



We know being a workplace rep is rewarding but can be a bit challenging at times - particularly if you are dealing with distressed members or an unreasonable manager. The top tips below contain some reliable advice for handling such situations. Always know that if you feel unable to cope, you can contact your Regional Steward or Senior Negotiating Officer (SNO) for support.

What can you do about?

1. LACK OF FACILITIES TIME

If you are having difficulties in carrying out your Steward's role in work time do read our quick guide on how to get the time off and facilities to do the job. You can download the guide at: <http://www.csp.org.uk/publications/quick-guide-time-facilities>.

You should also consider the following:

- Put dates in your diary and request facility time as soon as possible for all union commitments that are known in advance, such as CSP regional training days and staff-side meetings. This will also help manage those things with little notice such as disciplinaries and grievances.
- Recruit more Stewards or Safety reps if the amount of work and/or coverage is high.
- Discuss how you and the other CSP reps can work together as a team to share the workload and support each other.

Note the CSP takes this issue of restricted facility time very seriously, so if access is a problem do not hesitate to contact your SNO. Remember to also record in writing your unpaid hours and what you have been doing.

2. MANAGING MEMBER EXPECTATION

When members are making excessive demands on your time or have unrealistic expectations, you can:

- Run a regular in-service session or from time to time clarify/remind your members on what your role is and what it is not. In summary, you are there to protect their rights as set out in your employer's policies and procedures and to advocate their concerns and issues to management.
- Get them, whenever possible to act for themselves rather than rely on you. Encourage them to volunteer, or assign them tasks that contribute to your collective cause. An effective CSP in your workplace is ultimately a team effort. You simply cannot do it all on your own.
- Remind members to come to you sooner rather than later when they have concerns or get into conflict with their managers; you are more likely to achieve a better outcome for them if you are involved from the start. Usually it should take up less of your time to resolve - than dealing with soured relationships and poor communication.
- Decide what your boundaries are regarding when you are available and what you are prepared to do. Tell them from the outset what the deal is and stick to it.
- Be realistic with members on what you can do, including any likely outcome. Never promise to do something that you are not sure you can achieve.
- Members generally feel reassured when they know what they can expect from their representative. Be reliable and consistent. If you say you are going to do something – then you should do it.

Setting boundaries and being reliable should encourage a constructive and successful working alliance between you and your members.

3. HANDLING ABUSIVE MEMBERS

If a member gets angry or abusive with you:

- ☑ Try and stay calm (take a deep breath or two or if necessary take a break), but do challenge them about their behaviour. Describe back to him/her your perception of how they are behaving and how it makes you feel. Tell them you will end the meeting/call if they continue communicating in that way to you.
- ☑ Keep a record of the conversation and promptly seek support and back up from your SNO.
- ☑ Remember your role as the CSP representative is primarily to ensure the employer's process is fair and done properly. Any sanctions the member gets is not because of you.
- ☑ If the behaviour continues, discuss with your SNO if it is appropriate to continue to represent them.

4. DEALING WITH DISTRESSED MEMBERS

When members are facing a disciplinary or their job, performance is under scrutiny they can sometimes get distressed and in some rare situations even suicidal. If this happens, you could:

1. Encourage them to seek support from family and friends as well as use Occupational Health and their workplace counselling services. If this is not available, strongly urge them to seek an urgent appointment with their GP, and to be candid with the Doctor about how they are feeling.
2. Remind them about the things you undertook to do or what you both agreed is required in preparation for their case. It may be useful to confirm your arrangements in writing to them, as often people when distressed forget details. If you can, reassure them that there are plans underway and they are being pro-active.
3. If you are very concerned about the immediate risks to a member due to their level of distress (and the member is still employed), then consider notifying the employer in confidence (probably HR). They have a duty of care to all staff under common law and should therefore take immediate action themselves to support the member and access appropriate healthcare and advice as necessary. Where possible and appropriate let the member know you are informing the employer due to your concerns.

The mental health charity MIND advises if you are worried that someone is at immediate risk of taking their own life, you should stay with that person and take one of the following steps:

- Encourage them to ring the Samaritans, 116 123, open 24 hours a day
- Contact their GP for an emergency appointment or the out of hours service
- Call their community Mental Health Team (CMHT) if they have one
- Ring 999 or NHS Direct (111 from any landline or mobile phone free of charge)
- Go to the nearest Accident and Emergency (A&E) department.

If someone has attempted suicide, you should ring 999 and stay with him or her until the ambulance arrives.

MIND has dedicated pages on the subject of suicide and self-harm which you can view on their web site. www.mind.org.uk/