

## HOW TO LISTEN

Ever hear a member say to you, "That's not what I said to you?" You look at your notes and the words are right there, just as you heard them. What did you miss? You may have heard the words, but not their meaning.

Listening is a skill. The problem with developing that skill is that we are often too rushed and don't devote enough time to the actual process. When we finally do sit down with the speaker, we don't listen actively. Instead we let in background noise to distract us or we evaluate and debate the speaker in our heads. Digital distractions such as cellphones make the problem worse. We don't hear what the speaker is really telling us.

In grievance handling, the shop steward needs to be able to listen and, at the same time, observe the member. Much of what you need to know may be conveyed to you through body language or inference, not in direct speech.

So the first piece of advice is to stop all that you are doing. Turn off your cellphone and minimize all other distractions. If you are in a room full of people, get out of it and into a quiet area. You both need to focus.

The best start is to ask the open-ended question that you hate to hear the supervisor ask in a hearing: "Tell me what happened."

You need to face the member and make eye contact in a non-threatening manner. Be relaxed but make sure that your body language indicates your concern. Nod your head and make comments like "I see" or "I hear you." Let the member know you are listening. Take notes to help you focus and remember.

Leave your emotions behind. You may not like the person. You may have your own personal problems that need attending. What is being said may anger you. React to the story not the person. For the moment, you need to concentrate on the narrative. Leave your emotions outside.

As the story unfolds, do not argue mentally. This throws off your concentration and places a barrier between you and the speaker.

Help the member along by recapping what they said. At appropriate points in the interview you can say, "So this happened and then this happened." Phrases such as these allow the member to confirm what they said and give you the assurance that you are getting the story correctly.

Listen to what is not being said. Sometimes you can learn just as much by determining what the speaker leaves

out in the discussion as you can by listening to what is said.

Listen also to how something is said. We frequently concentrate so hard on what is said that we miss the importance of the emotional reactions and attitudes related to what is said. Those attitudes and emotions may be more important.

Avoid jumping to conclusions. Hear the member out. Your conclusions may be correct but there could also be some piece of the story that you need to hear in order to figure out the best way to handle the problem.

Often when someone comes to a conclusion about a person or incident, their mind becomes closed to new information including possible mitigating circumstances. Keep an open mind.

Once you have gone through the larger story and you have a general understanding of the nature of the problem, you should begin to ask more specific questions to get the details you need to investigate the problem.

Begin to evaluate the facts and evidence. This is an ongoing process as your questions may prompt more information that throws a different light on the facts.

After completing the interview you will need to gather facts from other sources in order to corroborate what you have been told. Thank the interviewee and tell them you will get back to them. Make no other promises until you fully investigate their story. Once you have concluded your investigation, you must decide how you will handle the situation. Then get back to the member and discuss your next move.

## TWU HISTORY



TWU has represented transportation workers for more than 80 years. Pictured here is an early photo of Local 252 school bus drivers who worked in Long Island, NY.

Today, Local 252 represents over 3,000 members who work for school bus and fixed route bus companies and paratransit operations.

The TWU Steward is published six times a year by Union Communication Services (UCS) in Rochester, NY in cooperation with the Transport Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO (TWU) at 501 3rd St. NW, 9th Fl, Washington, DC 20001 — [www.TWU.org](http://www.TWU.org). For info on obtaining additional copies, please call (202) 719-3900. Contents, with the exception of "TWU TOOLBOX," copyright ©2015 by Union Communication Services-Cornell ILR. Reproduction outside TWU in whole or in part, electronically, by photography or any other means without written consent of UCS-Cornell ILR is prohibited. *David Prosten and Linda Donahue, co-editors/publishers.*



Transport Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO

**TWU**

Volume 10 • No. 1

*Steward*

Our Union's Front Line Soldiers

# Conflicts Over Personal Appearance

