

NALC and USPS: At a crossroads



William H. Young

In too many places around the country, managers are up to their old route inspection tricks. They are plotting to cut the number of routes by shoving new route evaluations down letter carriers' throats.

Letter carriers find this behavior all too familiar. It is part and parcel of the plague of bad management that has infected the organization for decades. First, managers announce a plan to cut 10 percent of the routes in an installation. Then they launch a round of route inspections and try to bully and intimidate letter carriers into submission.

In every case these bullying route inspections lead to bad results. Service disruptions are inevitable—mail is delivered late or held over until another day. Customers complain. Grievances pile up. Tempers flare and resentment grows as supervisors try to browbeat letter carriers into finishing 9-hour routes in 8 hours.

This kind of dictatorial, confrontational management is a lethal disease in the Postal Service. What letter carriers want to know is this: With all the gains the parties have made in joint ventures, why is the Postal Service still allowing this virus to propagate? Why, at a time when the Congress is writing into legislation the future of the Postal Service, would top management permit this kind of service and labor relations chaos?

Top postal managers surely know the benefits of doing business the right way. In many places letter carriers, NALC and the Postal Service adjust routes in a joint, cooperative manner. In every case the results are positive. The adjustments are fair. There are no grievances. Good mail service continues.

Hasn't the Postal Service learned from this experience? Why does it allow these errant managers to damage labor relations and the Postal Service?

In the recent past NALC and USPS backlogged tens of thousands of grievances, filling a deep reservoir of mutual bitterness. The costs, in human terms and in lost value to the Postal Service, are beyond estimation.

Recently NALC has worked jointly with the Postal Service to achieve many worthy

ends. I have championed these endeavors. The parties have accomplished goals that were unthinkable just a few years ago:

- We drained the swamp of grievance backlogs and built a system that resolves most disputes quickly and in accordance with the contract.

- We established a *Joint Contract Administration Manual* that explains the National Agreement's rules, thereby preventing untold disputes.

- We have instituted an intervention process to improve labor relations in sites where serious problems persist.

- Letter carriers are developing millions of dollars in new business for the Postal Service through Customer Connect.

- NALC and USPS have worked jointly to improve safety and protect postal workers and the public from terrorist threats.

- NALC is working hard to achieve meaningful postal reform that will help the Postal Service survive and prosper.

The Postal Service is moving forward and backward at once, a situation that is bound to implode. Good managers have little incentive to continue as long as they see bad managers suffering no consequences—or even reaping rewards for atrocious behavior.

NALC respects the Postal Service's right to manage the institution. You do your job and we'll do ours. But don't forget: We demand the same respect in return.

Have top postal officials misinterpreted our good intentions? Do they believe they can continue to let these bad managers attack and harass letter carriers, and yet continue to reap the benefits of our cooperation and good will?

If so, they've got it wrong. They are making a terrible, foolish mistake. They are placing at risk all the progress we have made, and the future of the Postal Service as well.

So today NALC and the Postal Service stand at a crossroads. We can move forward or go back to the bad old days. Top managers can stamp out the sickness within their lower ranks and move to heal the damage they have done. Or not. Which will it be? ☒