

“Confessions of a Former Station Manager Part III” contributed by Guy Nohrenberg - Posted March 9, 2009

[Letter Carrier Connection](#)

Oh how management loves to capitalize on drama! I know. I was there. Every time we could put the fear of Postal Extinction into the employees, we were required to give a standup doing just that. “If we only save 10 minutes per route” “If we just reduce overtime” “If we If we If we...” And where is all that targeted? The Letter Carriers, of course.

Now, we’re seeing something different. Low mail volume. A nation teetering on the biggest recession in recorded history. We’re moving from Capitalism to Democratic-Socialism as the government slowly acquires banks and corporations in the midst of their rescues. People are stuffing money into mattresses and the banks in Switzerland refuse to release information on the richest Americans finding tax shelters in them. This is very different. Very new. Or is it?

Are you old enough to remember Carvin Marvin Runyon? Are you old enough to remember delivering mail from a Jeep? Do you recall the original purpose of the mailbox flag? Were you around when the National Guard was called in to deliver the mail in the 70’s? Remember when 18 and 8 really meant 18 and 8? How about routing flats? I remember. Some of you do as well. Remind the others. Help the younger carriers. Tell your stories. Help them to understand. If your age hasn’t resulted in increased wisdom however, put your headphones back on and remain quiet.

We’ve been through a great deal before. In each case, the Postal Service has weathered these changes and some very difficult times. In each case, the Letter Carrier is out on the street saying hello to the communities and by our very presence, things might just be ok after all. The very sight of you out there with your customers confirms normality.

So what do we do this time? What is our role in this latest crisis? What stories will we tell those that come after us? Will we earn our title once again? United States Postal Letter Carrier. It is a proud title indeed. Nobody knows your day better than you; the conflicts, the pain and the sorrows. It is your day, every day. This time, however, I’m here with you. So what can a former Station Manager say? What can I say now in this position that I could not say under my former title? Here’s the list of 10 things we can do to make things better. This Is what I can say:

1. **Stay completely informed.** People will ask you about everything on the street. You know that. They ask me. My name isn’t Potter, but I get asked about what they’re doing in DC about 5 day workweeks, postage rates, and the economy. Remember, any answers you give **MUST** be factual and verifiable. You will be quoted around dinner tables and likely even to your boss.
2. **Exemplify your craft.** Keep looking good. “You Rook Mahvelous!”... as one entertainer would say. Keep your uniform neat and clean. You are not looking good for your boss. He may be a slob with little to no understanding of your craft or route. He likely comments, often, “When I was a carrier...”. You want to look good for public support and personal pride. Not for your boss. His belly is writing checks his heart can’t cash! As that bottom button pops, that’s him...not you.
3. **BE VERY SAFE AT ALL TIMES!** This is not cliché. If the public loses trust in your driving on the streets, they will not support your line of employment. It’s that simple.
4. **Put forth a FAIR DAYS WORK!** This couples with being safe. Do you have runners in your office? You know... LLV denters? Carriers that attack more mailboxes and crush more misdelivered mail in a day than you’ve seen in a lifetime? Runners used to be my favorite type of carrier. Yep, I loved them as a manager! They could accomplish ANYTHING. I admit... I never did ask how. I didn’t want to know. A manager’s goal is to look good through the efforts of his carriers. That’s all that matters in most cases. Do you have turtles in your office? Those can be just as bad. Carriers who milk it out of anger or frustration. They can cause havoc and unnecessary burden. Just work safe to do a Fair Days Work.
5. **Know your contract.** If you read the contract for 15 minutes each night after your 30 minutes of reading the Bible, you will know more than your boss, surely, and perhaps enough to assist your stewards who volunteer their headaches for your well being. You cannot refer to it if you cannot quote it.

6. **Work with Integrity.** Yes. No cheating on anything. Management will be looking to cull out Letter Carriers like Cops in a Speedtrap. They actually get points for firing carriers and can be seen to be a more effective manager through the removal of carriers. This is my greatest Managerial Sin. I knew the contract and would spend more time disciplining carriers, moving them closer to the door, than motivating them and trying to understand their day.
7. **Ensure Management works with Integrity.** Get copies of EVERY 3996! Get copies of every 1571 Cut Slip! Ensure your union is checking that they report hours correctly, Return Times, Timekeeping, Delayed Mail. This is my number one frustration in this organization: a few Managers will engage in criminal falsification to attain elevated status and obtain unearned raises and bonuses. Keep them honest and report them every time you get that gut feeling. Our national numbers are affected with every change in how they measure mail or determine hours. It must be honest. A man once told me, "Guy, what they're doing is like giving false symptoms to a doctor; the doctor will work on these wrong symptoms while the patient gets sicker." Keep them honest!
8. **Don't panic.** No matter how a manager or supervisor acts... **KEEP YOUR COOL.** I used to tell my supervisors that they aren't allowed to panic until I do...and I don't panic. That still holds true and should for you too. We've seen this all before. We've been billions of dollars in the red in this organization and we've pulled through. America needs us and always will!
9. **Bring in revenue.** I don't care if you don't like the program, no matter what they call it, Customer Connect or Toothless Fred's Billboard for Belching Baloney Bonuses. Win over your customers and bring in new business. Who cares where the credit goes, we've always needed the work. Back when we were not caring at all about parcel volume, I thought it was silly. Now that the managers do care about parcel volume, we think it's smart. We should ALWAYS bring in business of ALL KINDS. Maybe not those little stuffed bears, but you know what I mean.
10. **Lastly, conduct yourselves as if your whole family were watching you.** I know there are some "Zoo" offices while others are silent Mausoleum offices. We should immediately start bringing in tours of kids. No kid should go through the school system without learning the mail system and bringing their parents. This is a huge failure of management. Kids need to be able to do more than text messaging. We need them to understand and use the most valuable hard copy messaging and delivery service in the free world! Talk to your managers and have them canvass the schools. Bring in the future!

I could not say any of that as a Manager. Why? Nobody would of believed me! Think of it like this. If you are smarter than your manager, then help him with your intelligence. Believe me, he needs all the help he can get. Here's an example:

Did you use the USPS Preliminary Financial Report? SPLY means (Same Period Last Year). Plan is a made up goal. The % Var are the percentage of variances. Last year we would have been in the black if we didn't have to contribute to the retirement preload. This year, thus far, our mail volume is short, overall, 1 of every 10 feet of mail. (remember there's growth in the United States). City Delivery Salaries are up .4% to last year. Total Salaries and Benefits are down 1 percent. Total operating expenses are down 1 percent. So what's outta whack? Rural Carrier Equipment Maintenance Allowance is OVER 22.8%. All Other Personnel Related Expenses are OVER 53%. Information Technology is OVER this quarter 137.5% to last year .Total Operating Revenue is DOWN -7.6%.

What does that tell you and I? They're taking this opportunity to spend lots of money on technology and hide it in a tough year. We need School Tours and New Customers. Work Fair. Be Safe. The same as the numbers have always told us. Don't let anyone panic you. Read the good book and the contract. This too shall pass. I'll help in any way I can and with your help we'll make it through all of this together!

Be Well!

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