

CWU Representatives Work Stress Guide

Many members come to place additional demands on their local Branch representatives, believing them to be capable of delivering all that they want and in their preferred time frame. Trade Union and Safety Representatives are placed much more under the microscope by their employers. Some in Government would like to see TU Facilities withdrawn – all of these pressures and especially those of members in need, are creating high stress levels for elected representatives. Local Branch Trade Union and Safety Representatives are not paid for this work and they deserve to be recognised for their excellent contribution but at the same time recognising that they are also entitled to a life of their own.

The following is a list of basic, sound guidance points which representatives should follow:

Keep control of communications with members

Mobile Phones

- Get a separate mobile phone for union work
- Have specific times when members know they can contact you
- Switch your phone off in evenings and at weekends or when not available at work
- Keep voicemail up to date

Emails

- Do not use your personal domestic email
- Consider setting up separate account with union in title
- Refer to agreements before using work email
- Do not use Facebook or twitter for individual communication
- Use out of office messages, be clear about your availability

Set Clear Boundaries

- Members will benefit from you being clear when you can be contacted and when you will respond
- Be clear when you are available within in your workplace
- Consider regular surgeries
- Consider adoption of a service level agreement with members outlining your volunteer status and role, contact arrangements and context, member's responsibilities and agreements. Ensure this is consistently used within your branch and colleagues!

Be realistic, do not promise what you cannot deliver

- Members will often be in crisis when they are accessing your support and advice. They may be much stressed and want immediate confirmation that all will be okay. Although sometimes difficult, it is better to be realistic than set up false expectations. It is also an ideal time to set the boundaries that will allow you to act appropriately whilst protecting yourself from burn-out.

Try to keep detached

- This is often easier said than done! But remember that over identification and emotional responses are more likely to lead an unsuccessful conclusion. Your emotional commitment to employment representation is your motivation, getting over identified or emotional with a member will be counterproductive.

Don't be afraid to ask for support

- You are not alone, ask for support. Talk to your branch and suggest establishing a buddy system. Move the support issue up the line.

Just say no

- You will do yourself or your members no favours if you keep saying yes to new cases. There is a limit to what you can take on. Discuss with your union colleagues, your family, and if appropriate your employer, and decide what is achievable.

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