

GRIEVANCE HANDLING

10 SECRETS OF A SUCCESSFUL GRIEVANCE PRESENTATION

1. **Have a Plan.** Shooting from the hip when going into a grievance meeting is dangerously close to shooting yourself in the foot. Meet with the grievor beforehand. Review all the arguments. Decide on your best evidence. Talk about strategy — the plan for how the meeting is likely to go. Know what your desired outcome is. If your grievor is going to be speaking, go through a rehearsal.
2. **No Surprises.** Make sure you know everything you can about what happened in the case. Nothing destroys a game plan more than finding out new information in the middle of a grievance meeting.
3. **Don't Lose Your Cool.** If you want to maintain control of the meeting, start by maintaining your self-control. Remember, one of your goals is to create/maintain a productive relationship with the employer for years to come.
4. **Be Realistic About Your Chances.** Understand going into the meeting whether you're in a strong position or a weak one. What does your contract say? What about enforceable policies? Often it's a situation that is new that wasn't anticipated the last time the contract was negotiated. Be sure you know if you're building a case on concrete or sand. And discuss the odds in advance with your grievor and Labour Relations Officer.
5. **Know Where the Other Side Stands.** Put yourself in the employer's shoes for a minute and think about how they'll present their arguments. Consider how they will defend their actions, and know before you walk into the room what your potential response will be to their presentation.
6. **Don't Get Personal.** You want to challenge management's actions, but you don't want to attack people personally. If you make it personal, it's harder for the other side to agree that you're right. And if management makes it personal, don't get baited into a shouting match. Be vigilant of your grievor's behaviours as well. Take as many caucuses as you need.
7. **Ask Questions.** Look for the inconsistencies in management's arguments, and note them down. Don't let them off the hook if they offer evasive answers. Be persistent. If any part of their side of the story is fabricated, chances are there will be a contradiction in their arguments, witnesses, evidence and/or statements. Find them.
8. **Have Notes, Take Notes.** Never go into a grievance meeting without a written outline of the arguments you're going to present and the evidence you have to back it up. During the hearing, take good notes — especially when management is making their case. Nothing slows a supervisor down more than knowing you are writing down what they say, word for word. Good notes will also help your LRO if the grievance progresses past Step 1.
9. **Get Evidence in Writing.** If you request any disclosure of documents, follow up with an email confirming that you requested it. This will give hard proof that it was requested, and when.
10. **Stay United.** Never disagree among yourselves during a grievance hearing. Be especially careful if management asks you a question you didn't anticipate. Feel free to call for a caucus, so you can step outside and discuss something in private with your grievor. Never show management that there is anything but full agreement on your side of the table.

Adapted from an excerpt written by Tom Israel while in his role as ED of the Montgomery County (Md) Teachers Association. Formerly, Tom was president of SEIU Local 205 in Nashville, Texas.