



STEWARDS CORNER

Monthly Newsletter for Union Stewards

Intergenerational Union Solidarity

Solidarity is the key to union power. And yet we often hear the generational divides in our workplaces... “the young folks don’t want to work;” “the old folks can’t listen and don’t want change.” Stewards that understand and recognize the generational divides will have an easier time mitigating the differences and communicating with everyone.

Today, there can be as many as five generations in the same workplace. These generations are often characterized by common sets of characteristics, experiences, and worldviews. But, these stereotypes or differences can play out as bias or anger. In order to grow our movement, we have to be intentional in bringing together everyone, of all ages and backgrounds, to form a united front.

Let’s begin with some basics. The following are the **labels given to different generations**:

- **The Silent Generation** (born 1925 – 1945; loyal, but traditional)
- **Baby Boomers** (born 1946 – 1964; collaborative, but averse to change)
- **Generation X** (1965 – 1980; self-reliant but skeptical)
- **Millennials** (1981 – 1996; driven, but entitled,)
- **Generation Z** (1997-2012; cynical, but hyperaware)

And then there are the stereotypes:

Match the Stereotype to the Generation

Stereotype	Generation
• Bad at learning technology	• Silent Generation
• Poor performance	• Baby Boomer
• Resistant to change	• Generation X
• Shorter tenure	• Millennial
• Lazy	• Generation Z
• Entitled and Selfish	
• Loyal	
• Hard-working	
• Reliable	
• Tech savvy	

That game may have been a little too easy and that is where problems may arise. What we need is to build understanding, not put people in boxes.

Steps Stewards Can Take:

1. Understanding the Expectations Divide

Key is understanding the reasons that generational priorities may differ. For example, older generations grew up with an expectation that if they work hard, their company will come through with job security and promised benefits, such as pensions. Younger generations grew up with an expectation that they will not be in the same job throughout their entire career, and work-life balance is often more important to them.

While our unions were built by members of the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers, recent data shows that Gen Z is the most pro-union generation, with Millennials right behind them. Union support across all generations has increased sharply in the last 5 years. We should celebrate (together!)

2. Mentorship

Mentorship is often thought of as a more-senior person showing a less-senior person the ropes, but mentorship should be a two-way street, based on the interests and skills of the participants. Creating innovative mentorship programs can showcase the talents of all members and help foster inclusivity.

Mentoring new members allows us to pass on the institutional memory that often gets lost when someone retires. Our local union history, which is vital to ensuring our union’s continued success, is often passed down orally. We can’t afford to lose our stories. Be sure to help all new members (not just younger members) learn about how we got here and why our union does what we do.

Younger people can also mentor older workers. Today’s Millennial and Gen Z workers were raised on technology, and have the reputation that they can master anything with a screen. Encouraging NextGen members to help preserve local union history through digital means can be a fulfilling project for everyone.

Of course, these are generalizations, but what we know is that every union member has a way to contribute to our success.

3. Respectful Communication

We all want to be listened to and treated respectfully. At the workplace everyone should be treated equally. Comparing co-workers to your kids... or your grandparents... may not be the most effective way to get your ideas across!

4. Create an Intentional Program to Bring All Generations Together

Unions build solidarity by creating a united front when dealing with management, and by helping members build relationships with each other during union-only activities. Each of these situations can be used to increase intergenerational solidarity.

When making demands of an employer, build a member coalition with multiple generations to ensure that a) your demands meet the needs of the many, and, b) consideration is given to how members may benefit from the demands. For example: demanding ergonomic improvements on the job. Older workers often need work to be designed in a way that conforms to their physical abilities - but any changes that make work easier for older workers will make work easier for all workers.

Similarly, when planning union events, make sure that the planning committee is inclusive. Ideas for inclusive events may include holding child-friendly events, or meetings where child care is provided; music and food that has a little something for everyone, and other considerations that a multi-generational planning committee is likely to identify.

Solidarity forever – among all ages!

There's a Role for Everybody in Our Union

How did your path to leadership begin? For a lot of USW leaders, it starts when someone in their local union asks or encourages them to do a task. Maybe it's to hand out bargaining surveys on the third shift, or to help pass the hat for a sick coworker. Accomplishing these small tasks builds your confidence and makes you feel like you're part of a team.

Serving on a Local Union committee is a common way that members get started. Generally, this is a role you can do on the job during downtime at work, or before or after your shift. Under Article VII of the USW Constitution (Local Unions), each Local Union is to have six standing committees, which were established at the International Conventions noted below:

- ▶ Workers' Compensation (1946)
- ▶ Safety and Health (1956)
- ▶ Civil and Human Rights (1964)
- ▶ Organizing (1988)
- ▶ Women's (2005)
- ▶ Veterans' (2022)

These committees reflect the Union's priorities and challenges when they were created. For instance, the health and safety report at the 1956 Convention indicates that there "are far more game and fish wardens employed by the various states than there are [workplace] safety inspectors." In fact, health and safety didn't become a [mandatory subject of bargaining](#) until 1966, and OSHA only became law in 1970. Health and safety, therefore, had to be the initiative of every local union.

At the 1964 Convention, delegates voted to make Civil and Humans Committees part of the USW Constitution in order to help implement the Civil Rights Act that was passed just months before. A. Philip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and renowned civil rights leader, spoke at the Convention in support of the new law and against the "evil forces of bigotry" that sought to divide workers.

Leaders Build New Leaders

Per Article VIII of the USW Constitution (Duties of Local Union Officers) local union presidents have the authority to "appoint all committees not otherwise provided for." So where do stewards fit in this picture?

One of your jobs is to develop new leaders, so if you see a member who is interested in the work of the union but doesn't know where to begin, you can teach them about the standing committees. Encourage them to talk with the Local Union president if they want to get involved in one.

What committees do depend on the particular circumstances of every local union. For example, although the description of the Organizing Committee is to "assist in organizing unorganized workers in the geographic area in which the local union is situated," (Article 7, Section 14), many local unions use them to

organize within their workplaces, especially in right-to-work (for less) settings. In some local unions, the Organizing Committee work on New Hire Orientation. Workers' Compensation committees help injured members deal with paperwork and return-to-work issues once they are ready to start working.

Women's Committees have become an important space for sisters to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to lead the union. Consider that many aspects of the workplace—from machines, to personnel protective equipment, to the availability of bathrooms—are often designed for, and by, men. Making employers take women into account is just one of the many issues Women's Committees work on. Male Steelworkers can do their part by supporting the work of this committee.

At the 2022 International Convention delegates voted to establish Veterans' Committees in every local union. According to one study, veterans are more likely to work in unionized workplaces as opposed to non-veterans (16% to 12% of the working population, respectively). For veterans, the camaraderie and sense of a shared mission that they experienced in the service is something that the civilian world often lacks. A local union Veterans Committee can connect union members who are veterans with each other, and also play a role in shaping public policy. In 2022, for example, [Veterans of Steel in District 4 teamed](#) up with Rapid Response to secure the passage of a law that requires employers to display a poster from the Department of Labor containing information on veterans' benefits and services.

Stewards are the eyes and ears of a local union. While you're on the lookout for contract violations and other problems, keep your eyes peeled for members who want to get involved, but aren't sure how to start. These committees are spaces for members to build leadership skills and grow the union.



<http://usw.org/ngconference>

TEACHING TUESDAYS

All classes are held at **11 AM (EST)** and **8 PM (EST)**

- ▶ 11/7: **Just Cause** (11 AM — 8 PM)
- ▶ 11/14: **Vets of Steel** (11 AM — 8 PM)
- ▶ 12/5: **Past Practice** (11 AM — 8 PM)
- ▶ 12/12: **The History of Right to Work** (11 AM — 8 PM)
- ▶ 12/19: **How the Unions Beat Scrooge** (11 AM — 8 PM)



<http://usw.to/teachingtuesdays>