

WHAT IS A STEWARD?

Stewards are members of the bargaining unit who have been elected to represent your interests and enforce the collective agreement. They are OPAA's voice and are leaders in your workplace. Stewards are volunteering their time and are not paid by OPAA, although they are reimbursed when they lose time from work when acting on behalf of the union.

When they are carrying out their duties as an employee, they follow the rules and complete the work just like everyone else. When they are acting on behalf of the union, they speak to management not as employees but as representatives of OPAA—as equals.

Here are **three key jobs** of an OPAA steward:

1. Welcoming new members to OPAA

When employees are hired, the stewards introduce themselves, provide them with a collective agreement, and officially welcome them to the union.

2. Experts and enforcers of the collective agreement

This is not limited to filing grievances. Stewards remind management, as well as fellow members, about collective agreement provisions and ensure it is being followed. Because they are experts, there may be occasions where the steward has to inform a member that their complaint is not a grievance, because it has not violated the collective agreement.

3. A witness

Stewards will be called upon to sit in on discipline meetings of fellow employees. They are not there to argue, but to act as a witness and take notes. Before and during the meeting, they can reassure the employee, who may be upset about the situation. After the meeting they can discuss with the employee whether a grievance is warranted.

Three things a steward is **not**:

1. A lone ranger

When a member has a problem, they should not simply dump it on the steward and leave. The member must be involved in the solution to the problem. In fact, the first thing a steward will always ask is: "Have you spoken to your manager about this first?"

2. A doormat

While sometimes employees need to vent to their stewards, this shouldn't happen all the time. Treat your stewards respectfully and remember that they volunteer much of their time on your behalf and are doing the best they can.

3. A miracle worker

Sometimes a grievance or a situation may have a different outcome than you expected. A steward will do the best they can, but must also work within the bounds of the collective agreement and the law, and sometimes, a difficult employer. They cannot guarantee a win every time.

A steward's work often takes place behind the scenes, and you may never hear about it. It can also be a very thankless job, so please take the time to thank your stewards for their hard work and willingness to step up to this difficult task.