




Getting Started as a YEU Shop Steward



A brief guide



This short guide will cover the essentials of becoming a Shop Steward - just enough to give you an idea what to expect. Its purpose is to get new Stewards on their feet and pointed toward resources, and also to give interested members a brief overview of the role and its responsibilities. The YEU Shop Steward Handbook has more detail on everything covered in this guide and other information you'll need to be successful.

If you are like most of our members, you have been hesitant to involve yourself as a Shop Steward because you simply don't have much time to give. Serving as a Steward does usually require that you volunteer some of your time—but probably not as much as you fear. Much of the training you'll need can be done while on paid leave from work and most of your Steward duties, such as representing a co-worker at a meeting, can be done during your regular work day.

Shop Stewards start out by performing a vital role as “first responders” in the workplace, recognizing unfair working conditions, taking note of contract violations, and consulting with Union staff about issues as they arise. As you take advantage of further training, you will also become confident processing grievances and meeting with management on equal terms. You will communicate with co-workers to keep them informed about Union business, and encourage them to give input for the next round of bargaining.

Your willingness to help and your interest in the role of Steward is valuable and appreciated. Keep in mind that most of the skills you'll need to be an effective Steward will be learned as you go; you don't need to be an expert before signing up. If you decide that becoming a Steward is not for you, there are many other ways to support your Union and your co-workers.

Let's look at where to begin.

STEP 1

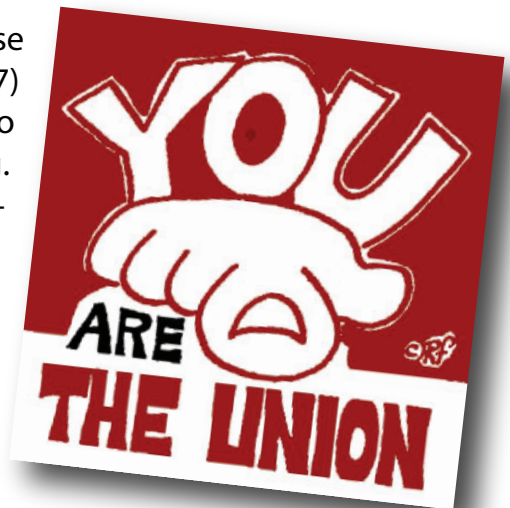
Make it Official

Yukon Employees' Union is organized into groups of workers (usually at a single workplace or for a single employer) known as "Locals". Each Local has an elected leadership board and a network of Shop Stewards.

To begin as a Steward, contact your Chief Shop Steward (one member of the leadership team). Your CSS will connect you with any other Stewards in your Local and guide you through the initial steps of getting started, which usually involves posting a notice in your immediate workplace of your intention to run.

Throughout your development as a Steward your CSS will be an important resource person for you. S/he will keep you informed about training opportunities with YEU/PSAC and will arrange opportunities for you to shadow other Stewards until you are ready to represent members on your own. S/he will also have answers to most of your general Stewarding questions and concerns. Contact information for your Local Executive, including your CSS, is on our website at www.yeu.ca/locals

Once you've been elected, please contact the Union Hall at (867) 667-2331 or at contact@yeu.ca to arrange an orientation meeting. You will be sworn in by the President, meet the staff who will support you, enjoy a cup of coffee and pick up a welcome package with everything you'll need to get started.



STEP 2

Prepare your Tools

A. Your Collective Agreement

One of the most important things to keep handy is a copy of your Collective Agreement, which should be readily available from your employer. Contracts are also hosted online at www.yeu.ca/locals. This document lays out the terms of employment agreed to between the Union and your employer, and it is usually renegotiated every 2-5 years.

No one expects you to meditate upon the contract day and night, but the more familiar you are with its contents, the more effective you will be as a Steward. Begin by reading the Table of Contents very closely, making sure you understand the various headings. Read a few sections to get a feel for the 'legalese' that these documents are written in and then begin reading through a section or two during coffee breaks.

Ideally, you want to know the Collective Agreement well enough that if someone approaches you with a question about what happens to unused sick time at the end of the year (for example), you'll know where to look it up, and be confident that you'll understand the clause once you've found it.



B. Employer Policy Statements

In addition to the Collective Agreement, your employer will often have policy statements or “administrative directives” concerning matters such as:

- a.) Occupational Health and Safety Standards
- b.) Harassment or Bullying in the Workplace
- c.) Accommodation of disability and return to work after an accident or illness
- d.) Anti-discrimination or Respectful Workplaces

While you do not need to be an expert on any of these matters, you will be more effective if you are familiar enough with them to recognize when a policy is being violated. Also note that employer policies might *supplement the Collective Agreement*, but they *do not override it*.

Be on the lookout for Employer Policies that contradict terms in the contract, and bring them to the attention of a Union Advisor with YEU.

C. Forms and Note-Taking Equipment

When you are sworn in as a Steward, YEU will give you a Steward’s Binder containing forms and materials for your day-to-day activities as a Steward. There are generic forms for taking notes at meetings, gathering details when someone comes to you with a complaint, and processing and tracking grievances. You’ll also find contact information for all the support staff at YEU. For now, just look through these materials and make sure you know what’s there.

STEP 3

Check the Pulse, Spread the News

Once you are an official Shop Steward, you'll want to identify yourself as such to your co-workers, and begin considering the issues that folks in your workplace are concerned with. A few ways to do this:

A. The Union Bulletin Board

Each workplace should have a bulletin board dedicated to sharing Union information. If you are unable to locate one, ask your Chief Steward or Local President about getting one put up. Often someone else in the Local will already be responsible for keeping it updated, but if not, consider taking on this job yourself.

In your Steward's Binder are a number of bulletin board posters that you could start rotating on the board. A notice informing employees who their Shop Steward is (that's you!) together with contact information should stay up for as long as you are active. Consider including a picture with the poster if you are in a larger work area and don't know all your co-workers by name.

B. Wear Union Swag

A simple thing like drinking from a Union mug or wearing your Steward pin can serve to remind people about the presence of the Union in their workplace. Doing this can identify you as a Union supporter and may invite your co-workers to ask questions.





C. Chat with Members

You don't need to interrupt everyone in the lunch room by standing on a chair and delivering a 15 minute presentation on the greatness of the Union. In fact, forcing a conversation about the Union is almost never a good idea.

What you can do is take a few minutes just to listen to someone's concerns over a coffee break. Start by saying "I wanted to ask you how work is going?" Try to do this with co-workers you don't normally socialize with anyway, so that everyone knows where to turn if they have a concern. Of course, not everyone has a common lunch room or overlapping coffee breaks, so you may need to get more creative. Come in a little early or stay late once in a while to interact with the folks on other shifts.

If your Local has the budget, ask your Chief Steward to get you a Tim's card to meet members outside of work for a coffee, or to occasionally bring in a box of Timbits with a note from the Shop Steward.

STEP 4

Providing Assistance

Stewards are normally called on by co-workers when they have a disciplinary meeting scheduled with management and need Union representation, or when they aren't happy with the way they have been treated at work and want the Union's help. Be sure to ask for help when you need it (from your CSS, YEU Staff & fellow Stewards), and remain in contact with YEU's Intake Advisor to track progress.

A. Attending Meetings

An employee called in to a meeting which could lead to disciplinary measures has the right to Union representation. They don't have the right to representation at just any meeting, however, and sometimes it isn't clear if the meeting will be disciplinary in nature. To better understand some common employer practices when it comes to correcting employee behaviour, consult the Shop Steward Handbook section on Representing Members at Disciplinary Meetings.

When attending meetings, your role as a Shop Steward is to support the employee. You do this in a number of ways, including:

- Consulting privately with the employee prior to the meeting to inform them of their rights and about the typical process. Explain that your role is to ensure the process is fair and that it conforms to the terms of your Collective Agreement.
- Taking notes at the meeting. This can be more technical than you'd think, since your notes can be used by the Union as important data at grievance or arbitration hearings. Consult the section on note-taking in the Shop Steward Handbook.
- Holding a private discussion with the employee after the meeting to ensure they understand the employer's position and, where appropriate, to discuss further action.
- With the support of your team, filing a grievance when due process is not followed, or where the discipline is excessive.

IMPORTANT – Every time you assist a member by attending a meeting with a supervisor, you must call YEU. Our Intake Advisor will open a file to keep a record of the meeting for the Union. You will also have an opportunity to connect with YEU staff and get the support you need as a Steward. Follow up with YEU staff after the meeting to either close the file or discuss further action.

B. Processing Complaints and Grievances

When you assist a co-worker with a concern or complaint, your job is to perform an initial evaluation of the complaint and contact YEU's Intake Advisor to begin the resolution process.

The grievance process includes deadlines for filing, and a legitimate complaint can go unresolved if those deadlines are missed. Included in your Steward's Binder are some tools that can help. A Grievance Tracking Chart, customized for your Local, will help you track the important dates through the process. You can use the Fact Sheet to begin gathering details about what occurred.

You may want to have the employee run you through the situation the first time without taking notes, but be sure to go over it one more time to keep an official set of notes to turn over to YEU staff. You can use the YEU Meeting Notes form for this.

IMPORTANT – Every time you take on a case for a member, contact YEU; this allows us to track important information.

****DOUBLY IMPORTANT**** - Stewards must respect the member's confidentiality. Get consent to open a file & keep your notes private and secure. Never discuss concerns without the member's explicit permission. Sometimes a member will only be seeking information and will not want to file a grievance. Be sure to keep a record of cases when you advise taking action, but the member declines.

STEP 5

Get Some Training

Your willingness to assist your co-workers, familiarize yourself with your Collective Agreement, take notes at meetings, and refer complaints to the appropriate resources is enough to get you started.

A Shop Steward needs to grow comfortable doing many new things. The list below outlines some duties that, with training, you will gain confidence performing.

- Filing grievances and supporting members during hearings with their immediate supervisor or manager.
- Challenging management claims or actions at meetings when they violate procedure or terms in the Collective Agreement (for example, if a letter of expectation that was supposed to be removed from an employee's file is being used as a reason to impose harsher discipline).
- Taking note of workplace practices that contravene terms in the Collective Agreement, or stretch them in unreasonable ways, in order to organize members to present a group grievance or to assist the Union in filing a policy grievance.

The Union needs Stewards who are comfortable in their role, so we have an interest in providing **the training you need**. There are a number of ways to get this training. Some highlights:

A. The YEU Shop Steward Handbook

When time permits, read through the full Shop Steward Handbook, available at the Union Hall and online at www.yeu.ca. The modules included in the Handbook can be studied independent of each other, so you can work through them in whatever order interests you.

B. Shop Steward Round Tables

You are invited to participate in our Round Table sessions, held the third Wednesday of the month from 9am-12pm at the Union Hall. We focus on a different topic each month, and each session includes an opportunity for you to network with other Stewards and to share some of your own challenges and experiences. These sessions are designed to benefit both new and seasoned Stewards, and are also open to members interested in exploring the role. Consider inviting a colleague to join you.

C. Mentorship and Shadowing

Stewards always work in partnership with their Chief Steward, YEU staff and sometimes other Stewards. As a new recruit you will shadow more experienced Stewards before taking the lead.

D. PSAC Training

The PSAC Regional Office is located on the main floor of the Union Hall, and they offer training on a variety of topics useful to Shop Stewards. Find information and current listings on their website at www.psanorth.com. Additionally, PSAC offers online learning modules that you can take advantage of any time. Find information at <http://psacunion.ca/online-learning>

E. YEU Shop Steward Conferences

Held annually, these two day conferences include a range of workshops for both new and experienced Shop Stewards. Check our newsletter and website for details on upcoming conferences.

We hope you'll choose to develop your knowledge and skills in the role of Shop Steward. Being an advocate for your colleagues can be very fulfilling. The most important thing to remember is that you are not alone; Shop Stewards are all members like you, supporting one another and working collectively.

Stay in close contact with your Chief Shop Steward and the members of your Local Executive - network with Stewards in other Locals. Keep a YEU business card handy and don't be shy about using it! Your fellow members and the staff at YEU will support you every step of the way.

YEU Shop Steward Round Table Sessions

9am - noon, 3rd Wednesday of each month

201- 2285 2nd Avenue, Whitehorse

Executive Boardroom, YEU Hall

More Questions? Contact YEU

1-888-YEU-2331 • 667-2331 •

contact@yeu.ca