



PROBLEM SOLVING TIPS

Union representatives face many and varied issues at the workplace. Some are grievances and complaints from the membership. Others are problems with management and the labour-management process. Still others are to be found within the union movement itself.

Whatever the problem, there is a common thread that a union representative must weave. They must first investigate the problem, and then develop a strategy or action plan.

Here are the seven 'Ws' essential to your gathering all the facts. Using these tips can save you a lot of grief!

WHO: 'Who' is involved? Ensure you record the member's full name, the employer, branch or division, section or unit, title and job classification. The name and title of the immediate supervisor and of anyone else directly involved should also be obtained.

WHAT: 'What' happened that caused the violation? Was it an issue regarding the withholding of leave? Was it a safety issue? Was it disciplinary action? Was it the unfair treatment of a member? Is it an issue that you wish to bring forward to labour-management consultation?

WHEN: 'When' is an important question, especially given the time limits in the grievance procedure. Include the pertinent times and dates, or how often and how long the act or omission took place.

WHERE: 'Where' was the place the action occurred? Give exact locations if the event occurred in different places. Give the distance between locations, if it has a bearing on the issue.

WHY: "Why" describes the reason behind the grievance or complaint, or the reason you want an issue placed on a UMC agenda. Has there been a violation of either the collective agreement, an arbitral award or an Act of Parliament? Are employer policies,

regulations or past practices at issue? This 'W' directs your attention to that something that has been violated and points you to the correct recourse mechanism that should be used.

WANT: The 'Want' relates to the adjustments or corrective actions necessary to correct the injustice. In a grievance, it may be to place the aggrieved member in the same position he/she would have been had the act or omission not occurred. Ask for redress in full in order to make the member whole – pay restored, files cleared, et cetera. If you want a departmental policy changed through the consultation process, say exactly what it is you want changed.

WHOA!! Take another look. Review your case. Have you got all the facts you need to properly deal with the issue? Keep asking questions until you get everything you need!

One last tip: When you have the answers, and the time comes to write your report, use the 'KISS' principle – Keep It Short and Simple!