

National Business Agent's Report
Mike Weir
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It's the New Year! It's time for new beginnings, positive resolutions, attitude adjustments, hopeful dreams and high expectations...well, for many of us that is true, but not for many of the managers in the Postal Service. Perhaps, they are simply feeling pessimistic about our financial condition; or, more likely, they are using that as an excuse to free their inner surly child. In any case, over the past few years, management's supervisory tactics have become even more onerous and unacceptable. Treating letter carriers with dignity and respect has become the exception to the rule which now appears to be treat employees any way you want so long as you make your numbers. This descent to a Stone Age level of behavior has coincided with the hiring of EAS employees who have little or no knowledge of the contract and little or no concern about abiding by it. As a result, the intervention business is booming as grievance activity continues to rise, morale continues to plummet and the atmosphere on the workroom floor becomes increasingly oppressive.

There are a number of offices I could cite to illustrate the point, but the perfect case study involves the implementation of FSS in the Mid-America District. I would describe it as a comedy of errors if it were not having such a tragic effect on the letter carriers and their customers. I briefly touched upon this issue in my October, 2009 article, expressing my concern that management would make unrealistic adjustments which would result in daily confrontations over workload and a poisoned atmosphere on the workroom floor. That concern was realized beyond my wildest expectations.

FSS is, essentially, the flat mail equivalent of DPS letters. Management contracted for the first phase of 100 machines prior to the recession's dramatic impact on the economy in general and mail volume in particular. Just as they did with DPS, management accepted drawing board

projections on savings as gospel, and refused to acknowledge reality when the machines actually starting generating FSS flats. The difference between the projections and reality was further compounded by the significant drop in flat volume. Despite the obvious correlation between fewer flats and lesser impacts, management was undeterred in their zeal to capture the work hour savings their projections promised.

When I first heard of the methodology management was intending to use to determine the evaluation and adjustment of the routes at the Blue Valley Post Office in Shawnee Mission, KS, I was skeptical. When they indicated they were going to take nine routes out of a thirty-three route office, I was astounded. When they actually went ahead with their plans over the union's objections, I was flabbergasted. And when the result was even more disastrous than anticipated, management tried to blame the carriers for laying down on the job. The reality is that all the routes ended up over eight hours. A lucky few were only thirty minutes to one hour overburdened. Many were one and a half to two hours over; some were two to three hours over; and a few were three or more hours over the eight-hour goal. Management descended upon the station to determine what the carriers were doing wrong. They leaned on desks and BMCs, drinking coffee and taking notes; but, mainly, glaring disapprovingly at the carriers' backs. They followed carriers on their routes, trying to identify the "time-wasting practices" which were causing them to miss their projected street times by two to three hours. They dragged carriers into the office for job discussions aimed at intimidating them into "improving" their performance. Carriers with more than thirty years of exemplary service were treated as though they were common criminals, stealing time and money from the Postal Service. Baseless and bogus discipline was handed out like candy. And after all this effort, what do you think they discovered? Management found that despite their "best" efforts to break their spirits, the letter carriers continued to perform their duties safely, efficiently and professionally. And management was forced to admit that the adjustments they had put into place were completely out of adjustment.

So, were you expecting a simple, happy ending here? Come on...you didn't really think management would give up that easily, did you? Yes, they admitted there was a problem; and, yes, they promised to fix it before Christmas. The catch was that the methodology they wanted to use to readjust the routes was just as bogus as the methodology they used to misadjust them in the first place. Fortunately, we have an MOU on FSS adjustments. If the local parties cannot reach agreement on an accurate adjustment, we will use MIARAP to clean up management's mess. This situation is a perfect example of why NALC enters into agreements with management to jointly administer programs like MIARAP and COR. When management unilaterally engages in minor route adjustments and unilaterally uses COR to finalize them, the results are generally disastrous. This has consequences in terms of wasted time, money and resources as well as creating hostile workplace environments for carriers and undermining the good will of our customers. I am not convinced that management will learn enough from this experience to do a better job in the next FSS office they adjust. But I guarantee the union will be there to ensure that, ultimately, letter carriers' rights are protected and that their routes are adjusted properly in accordance with the handbooks and manuals, and our joint agreements.

The Regional Rap Session is fast approaching. It is scheduled for February 20 - 21 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in downtown St. Louis. The room rate is \$97.00 plus tax; and, as always, there is no registration fee. The cutoff for reservations at the special NALC room rate is January 19. The phone numbers are: 800-925-1395 / 314-621-8200. A resident national officer will be in attendance. Join us for our usual aggressive training schedule to assist local officers and stewards in dealing with issues of immediate and continuing concern for letter carriers in both the contractual and legislative arenas.

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