

# ON THE JOB:

## AVOIDING THE PITFALLS



**Stewards are the heart and soul of NYSNA-style rank-and-file unionism.** Stewards represent the “NYSNA in Action” as the first line of defense against employer abuses-acting as organizer, counselor, peacemaker, and troublemaker. And that’s a tough job.

There are a lot of potential pitfalls facing NYSNA Stewards, too. These are not always possible to avoid, but listing some of the most important ones should help us to be on guard as we represent NYSNA members on the job.

- **FAILURE TO ORGANIZE** — Stewards are critical to organizing the members. We need to be thinking about how each grievance can be used to increase participation, build the union, and create new leaders (even future stewards).
- **PROMISING REMEDIES TOO QUICKLY** — Do not pass judgment on a grievance until a thorough investigation has been completed. Wait to make a decision until after you’ve talked with the grievant and witnesses, consulted the contract, and examined your company’s rules and past practices.
- **FAILURE TO REPRESENT FAIRLY** — Not giving an aggrieved member fair treatment makes the union vulnerable to a lawsuit for breach of its fair representation duty. Besides, this undermines the whole purpose of the union and the very idea of solidarity.
- **MAKING BACKROOM DEALS** — Never secretly trade grievances with management. Every member is always entitled to a fair hearing.
- **MEETING ALONE WITH MANAGEMENT** — Being alone with management discussing a grievance arouses suspicion among members, allows bosses to change their stories, and denies the grievant an opportunity to participate in a vital union activity (to say nothing of undermining the spirit of rank-and-file unionism).
- **FAILURE TO ADHERE TO TIMELINES** — Adhere to the grievance schedule stated in the contract. If an extension is needed, get the employer’s permission in writing.
- **FAILURE TO GET SETTLEMENTS IN WRITING** — Putting grievance settlements in writing helps to clarify the issues and keep the agreement alive. It also serves as a record for dealing with similar problems in the future — and as a way of reviewing issues for contract bargaining.
- **FAILURE TO PUBLICIZE VICTORIES** — Publicizing every victory helps to build a local union and boosts all members’ morale.
- **FAILURE TO SPEAK WITH NEW EMPLOYEES** — The union’s best chance for finding and keeping new members is one-on-one contact with a steward. Besides giving new workers information, this helps build personal relationships and includes new workers in the union from the outset.

Remembering these tips should help make the job easier and help to avoid some of the pitfalls that can be problems for any steward.