

The Art of Note Taking for Teamster Stewards

As Teamster leaders, stewards are responsible for gathering, analyzing and distributing a wide variety of information in order to enforce their contract, resolve workplace problems, investigate potential grievances and to win justice and ensure fairness for hard-working members.

Believe it or not, one primary aspect of this begins with note taking, an important, yet highly underrated art that allows control of the "record." While memory may fail—especially that of the supervisor's—notes do not.

Deciding what or how much to write and determining the best method for taking and keeping good records are essential to the information process. Review the following tips to make it happen:

- Always record the date, time location and all participants involved.
- Begin each set of "new" notes on a fresh page.
- Write neatly in ink.
- Notes should be legible. Others should be able to read them.
- Make a detailed outline of your notes; include a timeline of established events.
- Include references to documentation or evidence obtained. If necessary, "red flag" any issue or situation requiring follow-up or additional information.
- Notes should be consistent; for example, if "supervisor" is written as "Supv," stick with that version. (See next item).
- Establish a system of abbreviations and symbols, but be certain that the reader (if another steward, for example) is familiar with them.
- Record selective information; stick to facts and avoid opinions.
- While taking notes, listen actively and observe the speaker's body language; for example, is this person engaged in direct eye contact, or looking at the floor?
- Think critically. Keep an open mind. Notes should be objective and free of distraction.
- Identify key points and major issues along with supporting information.
- Control content, paying close attention to specific details facts or explanations that may expand upon key points and major issues.
- Review and edit notes on a regular basis.
- Share and compare notes for accuracy with other stewards.
- Keep notes and supplemental materials in an organized notebook accessible to others (i.e. fellow stewards, officers or business agents.) Store this notebook in a secure place (i.e., locked file cabinet, etc).
- Finally, many stewards use smartphones, laptops, and other electronic devices for notetaking and storage. Be aware that information written or stored on a workplace device may not be adequately protected. Current labor law has yet to address issues regarding usage of employer's computers; recent court decisions have ruled computers to be the sole property of the Employer. (Of course, such issues can always be resolved through collective bargaining language.) Consult with your business agent; check the current contract and review applicable employer policy.

Though many of us prefer the art of talking or listening, effective note-taking is essential to communication and is a skill that must be learned, practiced, and honed.

