

CONGRATULATIONS! You are the Cleveland Heights Teachers Union Building Steward.

You are probably asking yourself: "What am I supposed to do? "How much of my free time is this job going to take?" "How can I do my teaching job and still talk to all teachers about CHTU?"

A lot of teachers in CHTU have asked themselves those very questions, and a lot of those very same teachers have found the answers as you will.

So, CONGRATULATIONS, Building Steward! Welcome to the club of the Union leadership.

A FRAME OF MIND: Since you are the Building Steward your life has changed. You are the most important functioning part of the Union. Now, to all the teachers in your building, especially to the newer teachers, you represent the Union. But don't panic! No one expects you to be omnipotent. All they ever expect is that you be honest, sincere and involved. No one expects you to know all the answers. But they do expect you to know where to get the answers.

CHTU BUILDING STEWARD DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As A Leader

1. Educating members as to the importance of political activity, the importance of teacher involvement with emphasis on the relationship between collective bargaining and legislative bodies.
2. Assisting faculty members with problems or concerns affecting their professional life (such as unsatisfactory observations or evaluations).
3. Assuming a decision-making role in crisis situations.
4. Representing the membership at all Union meetings and/or Executive Board sessions.
5. Keeping the Union's leadership informed as to problems and/or accomplishments at your school.
6. Answering questions about the fringe benefit programs.
7. Distributing insurance claim forms to members as needed (dental, vision, etc.).
8. Conducting elections for Building Steward(s) and TAP late April or in May.
9. Utilizing fully the Union's ten minutes at faculty meetings for making reports and announcements.
10. Scheduling regular meetings with your principal to discuss building and/or staff concerns.
11. Serving as co-chair of your building's TAP Committee.
12. Enforcing the contract!

As An Organizer

1. Organizing the members in the school, recruiting and retaining membership in CHTU.
2. Promoting Union growth in the school through Union involvement by conducting building meetings.
3. Keeping the Union's actions, meetings, program and available service visible and accessible to members in the building. This includes distributing insurance claim forms, directing insurance problems, leaves of absence requests and retirement questions, to the Union Office.
4. Communicating information to the members through personal contact, memos, e-mail or first telephone network.
5. Scheduling appointments for any member requiring further assistance from the President or First Vice President.
6. Directing Union-sponsored political action in the building by circulating petitions, campaigning for levies and Union-backed candidates.

GRIEVANCE INFORMATION:

Let us define "grievance". The simplest and most inclusive definition is a "complaint by a teacher that he/she has been treated unfairly." It is important to appreciate three aspects of teacher complaints.

Sometimes the teacher will claim to have been aggrieved (and very well may have been), and in talking to the Building Steward is very definite about having the grievance carried all the way to arbitration. Some of these teachers actually have no intention of going through the formal steps of the grievance procedure, but what they are asking for and what they need is a form of therapy. It is important for you to realize that, although a particular teacher may change his/her mind tomorrow about processing the grievance, there is a very definite need felt by that teacher for someone to listen.

The second consideration that the Building Steward ought to keep in mind is that, no matter what his/her opinion of the grievance may be, every teacher of the bargaining unit is entitled to "due process". A teacher who feels aggrieved ought never be treated unsympathetically by a Building Steward.

Finally, you must keep in mind that there are grievances that should be processed right to the final step of the grievance procedure, because the teacher is right and has been aggrieved.

MEETINGS:

As in any democratically-run organization, it is the membership that directs Stewards to make the decisions and determine the policies to be carried out by the Union.

Building Stewards must persuade the Union members to attend the building meetings. There is no better way to develop well-informed members with a pride in their organization than through the building meetings.

Distribute the notices of the building meetings with an agenda before each meeting. Call the meeting to the attention of the members in your building again on the day of the meeting. Post the notice of the meeting on the bulletin board and in the teachers' lounge. Building meetings should be held not less than once a month and /or in response to specific building or executive board concerns.

GOOD MEETINGS SELDOM HAPPEN BY ACCIDENT. They result from planning and preparation. The following guidelines may help you.

1. HELP MEMBERS TO RELAX. Try to hold the meetings in a relaxed, congenial atmosphere.

If desired, serve refreshments. This will help build good feelings and make cooperation easier.

2. PREPARE AN AGENDA AND MAKE IT SHORT. Determine which items need to be covered and precisely what facts are to be reported. Be concise in the presentation. Allow for questions. You may wish to utilize the Executive Board agenda in preparing your own agenda. Remember to report "starred" Executive Board items.

3. PROMOTE DISCUSSION. This is vital to decision-making and to stimulating interest. It will serve to clarify the issues in a problem or situation and also give the members an active role in the meeting. Everyone will feel better if they have a chance to voice their opinion.

INFORMATION FLOW:

This is another aspect of the Building Steward's job that cannot be delegated. It contributes to the formulation of Union policy and activities. The flow of information should be a two-way street. It is important that the Union officers receive from your school information about problems.

The Executive Board of CHTU should know at all times what grievances are pending in your building and what is happening to those grievances as they proceed through the grievance procedure.

You as the Building Steward should pass on to the officers of the Union the opinions of your faculty as to the present policy of the Union and also any other concerns they might have.

It is important for the Building Steward to transmit information coming from the opposite direction, from the officers and members of the Executive Board. It is important to the faculty in your building that they know what policy decisions have been made by the officers and the Executive Board of the Union. And we repeat, that while you, as a Building Steward, may not be in agreement with the particular policy, you have an obligation to your colleagues to know what that policy is and how it was determined. You will find teachers in your building will be interested in the successes of other school buildings and in their problems as well. They are also interested in how grievances were settled throughout the school district.

Post notices of interest to members on the Union bulletin board or section of the school bulletin board or in other convenient locations. Keep the board up-to-date and attractive.

It is your job to distribute to the staff in your building all publications and materials sent to you by the Union Office for distribution. Some of the publications and materials will be for distribution to all staff (which includes all teaching staff, principals, secretaries/clerks, tutors, custodial and cleaning staff, etc. and the president of the building P.T.A.). Other publications and materials may be sent to you for distribution only to members of CHTU.

ENFORCING THE CONTRACT:

A final word, Building Steward, before we turn you loose as a teacher union activist. Almost everything that we have said in preceding pages can be summarized in the words, "Police the contract". School principals and administrators generally are pretty aggressive lot although this aggressiveness is sometimes hidden under a smooth, soft veneer of comradeship. Sometimes the most aggressive school administrator has the sweetest manner. Now there is nothing wrong with this in itself. But if this aggressiveness erodes the collective bargaining agreement, then it must be met with determination. If you find that teachers in your building are being asked to give up preparation periods or to perform non-professional chores in the face of specific prohibitive contract provisions, then your role becomes that of the leader determined to protect the contract.

Avail yourself of the Union rights under the grievance procedure. When you protect Union rights, you are protecting teachers' rights. Teachers are the Union. This is what the Union is all about. It means classroom teachers united to protect the rights of classroom teachers and students, and these rights (and responsibilities) are codified in a collective bargaining agreement which your negotiators have arrive at with the Board of Education. No contract is worth the paper it's printed on unless it's policed.

SO, good luck! Welcome to the club.
