



# Steward Notes

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## AUPE union stewards step up their game

AUPE union stewards are stepping up to the plate, ready to learn new skills and serve their co-workers better.

by Merryn Edwards  
Communications Staff

The Membership Services Committee has initiated a change that will see all union stewards progress in their role, taking on the full gamut of union steward responsibilities over time.

The union steward training is also changing to complement this commitment to lifelong learning. The change will eliminate the designations of union steward levels (one, two and three). Union stewards will now all hold the same title, distinguished from each other only by their experience, education, and length of service.

Eliminating this hierarchy will encourage all union stewards to mature over time in their role. Although union stewards will no longer be designated by their levels, those union stewards who have more extensive experience will be expected to step into a mentorship role to foster the development of newer union stewards.

However, while newer union stewards will be supported through the mentorship of their experienced brothers and sisters, all union stewards will be expected to fulfill the full range of steward responsibilities, including interpreting collective agreements, representing members in meetings and investigations, attending disciplinary meetings, and handling grievances.

The new union steward training program will ensure that union stewards are prepared with the information they need to fulfill these responsibilities. In order to be effective in the workplace, union stewards must be familiar with the principles of contract interpretation, the structures and operations of the union, and workplace and union rights such as Occupational Health and Safety and Human Rights legislation.

Union stewards should also understand how to work to build and strengthen the union through education and advocacy,

and communicate pressing issues between the workplace and AUPE headquarters and regional offices.

The completion of AUPE's recent steward survey did see the roster of union stewards decrease, after removing those who were either inactive or unable to take on the commitment to develop their skills and responsibilities over time. However, the renewed emphasis on mentorship will help grow the union steward program in the future to better activate and serve members throughout the union.

Before the new training program takes effect next fall, existing union stewards are encouraged to complete the current steward training up to and including Union Steward Level Two and Contract Interpretation if you have not already done so. Scheduling for the current union steward training is based on demand, so contact the Education department as soon as possible to register. (Please see the ad on page 4 of *Steward Notes*).

All existing union stewards who have completed the current Level Two training will not be expected to complete the new training

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program when it comes into effect next fall. However, if you haven't already done so, union stewards are strongly encouraged to take the Contract Interpretation course, as it will become a pre-requisite for the new union steward training program.

If you aren't able to complete the required courses before next fall, don't worry. The new training program will be tailored to suit the new direction of AUPE's union steward program.

And of course, new union stewards are always welcome to join the team. Nomination forms and information about the union steward's role are available on the AUPE website.

By working to inform and motivate union members, protect the collective agreement, and keep the communication channels open between membership and leadership, union stewards form the foundation of the labour movement and function as the face of the union at the worksite.

Consider stepping into this vital role yourself, or encouraging a respected co-worker to become a union steward today. ■



## HAVE QUESTIONS?

**CONTACT YOUR MEMBER SERVICES OFFICER**

CALL 1-800-232-7284

Have your local/chapter number and worksite location ready so your call can be directed quickly.





Photo credit: Keith Allison: Ray Rice

Photo credit: Amanda Coolidge: Jian Ghomeshi and I

# Allegations of misconduct in your personal life can lead to discipline at work

A spate of high profile domestic abuse cases involving National Football League players—not to mention the Jian Ghomeshi case closer to home—has shone a light on how employers can take disciplinary action for incidents occurring in their employees' private lives.

by Merryn Edwards  
Communications Staff

When graphic surveillance camera footage of former Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice emerged, showing him knocking his girlfriend unconscious in an elevator, it set off a firestorm of criticism prompting the Baltimore Ravens to fire the star running back.

It also prompted the National Football League to ban Rice from playing anywhere in the NFL, although the NFL Player's Association successfully appealed the ban. Nonetheless, the Ravens have refused to resign Rice and as of press time, no other team had expressed any interest.

The fact that such incidents did not occur at work or directly impact the player's performance did not stop the team or the league from initiating discipline.

Similarly, Canadian broadcaster Jian

Ghomeshi was abruptly fired by the CBC over allegations that he sexually assaulted several women while on dates. He has since been criminally charged, but has denied the charges, arguing that the alleged incidents were consensual, sadomasochistic role-playing.

Since his firing, widespread rumours have surfaced that Ghomeshi allegedly committed sexual harassment at work, as well. But allegations of misconduct don't necessarily have to be during work hours or of a criminal nature in order to warrant discipline.

If the identity of your employer becomes associated with any activity that could be deemed to harm the employer's reputation or interfere with their business interests, they may well have grounds for discipline.

And it's not just a concern for celebrities, whose identities—along with the identities of their employers—are widely known. The advent of social media has created a window into the private lives of everyday people—a window that your employer among others may potentially look through.

Precedents exist for discipline for social media activity, even in cases where such activity was not criminal in nature, not undertaken at work, nor had any direct connection to the workplace or co-workers.

For example, a B.C. arbitrator reviewing the case of an employee terminated for posting to a blog (which also identified the blogger's employer) containing Nazi-sympathizing postings and other controversial topics, wrote that “while the employer is not the custodian of the grievor's character or personal conduct, his conduct may be a disciplinary concern to the employer if it adversely impacts the legitimate business interests of the employer.”\*

In that particular case, the arbitrator reduced the termination to an unpaid suspension from the date of discharge. However, reinstatement may not be appropriate if the employment relationship is found to be damaged beyond repair. In such cases, the grievor may get damages in lieu of reinstatement, but is still out of a job. ■

## Lessons learned?

**First:** Allegations of misconduct don't necessarily need to be proven in court or even criminal in nature in order to lead to discipline.

**Second:** Remember that the Internet is not a private place, no matter how you set your Facebook privacy settings. Imagine viewing your social media activity through the eyes of your employer before you post.

\* *EV Logistics v. Retail Wholesale Union, Local 580 (Discharge Grievance), [2008] B.C.C.A.A.A No. 22 (QL)*





# Learning Changing Growing

## AUPE's core course scheduling has changed to serve you better

AUPE has streamlined the core course scheduling process to make getting your union education easier. Our new process makes our core courses more convenient, flexible and most importantly reliable.

Now the courses will be offered as soon as enough people are registered to take them, with the most convenient location chosen based on where the majority of registrants live.

Any member can take the *Introduction to your Union* and *Contract Interpretation* courses. Other courses are reserved for Union Stewards and Officers.

### To take your union education further:

- 1) **Go online.** [www.aupe.org/member-resources/education/](http://www.aupe.org/member-resources/education/)
- 2) **Choose.** Find a course.
- 3) **Register.** Call 1-800-232-7284 and ask to speak with the course registration desk.
- 4) **Confirm.** Once a course has met the required numbers, a location will be chosen based on the postal codes of registered members and you will be contacted with the date and location.

Steward Notes is published by the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees to provide information of technical interest to AUPE Union Stewards, worksite contacts and other members. Topics deal with training for union activists, worksite issues, disputes and arbitrations, health and safety, trends in labour law, bargaining and related material. For more information, contact the editor.

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The goal of Steward Notes is to help today's AUPE Union Stewards do their jobs effectively. To help us, we encourage readers to submit story ideas that deserve exposure among all AUPE stewards.

Story suggestions for Steward Notes may be submitted for consideration to Communications Staff Writer Merryn Edwards by e-mail at [m.edwards@aupe.org](mailto:m.edwards@aupe.org) or by mail. Please include names and contact information for yourself and potential story sources.

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