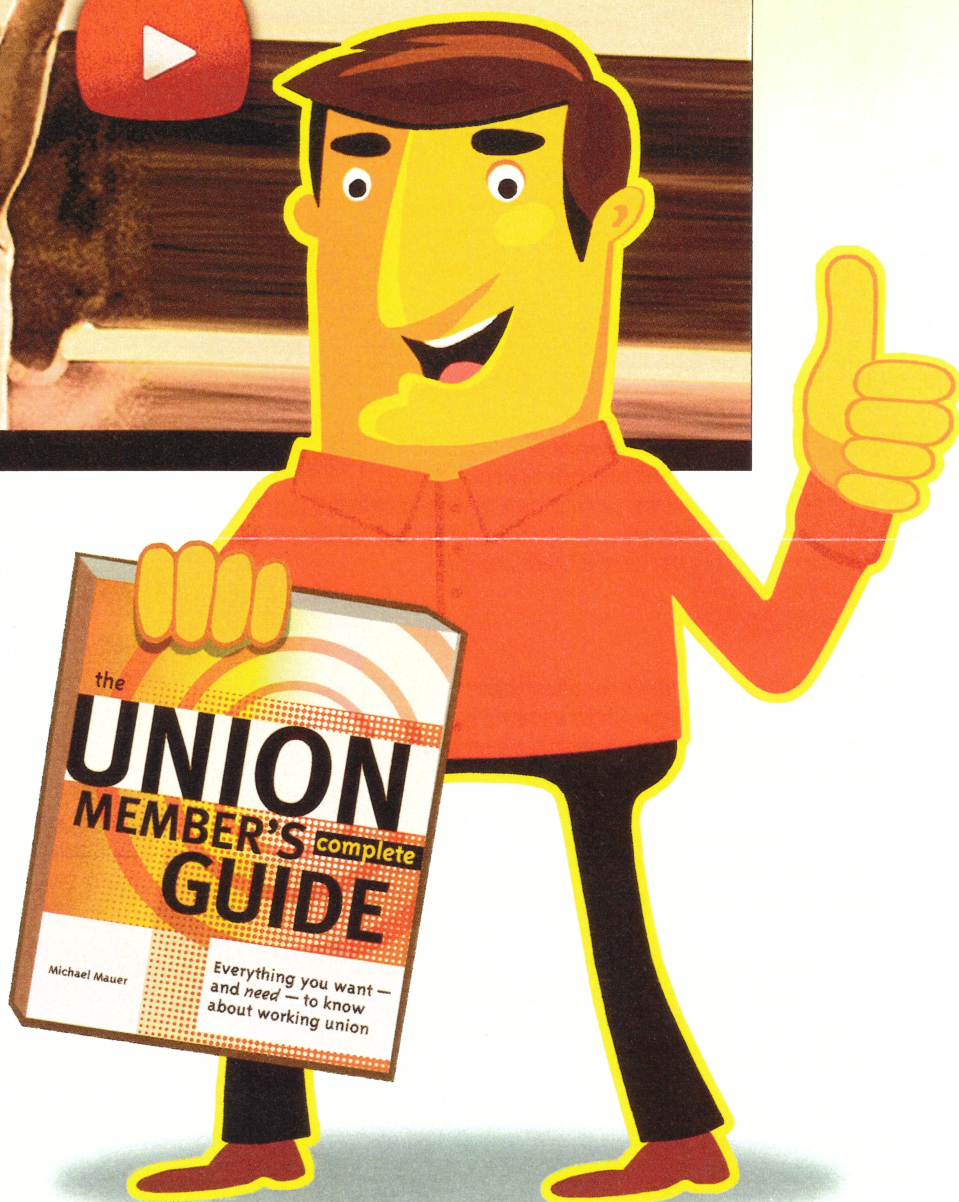


Volume Twenty-Six, Number 3

STEWARD UPDATE

Learning About Labor

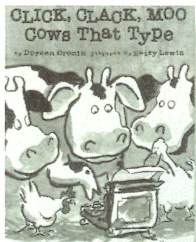


Learning About Labor

Wouldn't it be great if your members and others knew more about the labor movement? Most people lack knowledge about how unions work, what they have accomplished and their current goals and campaigns. Schools do not teach much, if anything, about labor, and the media does not help to inform people about unions either.

Below are some suggested pro-union/pro-worker books, websites, movies and videos that stewards can use to educate themselves, co-workers, union skeptics and, perhaps most importantly, children. All books mentioned are available at laborbooks.com—the online bookstore of Union Communication Services, publisher of *Steward Update*.

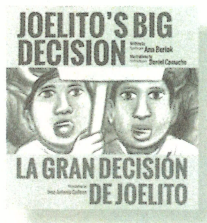
Especially for Children



Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type by Doreen Cronin
A delightful children's book (ages 3 to 7) with a union message! The cows say no milk until they get electric blankets. Union families say their children love and cherish this book.

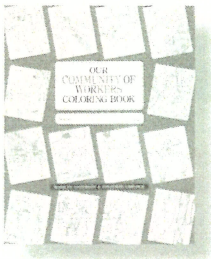
Joelito's Big Decision by Ann Berlak

When Joelito and his family go out for burgers, his friend is with his parents outside the restaurant with picket signs. The story of how Joelito reacts is told in both English and Spanish. For ages 6 to 12.



Our Community of Workers Coloring Book

This coloring book is about moms and dads at work—in offices, on construction sites, in factories, hospitals and more. The book is a product of the Rochester (NY) Central Labor Council.



Videos

Here are some especially well-done short videos that effectively deliver a powerful pro-union message. All can be found on YouTube by searching the titles listed. Email the links to members, post on social media or show at a union meeting with a follow-up discussion.

What Have Unions Ever Done for Us?

This American version of a television ad by Australian unions illustrates in a very entertaining way what unions have done for Americans.

The Big Picture: Strengthen Unions

In less than three minutes, this eye-catching video tells a clear story. Robert Reich, former U.S. Secretary of Labor, "speed draws" while explaining why strong unions are good for everyone.

A Brief History of Unions

This video from the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO provides, in less than two minutes, a lesson on the history of organized labor. It is fun, simple, & informative.

We Are the Union—Communications Workers of America (CWA)

Brooklyn Cablevision workers, who overcame strong company opposition to organize and join CWA, made this professionally produced hip-hop video featuring an amazing song.

Which Side Are You On?—Dropkick Murphys

The very popular Irish-American rock group Dropkick Murphys performs the classic union song "Which Side Are You On?" in this video that shows photos of historic and current labor struggles.

Union Town—Tom Morello/The Nightwatchman

Popular performer Tom Morello sings the song he wrote, "Union Town," to photos and videos of union members in action.

Books for Adults

The Union Member's Complete Guide: Everything You Want—and Need—to Know About Working Union by Michael Maurer

An easy-to-read, thorough explanation of what unions are and how they work, the book covers the structure of the labor movement, how contracts are negotiated, the grievance process, the union's role in communities and a lot more.

From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: A Short Illustrated History of Labor in the United States by Priscilla Murolo and A. B. Chitty

This excellent narrative surveys the historic efforts and sacrifices that working people made to win the rights we take for granted today, from minimum wage and overtime protections to health and safety guarantees to even the weekend itself.

Whether you're talking to your know-it-all brother-in-law, skeptical co-workers or anyone else, **They're Bankrupting Us! And 20 Other Myths about Unions**, by Bill Fletcher, Jr., gives responses to the myths most often cited by anti-union propagandists.

Movies

Check out some classic movies that depict workers' struggles to win improved working conditions and better lives. (all available on video rental and streaming services)

Newsies, based on the New York City newsboy strike of 1899, shows how young newspaper sellers fought a cut in their commissions. There is lots of high-energy music as well as characters with whom kids can identify.

Bread and Roses is a gripping and inspiring story of two young Latina sisters who work as cleaners in an office building and fight for the right to unionize. Based on the historic Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles, it features Academy Award winner Adrian Brody.

Norma Rae: Sally Field won the best actress Academy Award for playing a factory worker who becomes involved in an organizing effort at a textile mill. Watch for the unforgettable scene where Field stands on a work table holding a sign that simply says "Union"—powerful!

We would love to hear about your efforts to educate others about labor. We will publish the best stories in our weekly e-newsletter. Send short descriptions to us at cdr82@cornell.edu.

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

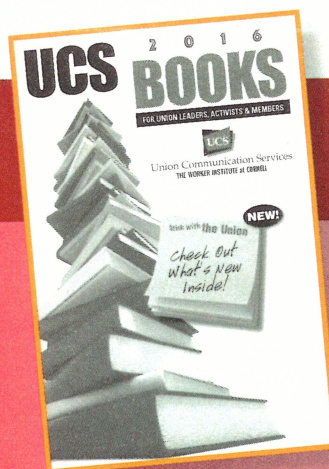
discusses cases that lose. In this way workers will understand that not every grievance is a guaranteed winner, and they will join with you in looking for ways to resolve problems outside the grievance procedure.

■ 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.unionist.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 founder of Union Communication Services, the publisher of Steward Update.



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Think Beyond “Grievance”

As stewards we need to continually examine how every action we take can increase participation in the union. This is the only way we can win more of our issues, strengthen our organizations and build worker leadership.

The collective bargaining agreement is a very important tool, but it is simply one of the tools labor has used to reach our goals. When we file grievances, the problems we are working on are often chosen for us — generally, whatever issue we have clear contract language on. We can get stuck responding to a negative action that management has taken, rather than taking positive action to prevent problems. Stewards need to be on the constant lookout, both for problems that the union can organize around and people who could get more involved in the union.

Problems to Organize Around

We need to remember that we can choose issues to organize around that may or may not involve a grievance filing. We need to assess who the problem affects, how many people will be motivated to get involved, and whether we might be able to win something. We need to choose issues carefully. We cannot organize around everything at the same time. You will want to choose (and assist others to choose) one or two problems that people most want to work on. Make sure people (including you) pick their favorites. Look for problems that the union can handle and hopefully win. Choose the problems that will best build the organization. Look for problems that large numbers of workers care deeply about.

People to Help

Good people are always present in every workplace, but often they are very busy, or don't want to become involved either through fear or because of past experience with the union. We need to have contact with people. The time spent in direct person-to-person contact is always

worthwhile. Ask other workers to do small doable tasks.

In one case we strengthened a worksite first by asking people to distribute union literature in the work area. This was not easy for people: the reputation of the union at the time was very negative. We then asked each person who had distributed printed literature to take the next step of committing to keep in contact with one to five specific people about union issues. Only when we had a small communication structure in place did we then ask

people to commit to distributing membership forms to nonmembers. From this committed core came a group of serious activists.

When problems and concerns arise on the job, stewards can use the following checklist to build the union. You may want to print the checklist on the back of your grievance form so that when problems arise you are reminded to think about what you can do to organize and build the union.

A Participation-Building Checklist

What is the problem?	What other workers or leaders would we like to involve?
How many workers are there at the workplace?	What is the remedy or goal you want to achieve?
How many people care about this problem?	Who in management could resolve this problem?
Is resolving this problem very important to people? Why?	How can pressure be exerted on the decision makers in management?
Can working on this problem increase the visibility of the union? Yes () No ()	How can pressure be exerted on outside entities who can influence management? (For example, government officials or agencies, community leaders)
Can working on this problem help reach out to under-represented groups of workers? Yes () No ()	How can we communicate with workers about this problem?
Is this problem winnable or partly winnable? Yes () No ()	
What leaders are already involved in organizing around this problem?	

Possible Actions

Who Will Do

Date to be Done

Grievance	_____	_____
Group meeting with decision maker	_____	_____
One minute stand up on the job	_____	_____
Buttons, same color shirts	_____	_____
Newsletter article	_____	_____
Rally	_____	_____
One-to-One communication network	_____	_____
Informational picket	_____	_____
Phone tree	_____	_____
Petition involving allies	_____	_____
Other	_____	_____

Dealing With Management: More Than One Approach

Far too many stewards work in places where management would like nothing more than to make the union disappear. Fortunately, this is not always the case; some Human Resources (HR) professionals accept and respect the role that unions play.

However, even with management representatives who can be reasonable, stewards know that meetings about grievances, contract interpretation or other disputes can all too often become adversarial, and even hostile. When that happens, it's easy to forget that your goal is to reach a resolution. Sometimes vicious cycles develop where nothing gets resolved because stewards and their management counterparts are locked in an unproductive struggle.

We all know that when management is trying to destroy the union, stewards have to double and redouble their efforts to organize members and build power. But that is a topic for a different article. In this piece we want to offer a few suggestions for those situations where the person on the other side of the table might be open to compromise and working things out fairly.

Take a Long View

Humans have egos. When people disagree over important issues, egos can get bruised, and people may become entrenched in their positions and develop grudges. No matter how tough the situation, it is important that stewards think about the kind of relationship they want to have with management in the future. A steward's relationship with management is a key part of being an effective representative. It's easy to always fight with management, but unless you have a working relationship where you listen to each other and discuss issues respectfully, nothing gets resolved.

Think about the kind of relationship you want to have with management.

Take the High Road

When you are in the heat of battle, it can be very tempting to call out management or embarrass them when the opportunity arises. This may give you some short-term gratification, but it has the potential of working against you. Not only might it create a problem in the future by damaging relationships, but you're unlikely to get a satisfactory outcome on the matter at hand if management gets defensive or refuses to communicate.

It's appropriate to actively and forcefully represent your members and enforce the contract; at the same time, it's also important that you not make things personal or take things personally. Give respect and expect to receive it. *The bottom line is that the personalities and communications at the table should not get in the way of the facts of the situation and the ability of both sides to consider reasonable resolutions.*

Stewards need to be positive and professional.

Adjust Your Style to the Situation

If stewards argue weak cases with as much intensity as strong ones, management is less likely to take them seriously. In fact, management will probably act pretty much like stewards do when confronted with a management

that always says "no" regardless of the case. If management sees that stewards have only one approach (come on strong with a "members are always right and management is always wrong" attitude), they have less incentive to be reasonable themselves.

Most good stewards come to understand that when they have a weak case—where a member did, in fact, break some rule—there is no value to acting like the member is a saint and management is being totally unreasonable. Always

represent members fairly based on the merits of the case, but adjust your style to fit the situation.

Be Prepared and Professional

Stewards need to be positive and professional. This means preparing in advance so that you:

- 1) Know the contract.
- 2) Have all the facts.
- 3) Know the habits and styles of the management representative involved.
- 4) Understand what the grievant and union need and want.

It's difficult to get settlement agreements without being clear on the outcome the union is seeking and why it's important to the union. Otherwise, management doesn't know how to respond appropriately. If necessary, stewards should discuss with the members involved what might be an acceptable compromise to resolve the issue.

Always be a person of your word, and don't promise things that can't be delivered. You should never bluff or give answers without knowing if they are correct. Remember to always stay above board and honest. It is extremely difficult to get results if you lack credibility.

Conflict is a natural part of labor relations, which can be dealt with productively by following the letter and spirit of the grievance procedure in the collective bargaining agreement. One veteran HR professional said it this way: "It doesn't cost anything to listen politely, even if you disagree with someone else's perspective. All I ask is that union representatives are professional and use common sense. My philosophy is work with me and be reasonable, and we can accomplish a hell of a lot that benefits both sides." It's a philosophy that could benefit many labor-management relationships.

—Damone Richardson. The writer is the HR Director of SEIU Local 1 and a former elected union representative and labor educator.

Note to CSEA activists: the *Steward Update* publication often uses the term “steward” to refer to rank-and-file union representatives who perform representational duties that CSEA has assigned exclusively to activists who hold the appointed title of “grievance representative.” Please be aware that any material in the *Steward Update* that relates to the handling of contract grievances or the representation of employees in disciplinary settings is not to be applied by CSEA stewards.

You can help build a stronger, more powerful CSEA

The attacks on workers and a fair, balanced economy keep coming. If it's not threats to undercut decent, union jobs, then it is a bad trade deal that threatens to move more jobs overseas. From corporate CEOs who want to outsource work and cut wages to attacks on collective bargaining rights, workers and unions have been facing endless challenges.

The latest of these challenges, promoted and paid for by the wealthiest 1 percent, is playing out at the U.S. Supreme Court. The case is *Friedrichs vs. California Teachers Association*, and it could have serious impact on the solidarity of public sector unions and the ability of workers to speak with one voice.

Regardless of that case, there are important actions that we should be taking now to better connect with members and strengthen CSEA — and you can help.

It all begins with building trust and relationships in the workplace — a valuable lesson practiced by our union predecessors. It starts with treating our union like a community of interests as opposed to a collection of individuals who happen to work together. The successes of unions in the 1930s relied not on their ability to negotiate raises

or win tough arbitrations (or even strike), but on a shared purpose and responsibility to one another.

The power of CSEA to speak for working people was harnessed through co-worker contact, often through interaction at social events.

But the importance of recognizing and connecting through our shared interests has eroded over time in a rapidly changing world — even though it remains as necessary as ever.

By focusing our efforts towards re-establishing our personal connections to co-workers, we can reverse this sense of isolation within our own union. This certainly won't happen overnight, but it can begin with a simple conversation. No matter how familiar or unfamiliar I feel with a co-worker, there's always something more that I can learn about her. We may never go bowling together, but I can help establish a longer-lasting, more personal relationship that strengthens my local just by taking a few minutes to discover how our interests overlap outside of the office. By expressing interest in her motivations, outlook, and hopes for the future, I'm beginning to create a different vision of what our union truly looks like and the membership it represents.

Although engaging co-workers in this way is much easier to write about than do, CSEA has resources to help activists with the process. We can help you learn the skills. CSEA has already trained hundreds of activists across the state to build stronger bonds with their fellow members. Labor relations specialists are available to assist and coordinate the outreach throughout the locals and units and help you create the more perfect union.

We can build our power by re-connecting with our co-workers and neighbors. While we may never have the monetary resources of the top 1 percent, there will always be more people on our side. No court can take away our union. We will shape our own future by organizing and realizing our collective power. We must never forget that our ability to create this future begins with us.

To set up a member engagement training for your local or unit, contact your labor relations specialist and have your president contact Lisa Hebert-Valenti at 800-342-4146, ext. 1400.

— Cory Taliaferro
CSEA Labor Education Specialist

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