

## The Grievance Interview

The key to good grievance handling is a proper investigation and that process should start with interviewing the member who comes to you with a problem. Based on this key interview, you will make a number of important decisions such as what to do with the problem, whether to investigate it further, and how to resolve the issue.

We all know that most work problems are not very simple. In order to get at the heart of the matter, the TWU steward has got to speak with the member and find out exactly what happened.

That means we have to develop three critical skills: interviewing, listening and writing.

If a steward is going to follow-up the problem, he or she has to be sure what happened. We must use the same interviewing skills that any investigator -- be it an insurance claims officer or a police officer -- uses. We ask and answer the "five W's":

°**Who** -- is involved? Name(s) of the worker(s) and the basic work information about the member(s) such as department, shift, job title, seniority, employee number. Most of this information will also be needed on the grievance form. You also need to find out some other information: **Who** witnessed the incident or who else was involved? **Who** from management was there?

°**When** -- did the incident or condition occur? Get dates and time as accurately as possible.

°**What** -- happened or didn't happen? **What** did the worker(s) do? **What** did management do or not do? **What** happened in the past?

°**Where** -- did the incident take place.

°**Why** -- did the incident occur? In answering this question, you may have to sift conflicting opinion to get at the facts.

### More Tips

**Do it in person and spend time.** Asking the five W's may not be difficult. Getting useful answers is another story. Your member may be so hot under the collar that you may have to wait a few minutes before he or she can settle down and tell you the whole story accurately and factually.

**Take notes.** Always take notes. You can't remember everything and taking notes conveys to the member that you are taking this issue in a serious manner. The member may also take your concern more seriously and give you more facts and less opinion if

he or she sees that their words are being written down. Some statements or facts may not seem important at first, but take it all down. Later investigation may make this unimportant information crucial to your case.

**Use a grievance sheet.** Some TWU local unions have developed a grievance work sheet that may help you interview the member. The Toolbox includes some samples. The sheet can focus your full investigation of the matter if you pursue the complaint as a grievance. Additionally, the worksheet will remain in the union files so if the grievance is appealed to a higher level of the grievance process, your investigatory work will be preserved for other union grievance officers.

**Let the member tell the story.** Make sure that you take enough time with the member. Listen to what the worker says without giving an opinion or making empty promises. Have them tell the whole story and make notes as you go along so that you can follow up on specific details later.

**Follow up.** Steer the interview back to the specific issue and ask for greater detail.

Keep in mind two other questions:

**What else** -- Do I need to conduct a proper investigation? What further information is needed? The success of any investigation means you start with the member but you must also consider other sources of information.

**How** -- Should the issue be resolved? A solution to the problem or complaint may arise in the course of the interview. Give the member a chance to help resolve the issue. Use your knowledge to guide the worker by making sure he or she understands the effect of any suggested solution. Lastly, prepare yourself for the possibility of a full-blown grievance. Begin to think about the remedy you will seek to correct the injustice.

There is no magic to interviewing a member. Just make sure that you have the time to conduct a full interview, listen carefully, and write things down.