

Setting and Reaching Goals



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The great major league catcher and coach Yogi Berra is famous for many achievements on the baseball diamond. He is also well known for his amusing way with words. On the subject of setting goals, he offered this wisdom: “You’ve got to be very careful if you don’t know where you are going, because you might not get there.”

One of the biggest challenges any steward has is actually getting things done, what with so much to do and so little time to do it.

Experienced stewards, those who get the most done, have learned how to set goals and develop

a plan to get there. It’s experience well worth sharing.

First, Set the Goal

Let’s say you want to get more members involved in the union. That is a worthy idea, and certainly not an original one, but as a goal it needs work.

For many years people have used the SMART system to help them set goals. A SMART goal is **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and with a **T**imetable.

So, rather than the general goal of getting more of your co-workers involved in the union, a SMART, focused goal might be this: get at least 15 of the 25 members you represent to attend at least one of three educational union sessions during lunch by early next year.

Setting your goal at 15 out of 25 to attend at least one session is certainly specific. It is also measurable — you will know if you achieve it or if you don’t.

Is it in fact achievable? You don’t

want to set so high a goal that you are likely to fail to reach it, but you also want to be somewhat ambitious and not just set very easily reached goals.

Relevant, the “R” in SMART, means important. It means that reaching the goal actually makes a difference. In this case you would have to believe that the process of surveying members on topics and talking to them to convince them to attend at least one educational session, combined with what they will learn by having attended a session, will move them to get more involved in the work of the union.



Get the Timing Down

The next step is to make a plan for the educational sessions and getting members to attend.

That’s where the **T** for timetable comes in. An effective way to plan is to work backwards. Set the dates for the sessions and work backwards to determine when you have to undertake key steps to reach your goal — things like determin-

ing the topics, getting people to present the topics, reserving a room, ordering food, sending out notices and so forth.

Put all the key steps on a timeline. That way you can look at it and see if the steps are in the right order and if they are realistic. You may have to develop a number of possible timelines before arriving at

the one you will carry out.

So, using our example of having members attend educational sessions, you might schedule them for the first Tuesday of December, January and February. With those dates set, you need to indicate by what date you need to recruit a few members to help you with the project, start and complete the survey on topics, talk to each member, and so forth.

Do It Step-by-Step

Once you have your timeline you need to break each key step into smaller steps, each with its own timeline. For example, to determine the topics for the educational sessions, you might first ask your union rep or officers for suggestions, then take that list and have each of your helpers contact certain members to ask them which topics they favor. Once you have the members’ preferences you can make a decision. But each of those steps needs to have a deadline and each of your helpers needs to have specific assignments.

The key to carrying out plans is determining **What** will be done, **When** it needs to be done and **Who** will do it. Then you need to make sure everything gets done on time: if not, you make appropriate adjustments.

It doesn’t end once you’ve reached the goal you set for yourself. After it’s all over you’ll want to evaluate how it all went. What worked, what could have been done better, and what will you do differently next time you set a goal for yourself in your steward’s work.

— Ken Margolies. The writer is on the Labor Extension faculty of Cornell University.

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Educating Union Members

One of the hardest parts of a steward's job — and often the most frustrating — is trying to convince your co-workers of the importance of taking the responsibility to learn about their union. This is especially true with workers who become members not through an organizing drive but because they've taken a job with a previously unionized employer. A common attitude is, "Sure I'll pay my dues. But whatever 'the union' does or doesn't do isn't going to make much difference to me in the long run. So there's not much point in investing my time and energy into figuring out exactly how the union spends my dues dollars, or why any of it much matters."

How do you convince a dues payer that it's worth getting educated about what your union and the union movement generally is all about, and about the history of the labor movement? What's needed to persuade is a combination of history, facts about the present day, and an appeal to "do the right thing." You probably know many more arguments than these, but you could try using these talking points.

The Past Creates the Present

You can't know where you're going if you don't understand where you've been. Many union members aren't aware that things are the way they are in our workplace and others because millions of workers won the fight to be represented by unions. The modern labor movement has transformed tens of thousands of workplaces, and tens of millions of lives. And while we might take for granted all that we have today, many of those who came before us paid a price — sometimes of their lives — to win union recognition and bitterly fought strikes.

Change the future by understanding the past

Financial Gain

Try throwing some statistics at your co-workers. According to the most recent U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report, those of us who are unionized earn 28 percent more money. We enjoy more benefits. For example, 87 percent of unionized workers have pension plans, versus only 51 percent of nonunion workers. It's the same with paid sick leave: 82 percent of unionized workers have that benefit, compared to only 63 percent of nonunion workers.

Informed Decision Making

On a very practical level, everyone in a unionized workplace has to make a decision as to whether to be a full, dues-paying member. "You need to understand what our union does and how you fit into the picture," you can tell your co-workers, "so that you can make an informed decision about whether to become a full, active and involved member."

Tool for Change

Here's another approach: "If you're like every other person who's ever lived, it's probably fair to say that there are some aspects of your working life here that you don't like. Because unions are the most powerful tool we have to gain control over what goes on in our workplace, to improve your situation you need to understand the possibilities and limitations of what our union can do. You can't get a true sense of what can be done without tuning into the process. If you're educated about what the union can do to change the workplace for the better, you're in a position to provide the input the union needs as your

representative. To put it another way, the union can't speak with your voice if it doesn't know what to say."

Social Movement

The labor movement has been a major force in shaping our society. When you make the decision to become not just a dues payer, but a union member who is actively involved in all the things our union does, you become part of something bigger than your individual life, and bigger than your workplace. In fact, you become part of one of the largest social movements in the country today, one that counts millions and millions of people in its ranks and has had a huge impact on all of society over the years. For example, the Social Security system would not have been established had it not been for the efforts of American unions.

Broader Impact

And, finally, the fate of unionized North American workers more and more is linked to the fortune of our fellow workers the world over. We unionists have

more and more reason — and more and more need — to speak up on international trade and environmental issues, human rights standards, and just about every other global issue. We need to learn about

Without your input, the union can't speak for you

working conditions in other parts of the world, and what our employers and our government have in mind with respect to worldwide trade and enforcing labor standards — or not enforcing them. If our employer can get away with having a worker in Asia or Central America produce what we produce, at a fraction of our pay and no benefits, you better believe he'll do it. And he won't much care if a few rivers end up flowing with cancer-causing toxins in the process, either.

— Michael Mauer. The writer is author of *The Union Member's Complete Guide: Everything You Want — and Need — To Know About Working Union*, from which this article is adapted.

Leveraging Union Power

Simply processing grievances in the “routine” way no longer seems to be working for many stewards.

Employers in both the private and public sectors are stalling, dragging out the meeting schedules, refusing to settle even the most obvious contract violations, trying to force unions to file for arbitrations and generally using the “Management Rights” clause of the contract as a club to whack away at rights that had long been accepted. While it may seem erratic, this behavior is well-calculated to gain leverage for management.

What is leverage? It’s the force that each side uses to make the other side yield. For a steward, leverage gets the boss to respect the union and to resolve the daily problems in the workplace.

Leverage makes the boss do what he really does not want to do: abide by the union contract. While the typical grievance plods through the steps and is eventually sent to arbitration, by using leverage you can speed up the process and save both time and money for the union.

One steward, describing the difficulties in this area, remarked: “With so many things at the arbitration stage, some are low down the priority list. We don’t want to be steamrolled on these smaller issues, we are a strong union with 99 percent membership, but our employer has very deep pockets.”

Demoralized Membership?

One crucial impact of management leverage is the demoralization of the members and the loss of confidence in the union. Every grievance that stretches out for months without resolution — especially if it’s *my* grievance! — reinforces the image of an employer too powerful for a union to confront. Nothing is more frustrating for a member than asking a steward “Where’s my grievance?” and being told “We’re waiting for a response” or, worse,

that the boss is flatly and loudly saying “NO” to every grievance.

Employers are routinely taking huge bites out of union contracts and out of conditions in the workplace, with a confidence that the union representing their workers will simply file yet another futile grievance. One steel producer, for example, started importing slabs from one of its foreign divisions, jeopardizing the jobs of hundreds of unionized workers. The local’s response: file a grievance and threaten arbitration. But the problem is, in a year or so, if the arbitration is ever heard, the damage will be long done and, in many ways, irreparable.

Stewards can fight these employer tactics in a number of ways.

First off, include the word leverage in every grievance-handling strategy session, since it’s as important as other common language like time limits,

or steps or proof. Discussing leverage in the evaluation of every grievance makes stewards and members begin to think organizationally, looking at the union contract as not just a legal document but as a reflection of a power-sharing agreement that is always changing, depending on the relative strengths of the union and the employer.

Try a “Leverage Contest”

Also, think about having “leverage” contests among the stewards to figure out how to win the game called *Move The Boss*. In some of the grievance handling classes I teach we had this discussion and came up with a nifty list of pressure tactics to encourage an employer to be more reasonable. Included in the list:

1 Work as carefully, and as slowly, as possible on key procedures like maintenance.

2 Follow every instruction carefully while taking no initiative so that every move has to be directed by a supervisor.

3 Pressure supervisors to resolve disputes at a low level, especially if higher management dislikes getting a lot of third-step grievances and seeing a lot of them can affect supervisors’ evaluations.

4 Have “education” classes for the members on the situation and on their importance in developing leverage — and also educate them on how management uses various tricks to gain leverage for its side.

5 Bring members into grievance meetings, possibly with group grievances.

6 Be particularly careful about health and safety issues and reporting them as “imminent dangers,” so that workers can legally refuse the assignment.

7 Take control of the workplace rumor mill. Usually the boss will get leverage in a situation by informally spreading horror stories of what could happen if the union doesn’t cave in. Reverse the process so management will know it could feel some pain if it doesn’t behave in a more reasonable way.

8 Demand to bargain over any changes in the workplace, rather than simply filing a grievance. Negotiations always get members involved and the added pressure can only help settle grievances.

9 Build a solid communications network among the members — using new technology if possible — so that every management move gets the membership’s full attention.

10 Publicize any threats from management against individual workers who are trying to use leverage so that all of the members and the boss understand the old union tradition: an injury to one is an injury to all.

Most important, be positive and be strong. As soon as a steward says “Well, there’s nothing we can do,” the grievance — and the union — are sunk. A steward needs to figure out what can be done to win a grievance. Don’t be afraid to think outside the box, and do everything you can to involve your co-workers.

— Bill Barry. The writer is director of labor studies at the Community College of Baltimore County.

**Leverage:
The force
each side
uses to
make the
other side
yield**

You Know You're in Trouble as a Steward When...

One of the challenges of being a steward is finding the time to assess just how well you're handling the role. Are you doing OK? Or, perhaps, have things somehow gone off the track? Taking a look every so often at how you're doing is essential to staying fresh and growing as a steward. While it's impossible to come up with a complete list of all the things you need to watch out for to stay out of trouble, here are a few of the big ones.

■ You're in trouble if you see workers in your department who are strangers. Your work as a union steward begins as soon as someone walks in off the street or transfers in from another department. You are the front line for the union, so you need to introduce yourself and begin listening to members' concerns and talking union to any new people as soon as possible. Don't wait until workers are off probation or until they come to you with a problem. If you don't know them and they don't know you, then everything they learn about their work and the union is from *management*.

■ You're in trouble when members don't come to you with their problems. The people you represent need to know that you are available and eager to help. Stewards sometimes make the mistake of only wanting to deal with strictly contractual grievances. Yet it is often through helping members on more minor issues that you build the credibility and respect that is invaluable in solving more serious problems. Remember too that building your union is all about having strong social ties in your workplace that go far beyond official union business.

■ You're in trouble when members seek help from other stewards. This may be happening because you haven't been

making yourself available, or because you're new or inexperienced. To get more experience you should take advantage of whatever steward training programs the union offers and you should regularly seek the advice of more experienced stewards. Another reason members may not be seeking you out: rightly or wrongly, they may perceive that you are tied to a particular clique or group of workers. It should be clear in your words and deeds that you don't play favorites and are prepared to represent everyone equally. If there are divisions in your department, be sure you reach out to all groups.

■ You're in trouble when management refuses to meet with you. You have to build credibility with management, not just the members. This is not to suggest that management will always like you, but through your integrity, persistence and hard work, management will realize that you are a force they need to contend with. As a new steward it may take some time to gain this respect.

Remember the "equity principle": you are not just an employee when working on a grievance but a representative of the union, and therefore you are the equal to management.

■ You're in trouble when members and management make private deals without you or the union's involvement. You need to help members understand that without the assistance of a steward and the union, the likelihood of getting justice is very small. Furthermore, without the involvement of the union, these back room deals frequently undermine the contract and in the long run make things worse for everybody. You need to talk about solidarity all the time and how through sticking togeth-

er everyone will benefit.

■ You're in trouble when you never win a grievance. Winning isn't everything, particularly if you're up against an aggressive employer or a difficult workplace. But if you are only rarely winning it's time to reevaluate your grievance strategy. Are you filing too many grievances that don't have merit? Are you doing careful grievance investigations? Are you carefully preparing for the hearing, including practicing with the grievant and with witnesses? Are you developing ways to pressure the employer outside of the grievance procedure?

Maybe this is a good time for a grievance refresher course. It also may be a good time to do some internal organizing in order to use rank-and-file support to pressure the employer to settle in the union's favor.

When you *do* win, be sure to publicize your union's grievance victories on the union bulletin board or in a regular newsletter.

■ You're in trouble when you hear rumors about members wanting to decertify the union. While members may sometimes threaten to get rid of the union if they don't win a grievance or things don't go their way, this is not something to take lightly. Your brothers and sisters and maybe you, too, fought hard to get your union, and everything you gained can be wiped out in one decertification election. The best way to prevent and diffuse decertification is to launch an internal organizing drive addressing the issues and concerns that are bubbling up to the surface. But don't try to handle this all by yourself. These decertification campaigns sometimes gather far too much momentum before the union becomes aware, so report any activity to your officers of the local as soon as possible.

— Tom Jurawich and Kate Bronfenbrenner. Tom Jurawich is professor of labor studies and sociology at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst; Kate Bronfenbrenner is director of labor education research at the New York State School of Industrial Relations.

You're in trouble when you never win a grievance

You're in trouble when management refuses to meet with you

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OFFICE OF THE INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

By the time you receive this letter, we will have elected a new Congress as we have passed the 2010 midterm elections. And, we will have already undergone several key elections in our campaign to organize Delta-Northwest Airlines. No matter the outcome of these significant events in IAM history, the fight is far from over. There's much more work to be done.

Some statisticians may claim the recession is over, but the pain is still very real for everyday Americans. More than 30 million Americans and 2.16 million Canadians are unemployed and underemployed — many of them people very dear to us: husbands, wives, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, friends, neighbors and former co-workers. They still are struggling. And all signs indicate there is no end in sight for them.

That's why we must press on — even harder. Most renowned economists say this jobless recovery could be significantly shortened by swift, robust government action. We must continue our efforts for further stimulus programs and a national jobs strategy that will put Americans back to work. We must demand the new Congress renegotiate our flawed trade laws. We need policies that will discourage the outsourcing of U.S. and Canadian jobs to foreign countries and currency reform to prevent countries like China from manipulating their currency for an unfair trade advantage. And, we must fight to rebuild the U.S. and Canadian manufacturing sectors. We know a recovery without a concerted investment in manufacturing is no recovery at all.

As Stewards, you know we cannot ease up. We must continue full-speed ahead, pressing for the adoption of laws in the U.S. and Canada that will bring real relief to working families and put our friends, family and neighbors back to work.

In Solidarity,

R. Thomas Buffenbarger
International President

