

THE SHOP STEWARD

Article 17.1 of the National Agreement provides that “Stewards may be designated for the purpose of investigating, presenting and adjusting grievances.” Article 17.2 states that “[t]he Union will certify to the Employer in writing a steward or stewards and alternates in accordance with the following general guidelines.” Those guidelines are enumerated in the remaining portions of Article 17.2 of the Agreement. Article 17.3 adds that “[w]hen it is necessary for a steward to leave his/her work area to investigate and adjust grievances or to investigate a specific problem to determine whether to file a grievance, the steward shall request permission for the immediate supervisor and such request shall not be unreasonably denied.” These are the basic rights of a steward, but to be a good steward you must learn something new about your job or role as a steward every day.

Just recently representatives from the National Office of the NPMHU along with representatives from the Postal Service negotiated over wages, hours and working conditions and reached a settlement that was overwhelmingly approved by the membership of the NPMHU as the 2016 National Agreement. The job of a shop steward is to enforce that National Agreement on behalf of the mail handlers he/she represents and to make sure that USPS management lives up to the agreement. As a steward, you should remember that if you do your job well, you will be doing one

of the most important things that can be done to strengthen the NPMHU.

The foundation of this 2016 National Agreement on the workroom floor is the shop steward who is and will be the Union representative in the workplace to ensure that all mail handlers are being treated fairly. As a steward, you should have a special relationship with the employees you represent. Research studies have shown that the average worker’s image of his/her local union, his national union, and the labor movement generally develops out of his/her attitude toward the steward on the workroom floor. When a union member sees his/her steward as intellectual, aggressive, fair-minded, and knowledgeable, that member will generally feel the same about the union.

Many don’t realize it, but a shop steward is responsible for many jobs. The most important job of the steward is being able to handle and process grievances. Some other responsibilities of being a steward include: (1) organizing new members while striving for 100% membership in his/her installation; (2) keeping all members informed; (3) acting as a link between elected union officers and the membership; (4) supporting the union; and (5) keeping themselves informed.

Article 17.5 of the National Agreement states that “During the course of any employment orientation program for new career or non-career employees covered by this Agreement, or in the event a current postal employee is reassigned



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to the mail handler craft, a representative of the Union representing the craft to which the new or current employees are assigned shall be provided ample opportunity to address such new employees, provided that this provision does not preclude the Employer from addressing employees concerning the same subject. In addition, at the time any non-career employees covered by this Agreement become eligible for health insurance, the Union will be provided ample opportunity to address such employees on this subject. Health benefit enrollment information and forms will not be provided during orientation until such time as a representative of the Union has had an opportunity to address such new employees.”

Therefore, when new mail handlers and MHAs are hired, one of the steward’s basic job responsibilities is to get acquainted with these new employees when they first begin their new career and inform them about our Union and its activities. A good steward will introduce him/herself and explain to the new employees

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that a steward is available if there are questions regarding his/her rights as a mail handler. The steward should also be prepared to give the new mail handler a sense of what the Union has accomplished over the years. A good steward will also make certain that all new mail handlers have been given information regarding the Mail Handlers Benefit Plan. Remember, an informed member is a good member.

As stated earlier, the principal function of a steward is grievance handling. In order to be successful in handling a grievance, a steward must first familiarize him/herself with the National Agreement. Simply reading the contract is not enough. A good steward will not only read the contract, but learn how it has been and is being interpreted by the parties by familiarizing themselves with the Contract Interpretation Manual (CIM).

Following the contract and the CIM, probably the single most important document with which a steward should become conversant is the seniority list and/or the relative standing list for

PTFs and MHAs. Stewards should be prepared to request these documents from the local management if they are not being provided because the National Agreement spells out the details of how the principals of seniority are applied.

One of the most problematic jobs of stewards is getting to know and understand the people around them when it comes to grievance handling. A good steward knows which mail handlers are willing to give statements when the Postal Service violates Article 7 or any other Article of the National Agreement and which mail handlers are shy or unwilling to participate in the grievance process.

So, what is a grievance? A grievance is a complaint by the union or a member of the bargaining unit that violates the National Agreement. The steward's responsibility is to determine whether such complaint constitutes a legitimate grievance under the National Agreement. Sometimes these complaints are violations of the National Labor Relations Act which the Postal Service is subject to under the law and

under Article 5. Some complaints or grievances also violate other federal laws and regulations and can sometimes be made the subject of a grievance. Stewards should keep in mind that all complaints are not legitimate grievances. Article 15 of the National Agreement contains a detailed summary of what a steward must know in order to properly process a grievance and perform his/her job as a steward.

Remember, being a good steward is a tough job and you should be prepared to accept constructive criticism, willing to accept useful suggestions, and prepared to tackle the tough problems that our members may have. Also, if you are a steward or just a member, you can rest assured that the National Office of the NPMHU is solidly behind you and ready to provide you with the support and resources to not only make you a good steward but also make you a great member.

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MAIL HANDLERS SUPPORT

JUVENILE DIABETES RESEARCH FOUNDATION



The National Postal Mail Handlers Union has been a sponsor and a participant of the JDRF Walk to cure diabetes for over 20 years and we will continue to walk until Type One becomes Type None!

This year our walk will be held on the National Mall. The NPMHU Team will be walking in Washington, DC: Sunday, June 4, 2017. We need your support. A dollar here and there adds up, no matter how small you may think it is to someone with Diabetes it's a huge gift.

Each year, JDRF One Walk brings together more than 900,000 peo-

ple across the country to change the future for people living with type 1 diabetes (T1D). This fun, family-friendly event gives people with T1D—and their friends, family and co-workers—the opportunity to raise money for life-changing T1D research. They walk to help JDRF ease the incredible burden of this disease for the millions affected, until we create a world without T1D.

To donate to our team please visit the Mail Handlers webpage at www.npmhu.org and follow the link to the Mail Handlers JDRF team page. Donate to the JDRF One Walk today and help us turn Type One into Type None.