

Know Your Rights as a Steward

Stewards have many rights and roles as representatives of Local 17 in the workplace. These are often outlined in the collective bargaining agreement or they have been established by the decisions of federal and state labor relations agencies and the courts. Knowing your rights and roles as a steward in a particular situation will help you be a stronger representative of the union. This article focuses on your roles with management and with other members.

Equality with Management

When stewards are performing union activities or acting in their official capacity, they are considered equals with management.

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has determined that stewards must be free to challenge management statements without censorship. The NLRB described this relationship as “a relationship between (employer) advocates on one side and union advocates on the other side, engaged as equal opposing parties.” Stewards act in an official capacity when they:

- Investigate grievances
- Request information
- Present a grievance
- Act as a Weingarten representative
- Participate in a labor-management meeting

Greater Leeway Allowed

The steward is allowed much greater leeway than the average employee in discussions with management because the steward is acting in an official capacity as a representative of Local 17.

If stewards had to “live” by the traditional rules of employee conduct, they would be placed in a difficult predicament—either forego their role as union advocate or risk almost certain discipline.

If the steward is acting in his or her official capacity, such as in a grievance meeting, and it doesn't disturb office operations, federal and state labor laws



protect loud arguing or even shouting during such meetings.

Just because stewards have greater leeway at the workplace, doesn't mean they should be disrespectful to others in the course of representing a co-worker. In fact, sometimes over aggressive behavior by the steward can make a member feel uncomfortable and the member may choose not to have a representative present at a disciplinary meeting.

Working Relationship with Management

The relationship the steward develops with management is key to effectively functioning as a Local 17 representative. Stewards serve as a link between management and employees.

If you carry out your duties as a steward in a way that demonstrates credibility, management may not always agree with you, but you will likely become a more effective steward.

More information can be found in the printed version of the *Local 17 Steward Resource Guide* or on-line at: www.ifpte17.org/publications/publications.html. — *By Natalie Kaminski, Local 17 Union Representative*