has to provide proof and medical records.

Oversleeping While on Break

If an employee falls asleep while on break and doesn't get back to the job on time, there's a risk of being fired or disciplined. Whether you can get the discipline removed depends on whether this happens frequently in the workplace, what has happened in prior cases, and what the rules say. If the employer's rules absolutely forbid sleeping on company premises or grounds, you are going to have trouble getting the worker back on the job.

Prior Record

It's much easier to get someone back on the job if his or her prior record is spotless, or even if infractions didn't occur in the prior year. Many labor agreements call for ignoring disciplines that occurred a year or more prior, so make sure you check your agreement. And watch out for employers

who trot out old, unrelated disciplines to try to support their current action.

Witnesses

While it's not necessary for the employer to have more than one witness to "prove" that the worker was sleeping, it helps. The employer must be able to document exactly how long the worker slept and be able to document it for you and any future arbitrator. Some employers may insist that the steward be present when they wake up the sleeping worker, to avert a debate later over the incident. Just remember that the boss must prove that the employee was asleep during work hours.

Past Practice

If in the past the employer has been lax in enforcing a no sleeping rule, then the steward should make sure to point out the inconsistency of the policy. If the employer wants to enforce its own no-sleeping rule more vigorously, it has to re-notify all employees in writing. And just posting it in the company newsletter is not enough, unless reading it is mandatory.

Shift Workers

Employees on the night shift commonly get less sleep than day workers. This is no excuse, but nevertheless, chances are greater that workers on the night shift are more likely to doze off. Make sure that you as steward inform them of the risks they run by not getting enough sleep off the job.



To conclude, stewards need to make sure their co-workers are aware of the rules concerning sleeping on the job, but, at the same time, stand ready to defend them if they get in trouble, by at least doing a careful investigation.

— George Hagglund. The writer is Professor Emeritus of the School for Workers at the University of Wisconsin - Madison.

Dealing with Complainers

If you're like a lot of stewards, you have a co-worker who does nothing but complain about the union. It seems like every word out of this person's mouth is negative.

People like this can be a real handful. Their anger defies reason. It's almost as if they have nothing else to do but complain and find fault: about the union's positions on things, its leaders, its failures at the bargaining table or in the grievance process, its dues... *especially* its dues. The list of grievances against the union usually is as long as the complainer's imagination is deep.

It can be a real headache for the steward, who knows better than anyone just how much the union is actually doing. It's not easy putting up with the day-to-day whining of a co-worker, especially when you know so many of the beefs are unjustified.

And it can be a much broader problem. If the person's a loudmouth, as is often the case, he or she becomes a disease-carrying virus who does everything possible to infect co-workers. The drumbeat of antiunion ranting can wear down even the strongest union supporter.

Through the complainer's efforts, nonproblems can become problems. Small problems can become big ones.

Ways to Respond

There are ways to deal with this, but first, remember: you owe it to yourself and your co-workers to take an objective look at every complaint that arises, no matter who it comes from. It may be from a non-stop complainer, but does it have merit? If it does, and you're in a position to help make things right, pursue it. If he fires enough shots, even a blind man will occasionally hit the target. Helping a chronic complainer with a legitimate problem will take you a long way toward moderating future complaints.



But if the complaint is unjustified, or a mountain is being made out of a molehill, you owe it to the union, yourself and your co-workers to deal with it.

Here are some ways you might be able to go about it:

If the complainer is confronted head-on, it may slow him down.

■ Chronic complainers frequently will gripe to everyone around them — except people like stewards or union officers, who feel

comfortable representing the union's position and know how to respond.

Perhaps next time you hear the complainer bending someone's ear, you can step in and set the record straight. If the complainer is confronted head-on, it may slow him down.

■ In the same way, it may be possible to shut down the complainer by confronting him or her in front of a number of other workers. Preparing your response in advance, pick some issue he has been griping about. Making someone look foolish is a great way to modify his behavior. It won't make him an ally, but it may make him think twice about making an issue of every little thing in the future.

■ You can challenge the complainer to

“put up or shut up.”

If the complaint is about how the union is run, tell the complainer to come to a union meeting and offer suggestions. Serve on a committee. Run for office. With a lot of people, it's easier to whine than it is to actually do something.

■ If the complaint is about dues, you can offer to refund the

dues if the complainer will turn over to the union, or donate to charity, the cash value of the benefits he gets from the union contract. This list could include things like paid holidays, vacations, health insurance payments, and annual pay raises.

■ You can try getting some of your stronger union co-workers to agree to a common response to the complainer. “You know, John (Jane), I'm really tired of hearing your complaints about the union. I think it does okay for us. I don't want to hear this stuff any more, okay?”

The best solution of all, of course, is to turn the union-hater around. Why does he or she complain so much? Ask. Maybe he had a bad experience with a union once and never got over it. Maybe he really doesn't understand the way the

union operates, or the benefits that are a direct result of the union's presence. The next-best thing to do with a complainer is to get him or her to stop. The best thing to do with one is to turn him into a supporter.

The best solution of all is to turn the union-hater around.

— Pat Thomas. The writer is on the staff of the Service Employees International Union, CTW.

Stewards in the Community

In my son's junior and senior years in high school he spent half of each day in a program in which students learned the fundamentals of the building trades. Every student selected a trade (my son chose carpentry) and together with kids learning other trades, built a house each year. It was — and still is — a great program. But one thing troubled me: the board that controlled the program consisted almost entirely of non-union contractors.

During his first year in the program I complained about this — mostly to my son, I admit — but I didn't actually do anything about it. But the second year I decided to contact the local building trades council and the school administration to set up a meeting between them. At the meeting it was agreed that the unions would be given access to the students. As a result, representatives from the building trades council attended a job fair where they were able to talk to the students and explain the benefits of unionism, how union jobs have better safety records, and the like.

This was a pretty easy way to promote unionism — even though it took me a year to get around to doing it. But as small an effort as it was, it enabled the labor movement to plant its flag in new territory.

Why is union visibility and participation in the community important? Unions today represent a minority of the workforce. The media generally present the big business point of view and either misrepresent or ignore union views altogether. But if we make a mistake (or what they perceive as a mistake), that becomes big news. And if there is conflict during organizing or bargaining activities, our neighbors will see us as people they know, who care about the community as much as they do, and will be more likely to be sympathetic to our issues.

Therefore, it is important for us to go directly to the public — our community — to let our neighbors know what we really are about. The question is, how do we do this? Here are some ideas that unions have tried, with success.

Work with Coalitions

Your central labor council and/or state or provincial federation of labor is a good place to start. They frequently have ongoing coalitions with community, civic and faith-based organizations that work on community issues. Such coalitions have worked on affordable housing, living wage and local legislative issues. By participating with these groups you are showing by your actions that unions care about and support the community. You help to improve the general quality of life in your area, build labor's image, and make community groups more likely to help local unions when asked. To find out how to get involved contact your local's leaders.

The organization Jobs with Justice (JwJ) is a large and established labor-supported union-community coalition that also engages in some of the same work described above. Check around and see if a JwJ chapter exists in your community.

Help with Charities

Many local unions and central labor councils raise money for charity through such activities as golf and bowling tournaments, charity walks, and contributions to homeless shelters and food banks. This helps good causes and shows the public that the labor movement cares about the

world around it. And why not field a union team in a sports league or a union contingent for a community parade?

Speak Before Civic Groups

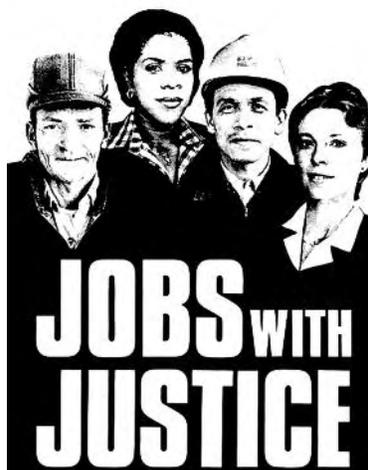
Some of us are already active in our own civic associations, many of which are always looking for speakers. If you feel comfortable in the role, volunteer yourself to explain why the labor movement is important to you and how good labor jobs contribute to the quality of life of the community. If you do not feel comfortable, or if the subject is of a technical nature, ask your leaders how to find a speaker from the labor movement on the issue at hand. Since local government frequently has an impact on community issues, consider getting a speaker from the local public employees' union. Since these unions represent workers "where the rubber meets the road," they can explain what's really going on with local governments' provision of services and show labor in a positive light.

Get Involved in Politics

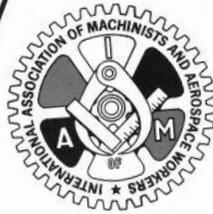
Consider becoming active in political campaigns, either working to distribute material to union members and talking with them about labor-endorsed candidates, or as a volunteer directly with the candidates' campaigns. In most public sector workplaces this must be done off the job, so ask your local leadership about any restrictions and how to get involved.

The labor movement primarily works to ensure good jobs with good pay, job security and good working conditions. But we are also affected by the state of the world — starting with our communities. By getting involved in community issues, we can improve the world for all, while building labor's image. And that's good for everyone.

— Carl Goldman. The writer is executive director of AFS-CME Council 26, Washington, D.C.



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OFFICE OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT

Brothers and Sisters,

Welcome to another edition of the *IAM Educator*. This issue has several helpful articles to help you in your role as steward — dealing with chronic complainers, getting active in your community, handling sleeping on the job cases and how to go from being a good steward to a great steward.

As a steward, you have the ability to spread the word about important issues to your co-workers every day. That unique ability will be crucial in the upcoming elections in November.

We have survived one of the worst anti-labor administrations in our lifetimes. But many of our brothers and sisters have paid an unnecessary price. Family incomes are down, prices are up and the economy is making a few people at the top very rich and leaving the rest behind.

This course cannot continue. We must work every day to make our members aware of the direct connection between who runs our government and how we fare in our daily lives.

In the two years that pro-labor Democrats have controlled Congress, millions of workers got a raise with an increase in the minimum wage, college loans are now more affordable, more children have access to healthcare and there's more oversight on government agencies responsible for our health and safety, just to name a few changes.

The House of Representatives has done its part and passed the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) to help workers join unions, but its fate and the fate of other important pro-worker legislation has stalled in the Senate. Without a 60-vote pro-labor majority in the Senate, anti-labor Republicans can block action on any bill they choose.

You can help change that on November 4, 2008 — Election Day. Make sure our members are registered to vote. Make sure they know who the pro-labor candidates are and their positions on working family issues. If we can work together and increase the pro-labor majorities in the House and Senate, we can turn around the bad trade policies and pass legislation that will rebuild the middle class in North America.

In Solidarity,

R. Thomas Buffenbarger
International President

