



Roles and Responsibilities of a Shop Steward

A shop steward is a Trade Union Representative or a person elected by workers to represent them in dealings with management. Their role, as defined by the by Section 14 of the Labour Relations Act (LRA), is;

1. To assist and represent employees at grievances and disciplinary proceedings, at their request.
2. To monitor the manner the employer complies with the LRA and any other laws relating to conditions of employment, as well as binding collective agreements.
3. To report any alleged contravention of work-place provisions of the LRA, or any other laws relating to employment, as well as binding agreements to the employer, the trade union, the responsible authority or agency; and
4. To carry out functions agreed to between the union and the employer.

As much as there can never be a union without members, shop stewards underpin the core functions of the union in directly liaising with members of their issues, therefore making it very important to hold regular workplace meetings with members and to receive feedback from them. Communication is always central to our function.

As a shop steward, you are accountable to the members who elected you and your union in its entirety. You do not speak for yourself as you must always carry the mandate given to you by the

workers you represent, and that of your union. You must, therefore, report back to your members and the union structures.

Shop Stewards need to be committed, hardworking, disciplined, progressive and literate. Shop stewards must make sure that management sticks to agreements which have been negotiated with workers. They must also make sure that management carries out decisions reached in negotiations. It is important to be vigilant. It is important to get written undertakings from management to hold them to account later.

A shop steward is an organiser in his/her workplace, with the main duties being to build up and maintain discipline, progressive and informed membership at the workplace.

Role:

Recruit new members

Ensure all members are paying subscription to the union

Hold regular meetings with members at the workplace

Develop unity among workers

Look for opportunity to recruit new members into the union, even outside their workplace.

They Should:

Take up workers grievances with management;

Negotiate on all issues which concern workers;

Take the decisions of workers to the management;

Report back to workers after each meeting with management

Represent the views of your workers in Union and alliance structures;

Represent the views of your workers in communities and in political structures.

Shop stewards are the leadership of their workplace. As a shop steward you are a leader in POPCRU as well as in COSATU.

They should be able to do the following:

Listen to workers;

Listen to their grievances and opinions;

Give members guidance and direction but don't think you need to control workers;

Discourage division don't take sides when sorting out differences of opinion between workers;

Work as a collective no shop steward can do everything alone.

A shop steward must be knowledgeable and well informed and should be able to learn through experience. The Union should provide training for you.

You need to know:

The structures, constitution and policies of your Union and COSATU;

Employment practices and conditions in your workplace;

Laws and agreements that covers the various sectors we are organising;

Social benefits that workers are entitled to.

You must pass on your information and knowledge to your fellow members.

You must be able to inform them about what is happening in their workplace, in POPCRU & COSATU.

You should be able to inform members about their rights and be able to participate in political debates.

You should participate in Education structures of the Union in workplace, in your branch and in your COSATU Local.

Tips

As a Shop Steward, you should NOT:

Go to management behind the backs of the workers or without a mandate;

Sign any agreement without the mandate of the workers;

Caucus with members against other shop stewards;

Act as an individual without fully consulting with other shop stewards in your workplace;

Represent a member without that member being present;

Act as a supervisor on behalf of management

Take responsibility as a leader and give shop stewards the correct information no matter how painful it is.