

How to Prepare the Grievant for the Grievance Meeting

How many times has this happened: You go with the grievant into a meeting with the boss and under questioning from the employer, your case unravels? Your grievant contradicts himself or says too much.

All stewards need to prepare well before they go into that grievance meeting or disciplinary hearing with the member. Preparation means conducting

good research but it also means sitting down with the member and going over the case.

Your goal is to ensure that the member sticks to her story, doesn't get rattled, and understands that you will be acting as her advocate. Lawyers do this with clients; some employers do the same thing with their supervisors.

Understand that anything that is said between the member and you in this private meeting is confidential and "privileged." It is not shared with anyone else, including the employer. So here are some guidelines to help you:

1. Never go into the meeting without knowing what the grievant or witness will say. Interview the person.
2. Go through those questions with them so they will feel comfortable and confident in answering them. You are not trying to give them the answers here. You want them to be consistent and not offer up anything that is not relevant to the case.
3. Anticipate what the employer may ask and go over those questions. You are trying to ensure that the member will not be surprised.
4. All answers should be brief and to-the-point. The member should use his own words, not those of the employer. You can rephrase a question so that it is fair and not leading.
5. Under most circumstances, counsel the grievant not to reply to open-ended questions with long answers. This can be a trouble-filled area, especially when a member spends ten minutes responding to the question, "Tell us in your own words what happened." Go

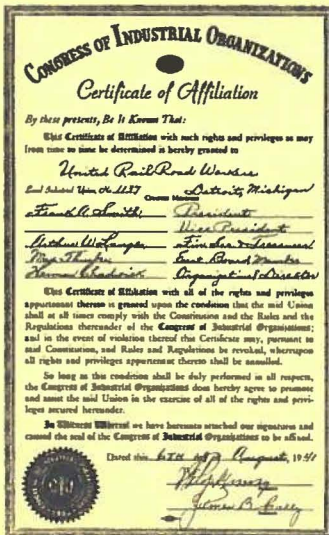
over this beforehand.

6. The grievant should never be argumentative. You should be on your guard in case this happens and call a brief stop to the meeting.
7. The member should answer all questions. But if they can't remember or they do not know the answer, they should answer accordingly. "I don't know" and/or "I can't remember," are reasonable answers. Simple "yes" and "no" are also respectable replies.
8. When questioned by the employer a strong response like "I remember" is much better than "I think," when recalling facts.
9. Never let the employer badger or harass the witness or grievant. In a grievance hearing, this type of behavior is a violation of due process and must be stopped.
10. Use your meeting with the grievant or witness to take them through the whole process. Let them know who will be there, how the meeting is conducted and what everyone's role is. The meeting will be stressful for the member so try to reduce anxiety with this information.
11. Lastly, the employer may ask if the member had spoken to you ahead of time. Your interview with the member is part of this process and the member should acknowledge that meeting. If the member is asked, "What did your union representative tell you to say at this meeting," the proper response is "She told me to tell the truth."

The time taken with the member prior to the meeting with management is time well invested and will help to ensure a good outcome at the hearing.

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