

A Steward's Guide to Answering Tough Questions about the Union

In responding to any members' questions, we want to do three things:

1. **Acknowledge** the question (show respect but don't overly rationalize their fears for them)
2. **Answer** the Question (provide a quick but accurate and sustentative answer)
3. **Redirect** back to the central question – are they ready to make things better at work.

Never make anything up – if you don't know the answer tell them you don't know and you will find out and get back to them. Then redirect. Make sure you get back to the person.

Our Collective Agreement has the best anti-contracting out language; management cannot touch it.

On paper, that's true. But we know more and more jobs and work in transit is going to private contractors. These decisions to contract out are political and are made by the TTC Board and elected officials. So we need to be as organized as possible. If you had a magic wand, what would you do make jobs more secure?

You guys only care about the drivers.

Naturally, you want to make decisions for yourself, and for your own job class. Drivers make decisions concerning drivers-only issues and you and your coworkers will make decisions on things that only concern your job class. What are some things that affect everyone that you'd want to see change?

I don't trust the Union.

It sounds like you've had some bad experiences. This can be a new day for you AND for your union, though – but nothing will change for you unless you get involved with what's going on here at the TTC. Union or no – what kinds of things should change here?

I like my supervisor.

That's great! Everyone should have a good relationship with their boss. Workers in a union develop an equal relationship with the top-level decision-makers, who usually make all the decisions. But being involved in the union doesn't mean your relationship with your supervisor has to change; in fact, many times, you can get more accomplished as a union member than your supervisor can. What kinds of decisions should you and your coworkers make along with administration?

The union hasn't ever done anything for ME.

It makes sense that you would want to know what improvements you can make by having a union. The union is you and your coworkers having the power to make the boss do what you want and stop them from doing what you don't want. So what do you want to make the boss change?

Why hasn't the Union gotten a lawyer to fix these problems?

I understand that you want to change these things right away. The union could hire a lawyer, or you could, but you'd have to wait for a long time for a result and just hope the right thing happens. Or, you and your coworkers could make some changes NOW. Who in your department cares about these things as well?

I'm a good worker so I don't need the Union. The Union protects bad workers.

Of course you're a good worker, and you want to work with people who you can respect and rely on. It's management's job to make sure people do their job; one of the things about having a union is that that process is fair and doesn't fall prey to favoritism. But that's not all that having a union is about; what would you want to change with 16,000 workers at the table at the same time?

If WE'RE the union what do we pay staff for?

You ARE the union, but we do the work that you don't have time to do because of your own jobs! The only way to win things, though, is if management feels pressure from YOU to give in – not us. Our job is to equip you with the tools to deal with the boss every day, on an immediate basis. What's an example of something that happens at work that you'd like to be able to stop immediately?

So are we going to go on strike?

Nobody wants to go on strike. The only way it could happen is if members vote to go on strike. And right now, people aren't talking about striking, they're talking about what improvements they want to make! What kinds of standards do you want to change?

How are we going to win anything if we can't go on strike?

Striking is a very powerful tool, but it's not the only one. Many workers can "strike at the polls," because you elect your bosses. There are lots of ways to put pressure on management; other ATU locals won a great contract by making phone calls to the board, stickering up, taking their pictures, and rallying outside their transit commission. What's something that you really want to change?

I don't think anything will ever really change.

It's frustrating that the boss hasn't done the right thing and made the improvements you want already! But that's not in their interest; and they have the money – and they want the power – to keep the status quo. Look at all the changes that have been made by the union already, though. So let's talk about what changes you'd like to see going forward

Why don't we call the media?

It seems like a good idea, because of the crazy things the boss is doing, and the community should know about those things, right? But we can't control the media. There is a right time for that, but it's got to be part of a larger campaign. So what's the most important thing the community should know about the work that you do?

I don't like the Union steward.

You have the right to good representation. But it's your union, and if you want to improve the organization, then it makes sense to get involved! There's no reason why you can't be a steward! What kinds of things would you like to work on?

The Union will put the TTC out of business if we ask for too much.

Everyone wants to make sure their job is secure. So - would you and your coworkers make any decision that would force your boss out of business? Of course not. That said, what would you NOT want to settle without?

The Union rep screwed us over on [X].

It's easy to see your rep or steward as "the union," and I understand that you're unhappy with how [X] was resolved; but right now, your coworkers are preparing for bargaining. Everything will be on the table and huge bargaining committees mean that lots of people will be involved in making decisions. How would you like to have seen [X] resolved?

