

Informally Resolving Potential Grievances

The goal of the informal step of the grievance procedure is to see if the issue can be resolved through discussion by the individuals closest to the grievance.

Before the informal discussion with management, stewards should:

- Discuss with the member(s) involved what they want and what they would settle for.
- Explain to the member(s) involved that this is not a hearing, but a chance to work things out before the grievance is put into writing.
- Anticipate what the supervisor is likely to say and think about how to respond.
- Decide in advance what the member(s) involved will say during the discussion and explain why usually it's best that you, the steward, do most of the talking.
- Based on how the supervisor has acted in the past, determine which approach has the best chance of getting the supervisor to settle.

At the informal discussion:

- Set the right tone for calm discussion—be friendly, not confrontational.
- Explain that you are here to see if the issue can be resolved informally without the need to write up a grievance.
- Try to get the supervisor to open up and talk.
- Remind the supervisor of the advantage of resolving issues early before they grow and cause more employee dissatisfaction.
- If the supervisor took discipline against a member ask him/her to explain why.
- Listen and take notes!
- If necessary, take a time out to talk to the member(s) without the supervisor present before continuing the discussion.
- In some cases, have the member(s) explain what happened or their feelings about the case.
- Point out strengths of the union's position and weaknesses in the supervisor's.

Determine if management is open to a settlement. *If yes:*

- Ask questions to try to find out what settlements the supervisor might agree to.
- Don't make any agreements without talking to the member(s) involved first and getting an ok.
- If your case is weak you may want to have the member explain that he/she understands the error made and it won't happen again and ask for another chance.
- When you reach a settlement, you make sure everyone involved is clear on what the settlement is.
- You may need to put the settlement in writing if it is complicated or you will need to prove later that it was settled.

If management is NOT open to a settlement:

- Don't keep arguing.
- Get as much information about the supervisor's position as possible.
- Get management's version of what happened in your notes.
- Make sure you understand management's position.
- Tell the supervisor the union will be filing a grievance and end the meeting.