



Unit Chair's Manual

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Unit Chair's Manual

Introduction

Hello, and congratulations on being Chair of your Unit, whether you are new to the position, or are a veteran.

Please become familiar with your duties, as described in this Unit Chair's Manual. Taking on our employers effectively requires strong Units, and a Unit can't be strong without being well-run. That's your job. Whether it's maintaining effective meetings, ensuring that the USW's rules are followed, or just providing an example that members can be proud of, your role as Unit Chair is critical to the success of your Unit. A manual can teach you what your duties are, and the basics of how to fulfill them, but it will be your own talents and values that will make you a great Unit Chair. It is your leadership that will make your Unit flourish and thrive. Nonetheless, I hope you find this Manual useful.

If you ever require any advice on your role, don't hesitate to contact me at donna.hokiro@usw1944.ca.

In solidarity,

Donna Hokiro
President
United Steelworkers Local 1944

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Duties

Duty #1 - Become familiar with the USW Local 1944 By-Laws and the USW International Constitution

Part of the role of a Chair, whether a Unit Chair, a Committee Chair etcetera is to ensure that business is performed in an orderly way, in adherence to the rules in effect. It's no good for multiple people to have multiple ideas of what the rules are, and so it's important that they are confident that the Unit Chair knows the rules.

The USW Local 1944 By-Laws, and a soft copy of Bourinot's Rules of Order can be found on the Local website at <https://usw1944.ca/usw-local-1944/bylaws>. Units are expected to adhere to any Local By-Laws that apply to them, and Units should look to Bourinot's Rules of Order in case there is any remaining question regarding due process at a Unit Meeting.

That said, it's very important for a Unit Chair to understand that rules are there to facilitate Union business and not to stifle it. A well-functioning Unit should have enough solidarity, trust and mutual desire to function smoothly to not always have to be turning to the rules. That's the difference between being organized and being a bureaucracy, encouraging participation but not allowing a free-for-all.

Duty #2 - Chair Unit Meetings effectively

As Unit Chair, you chair Unit Meetings, hence the name. Here are some tips on doing this well:

a) Ensure that the rules are followed

It's not enough to know the rules, the Chair is expected to enforce them. If there is any confusion regarding the proper method of conducting Union business at a meeting, the answer should either be found in the USW's own rules, or failing that, Bourinot's Rules of Order should be followed. However, keep in mind that while not knowing the rules is bad, constantly turning to them could very well encumber the meeting and drive participants away. That is not to say that order need not be maintained, but being a stickler may sometimes be worse.

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Maintaining an environment of trust and solidarity does more to smooth the conduct of a Union meeting than the best set of rules enforced by the most knowledgeable Chair.

Your responsibility for maintaining order applies also to standards of courtesy that fall short of being "rules". If someone keeps interrupting, or acting disrespectfully etcetera, it should be the Chair who addresses this.

b) Ensure that USW Local 1944 By-Laws Unit Order of Business is followed

USW Local 1944 Bylaws Article XVII shows the correct Order of Business for Unit Meetings, and some notes are added here in *italics*:

1. Call meeting to order

As per the USW International Constitution, this is done by the Unit Chair stating the following:

"The time for opening this meeting having arrived, I declare this meeting duly convened and qualified to consider measures tending to conserve the best interest of this Local Union, and the United Steelworkers."

2. Roll call of Officials - by Unit Secretary

The Unit Secretary reads off which Unit Officials are in attendance and which are absent. The Unit Officials are the Unit Chair, Unit Vice-Chair, Unit Secretary and all Unit Counsellors.

3. Reading of the minutes of the previous meeting

"Reading" the minutes means reviewing and approving the minutes. After the minutes have been "read", a motion must be made and seconded that the minutes be "approved" (or adopted) as read. Such a motion means that in the opinion of the members, the Unit Secretary has recorded the minutes of the previous meeting correctly. Should the reading reveal any errors, or omissions, a member may move to correct the minutes. If this motion is carried, another motion should follow that the minutes "as corrected" or "as amended" now be approved.

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4. Reading of Communications

The Unit Secretary reads (or gives a summary of) any communications from others to the Unit which require attention. Those that do not require much discussion may be dealt with immediately; others may be laid over to "New Business" or referred to a committee. If no action is required or desired, the communications may be read and, upon a motion to receive for information, filed.

5. Report of Officials and/or Officers

This is where any Unit Officials, USW Officers attending as guests, will give a report on issues under their responsibility, other than Unit Counsellors reporting on grievance handling, which comes later.

6. Report of the Local Union Representative

This is where the Local Union Representative will report on issues and occurrences happening throughout the Local Union.

7. Report of Counsellors

This is where Unit Counsellors discuss grievance handling, giving due consideration to member privacy.

8. Report of Delegates

This is where members who are delegates on behalf of the Unit (or Local) to any entity outside of the Unit make their reports. This would include delegates to the Local Union Delegated Meeting, delegates to Labour Council, delegates to Conventions of any Federation or Congress of Labour, etcetera.

9. Initiation of New Members

As Unit Chair, you have the honour of initiating new members into our Union. To initiate new members, call on all meeting attendees to stand, bring members who are attending their first USW Local 1944 Unit Meeting to stand

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at the front of the room for initiation, ask them to raise their right hand, and then you will read to them the following Oath:

"Recognizing that the United Steelworkers is a strong labor organization dedicated to the advancement of my interests and the interests of all working men and women and that the strength of the Union depends on the commitment which its members make to it and to each other, I do sincerely promise, of my own free will, to abide by the laws of this Union; to bear true allegiance to, and keep inviolate the principles of the United Steelworkers; never to discriminate against a fellow worker on account of creed, color, sex, or nationality; to defend freedom of thought, whether expressed by tongue or pen, to defend on all occasions and to the extent of my ability the members of our organization, and never to reveal to any employers or their agent a member's name without proper authorization. I will cease work when authorized and approved by the organization to do so."

Then, ask the new members to repeat the ending of the Oath after you, a few words at a time: "To all this I pledge my honor and I further pledge that at every opportunity I shall 'Say A Good Word About My Union.'"

10. Reports of Committee Representatives

This is where members of Committees such as Workplace Health and Safety, or any other Committees your Unit may have created or participate in, make their reports.

11. Unfinished Business

These matters are those remaining over from previous meetings. They are usually recorded in the minutes of the previous meeting. The Unit Secretary should inform the Unit Chair of any unfinished business so it may be included in the order of business in this Section.

12. New Business

These are matters which have been laid aside earlier in the meeting or which have come up since the last meeting.

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13. Good and Welfare

All miscellaneous matters for the good of the Union which should be brought to the attention of the meeting should come to the floor at this time. These matters usually do not require any action by the meeting. They are simply matters of information and education (ex. a message of congratulations or condolence that the Unit would like reflected in the minutes).

14. Adjournment

As per the USW International Constitution, this is done by the Unit Chair stating the following:

"The business of this meeting having been duly transacted, I declare it adjourned until our next regular session, unless you are especially called together, when I hope to see all members present."

As Chair of Unit Meetings, you move the meeting through the Order of Business. Please ensure that the proper business is brought up at the proper time of the meeting. Otherwise people may just talk about what they find interesting and pretty soon the meeting is over and you haven't dealt with something important. It's important to be mindful that these meetings are about the running of the Union, and by extension your Unit, and are not to be used a vehicle to discuss every little detail about what's happening in the workplace. These are not "team" meetings.

When necessary: Swearing-in new Unit Officials

Newly-elected, acclaimed or appointed Unit Officials should be sworn-in and installed at the Unit meeting following the ratification of their election, acclamation or appointment. This meeting will commence with the current Unit Executive still installed, and the current Unit Chair will swear-in and install the new Unit Officials as the last order of business of the Unit Meeting.

Installation of new Unit Officials involves all Unit Officials taking the following oath, as found on page 80 of the USW Constitution:

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"I,, do hereby sincerely pledge my honour to perform the duties of my office as prescribed by the Laws of the organization, and to bear true allegiance to the United Steelworkers. I will deliver to my successor in office all books and other property of this Union that may be in my possession at the close of my official term. All of this I solemnly promise, with full knowledge that to violate this pledge is to stamp me as a person devoid of principle and destitute of honour."

Duty #3 – Coordinate the selection of a member by your Unit Officials to fill a Vacancy in a Unit Official position

If any Unit Official leaves their position mid-way through their term, this is a vacancy that needs to be filled, and you should coordinate that process.

Vacancies in Unit Officials positions (Unit Chair, Unit Vice-Chair, Unit Secretary and Unit Counsellor) are to be filled by a member selected by the remaining Unit Officials. Ideally, all Unit Officials should be canvassed for their choice, although it's sufficient if enough Unit Officials are canvassed so that any further canvassing would not affect the outcome. For example, if you have 5 remaining Unit Officials and 3 select a certain member to fill a vacancy, then you don't really need to canvass the other two as their selections wouldn't affect the outcome (although it is best to include all Unit Officials in this process). The selections don't need to be made at a meeting, they could be made via text etc.

The selection made by the remaining Unit Officials would then be communicated to the Local Office, at unit.correspondence@usw1944.ca, and the selection will then need to be ratified by the Local Executive Board. You will be informed when the selection is ratified, at which point it is in effect.

The USW Local 1944 By-Law dealing with this process is Article V 1c7.

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Duty #4 - Be an ex-officio member of all committees and appoint all Committee's not otherwise provided for

Under the USW Local 1944 By-Laws, as Unit Chair you are ex-officio a member of all Committees, meaning that you are on each Committee internal to your Unit automatically. You are also responsible for appointing all Committees internal to your Unit unless the Unit has passed a motion to determine those Committee members in another way.

Duty #5 - Appoint Union members of the Workplace Health & Safety Committee, unless the Unit has determined another appointment process

Please note that this section applies to federally-regulated certifications. Workplace Health and Safety Committees are established under the provisions of section 135 (1) of Part II of the Canada Labour Code.

As Unit Chair, it is your responsibility to select "employee members" to serve on your Workplace Health and Safety Committee, unless your Unit has formally determined another selection process. Management shall choose "employer members" for that same committee. At least half of a workplace committee shall consist of "employee members". Members are appointed on a 2-year term. Start and end dates should be tracked by the Unit Chair.

An "employee member" is someone who does not exercise managerial functions, and is selected by the trade union representing employees. Some workplaces may have employees from several unions, and/or employees who do not exercise managerial functions, but are not represented by a trade union. In these cases, there is likely a specific process in place for employee selection.

When you are selecting members for your Workplace Health and Safety Committee, please ensure that the workplace is widely represented; make selections based on different shifts, different job times, different floors, etc. If the union fails to select committee members, it could be in violation of the law.

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Committees must meet at least 9 times per year, at regular intervals. Furthermore, the committee shall make monthly inspections of all or part of the work place, so that every part of the work place is inspected at least once each year. All Health and Safety work shall be done during work hours, paid by the company.

While you may or may not actually be a member of your Workplace Health & Safety Committee, you certainly have a responsibility as Unit Chair to advocate for beneficial working conditions for members of your Unit, and that responsibility includes making sure that your Workplace Health & Safety Committee is functioning properly. Please check-in with members of the Committee regularly to ensure that things are going smoothly, and provide what support you can.

Conclusion

Hopefully you now have a solid idea of what it means to be Unit Chair, and how to perform these duties properly. As all Union activists should aim to be seen as examples of leadership and fairness by their coworkers, you, as Unit Chair, are to be such an example not only to your coworkers, but in particular to your Unit's activists. Solid Unit Chairs inspire solid Unit Officials, who inspire solid Units of workers, who get solid Collective Agreements and the rights they are owed. Thanks for stepping up, and say something good about your Union everyday.