

## Stewards plan support for stewards

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It's often said that stewards are the backbone of our union, and like any backbone, it works best with adequate support.

As part of the 2020 Strategic Plan, and following discussions at recent conventions, HSA stewards have been meeting to talk about the work they do, the challenges they face, and the resources they need to do their important work.

#### **DIFFERENT CONCERNS, DIFFERENT ROLES**

At regional meetings last fall, stewards were asked to identify their main challenges and discuss possible solutions. Concerns varied from one worksite to the next, because large sites have different issues than smaller ones, and sites with a more diverse mix of professions face demands which are very different from those at sites with a more homogenous blend of members.

Some stewards expressed concerns about having the confidence in their knowledge and abilities to help members with complex labour relations problems. Some said they needed a more robust and effective steward team to be able to meet the needs of their members. Others said they needed more time and more tools to advocate effectively for them.

Overall, stewards said they are dealing with challenges concerning:

- time
- education and guidance in helping members
- help to spread the work around
- technology solutions
- strategies to organize members

Stewards also identified the varying roles they are expected to play from one day to the next. Because stewards often deal with members who may not attend HSA meetings or read information circulated by email, social media, the web site and the bulletin boards, stewards often find they are the only contact these members have with their union. To do their jobs effectively, stewards say they are called upon to serve in the following roles:

- an organizer who helps members deal with problems as a united group
- a problem solver who is the first person members turn to when confronted with a safety issue or contract question
- an educator and communicator who informs members about their collective agreement rights and recent developments relating to their workplace
- a workplace leader who acts as the face of the union in the worksite and must not be afraid to speak up to management

## **BRAINSTORMING IN FOCUS SESSIONS**

In February, stewards from small, medium and large-sized worksites gathered to discuss these insights at a series of focus groups with staff and regional directors. Discussion touched on education and new technological tools, shared tactics for motivating members and organizing support teams, and how stewards would be supported in an ideal world. Participants sketched out a draft plan to help develop effective support for steward teams facing these and many other issues.

## **NEXT STEPS**

A full report on the the findings to date, along with a draft proposal for new technology resources that are currently being developed to help stewards do their important work, will be presented to delegates for discussion at convention in May.

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