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## Three Good Steward Habits

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## Three Good Steward Habits

### Abstract

[Excerpt] I learned these habits from a former colleague, Jessica Govea Thourborne, who developed them when she was one of the founding members of the United Farm Workers Union with Caesar Chavez. Cancer took Jessica from us, but her legacy lives on and there are hundreds of dedicated union and community activists inspired by her who have adopted her good work habits.

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### Comments

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# Three Good Steward Habits

**H**abits can be good or bad. Developing good work habits can make a steward more successful. Here are three such habits that have been found to be particularly effective.

## **Brief — Do — Debrief**

Before every meeting, task or event of any consequence always meet with others involved or with yourself if it is an individual project and "brief." This means reviewing the goal of the activity, what to expect and a plan for how to proceed. If it is a group effort the plan should always clearly define the role everyone will play and contingencies for dealing with unforeseen occurrences. When everyone is clear on the "brief then it is time to "do."

In doing the "do" the main task is to follow the plan developed in the "brief" but also to be aware of how it is going and taking notes if necessary to facilitate an evaluation during the debrief.

In the debrief, after reviewing what happened and how everyone felt about the outcome, make sure there is an evaluation of whether the goal was reached and why or why not. The most important part of the "debrief is determining what was learned from the "do" and identifying the next steps.

By following the "brief— do — debrief habit you will find that goals are more often met, people in teams develop better working relationships, and, perhaps most importantly, there is a constant process of learning. In the current difficult times when things change very quickly stewards must always be learning from their experiences to keep up and meet new challenges.

## **Start and End Meetings on Time**

Many people try to make meetings start and end on time with limited success which often diminishes as time goes on. However, it can be done with a lot of work and persistence even within organizations with long-standing cultures of never doing so. In many unions the fact

that meetings always start late is a running joke, but one that not everyone finds amusing.

In making a change the first step is very clearly communicating that 9 am really means 9 am and not 9:30, 9:45 or 10 am. Then it is crucial that you actual start the meeting at 9 regardless of how many people are present. If you do this consistently people will see that you are serious about starting on time and gradually you can change the culture concerning meetings, at least when it comes to meetings you run.

In doing this it is important that everyone understand that coming to meetings late without a very good reason is disrespectful to you and everyone else at the meeting. Those who come on time will be your allies in sticking to the schedule and they will apply peer pressure to get others to comply. Of course, your meetings need to be well-planned and run efficiently. If you show enthusiasm and make people feel welcomed and valued they will look forward to meetings rather than avoiding them.

## **Always Show and Demand Respect**

Just as framing the issue of coming on time to meetings as an issue of respect helps get people to change their habit of

coming late, demanding and showing it in everything you do will increase your effectiveness. Just talking about respect is not enough, people need to see that you not only demand respect but always show the utmost respect for others.

You must treat everyone with equal respect regardless of what languages they speak, how much education and degrees they might have and whether they are an officer in the union or a new member. In particular show respect and appreciation in public when people are dedicated, follow through on what they say they will do and work as a team. If they do not act in those ways talk to people respectfully in private about why that happened. As a result, people will be more motivated to contribute to the union.

I learned these habits from a former colleague, Jessica Govea Thourborne, who developed them when she was one of the founding members of the United Farm Workers Union with Caesar Chavez. Cancer took Jessica from us, but her legacy lives on and there are hundreds of dedicated union and community activists inspired by her who have adopted her good work habits.

— Ken Margolies. *The writer is on the Labor Extension faculty of Cornell University.*

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