

# My casual transition to career



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**N**inety days. If I was lucky. That's how my postal career began in September of 1992. I was hired as a Christmas casual. No benefits. No uniform. No job security. No future.

I had just moved to Lincoln, NE. I remember ripping the maps out of my phone book from home and taking them with me to work so I would know where to find streets I'd never been down before. I never took a lunch break. I never called in sick. I lived in fear of getting lost, losing my arrow keys, not being fast enough, getting hurt, having an accident, not being asked to come in to work the next day and, always, my inevitable last paycheck.

Somehow I made it through to the end of those 90 days and my reward was not a career job, but another 90-day appointment as a casual employee. The only upside to my second appointment was by then I knew practically every street delivered by my station and no longer needed the maps. The downside: It was just another 90 days. Still no benefits. Still no uniform. Still no job security. Same old fear.

I have no doubt that my postal "career" would have ended in March of 1993 if it had not have been for the carriers in Lincoln who took that early out. (Yes, I've tried to thank them all.) That, and delivery point sequenced mail.

It was pure timing that resulted in my being hired as a transitional employee. At the time, the Postal Service was implementing DPS and was under withholding. (Sound familiar? FSS. Withholding. More TEs.)

**It was the 1990 Mittenenthal Award that provided for the creation of the non-career transitional workforce.** Transitional employees at the time were hired to cover duty assignments due to be eliminated by DPS automation and by those held pursuant to Article 12 (92 percent in 92, right?). The good news for me was that the life expectancy of my work had grown from 90 days to 359 days. Well, if I was lucky.

I was now earning sick leave and annual leave. But I still had no insurance and no eligibility to get any, either. I still never took a lunch break. I never called in sick. I lived in fear of losing my arrow keys, not being fast enough, getting hurt, having an accident, not being asked to come in to work the next day and, always, my inevitable last paycheck.

As a transitional employee, all I knew for certain was that someday I would no longer have my current job. I just

didn't know what day that was going to be. There was no mechanism for me to become a career employee as a TE. I had to wait, like everyone else, for the Postal Service to be hiring so I could take the entrance exam. And then I had to wait for my name to come up on the roster.

As a TE, I would have given anything to have a clear path to becoming a city letter carrier. I would have given anything to have a way to get health insurance. I would have given anything to have the right to bid on assignments, instead of always being stuck with the routes nobody wanted to carry. I would have given anything to have relative standing. I would have given anything to have a uniform allowance. I would have given anything to have the opportunity to be the steward in my station without the fear that man-

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agement would let me go or not rehire me because of it. Or not rehire me just because they didn't like me, period.

I would have given anything to know that I was the future of the letter carrier craft. I would have given anything to have had the opportunity at the time to be a city carrier assistant.

**This union has been fighting for a long time for an all-full-time letter carrier career workforce.** And this union has also been fighting to make sure that any non-career workforce has a direct path to a career job, not one foot out the door. As both a former casual and transitional employee, I understand and appreciate the magnitude of this change in our national agreement.

I did finally take the test and become a PTF. Once I passed my probationary period, I could finally breathe. I stopped living in fear, started taking my lunch and became my station steward. The rest, as they say, is history.

It's been nearly 21 years since that first 90 days. Turns out, I was lucky after all. So to the CCA who will eventually have my current job, I say, Hang in there. Your future is looking bright—no luck required.