

The mission is...



James D. Henry

John Qunicy Adams once said, “Find a mission that you can give yourself over to and then spend your days moving that mission forward. Man is made so that when anything fires his soul the impossibilities vanish. The influence of each human being on others in this life is a kind of immortality.”

Once I became a union activist, I found the mission that I could give myself over to, and I’ve spent my life since moving that mission forward. While the mission is multifaceted, at the heart is the preservation and advancement of letter carriers’ contractual rights, dignity and respect in the workplace, and the entitlement to committed representation. As the NALC vice

president, that is not only my responsibility, but my duty.

In accomplishing the mission, it is necessary to identify areas of concern that plague letter carriers’ quality of work life and have become an impediment to contractual enforcement. Effective representation is thwarted by management’s tendency to let financial gain supersede its obligation to adhere to the collective-bargaining agreement (CBA).

Contractual violations occur so frequently and consistently, that it would appear there’s no respect by management for the contract. In particular, the violation of exceeding maximum work-hour limits of 12/60 has reached epidemic proportions nationwide. Despite the innumerable grievances filed and the multitude of arbitration awards, Step B decisions and local settlements in the union’s favor, management routinely resists compliance with Article 8.5.G.

However, the more management resists, the more the union will insist on contract compliance to protect letter carriers’ rights. The goal for my office is to work closely with the national business agents (NBAs) and collaborate on methods to adequately address this matter. Just know that we see and hear your concerns.

We also must make management honor and adhere to grievance settlements, be it Informal A, Formal A, Step B decisions or arbitration awards. Article 15.3.A of the CBA requires “good faith observance,” but management often does not act in good faith. All too often, if an agreement calls for payment over the supervisor/manager’s personal limit, payment is delayed or ignored. If the agreement calls for an instructional resolution of “cease and desist,” management simply continues violating. If the settlement calls for a disciplinary action to be rescinded and the carrier made whole, it often gets delayed.

I will work closely with the NBAs to identify and expose those in management who deliberately fail to comply with grievance settlements/decisions and hold them accountable. One way to do that is to consistently hold upper management responsible for its subordinates through interventions, labor-management meetings and the grievance procedure.

There is an old adage, “happy wife, happy life.” How one interacts with your principal partner makes a difference in the quality of your life. USPS management’s principal partners are the letter carriers. Daily, letter carriers contend with management about 3996 workload estimates or simply needing time off because of the long work hours due to staffing issues. This results in low morale and needless confrontation on the workroom floor. It also causes some supervisors/managers to ignore the dignity and respect of carriers in an attempt to meet time and budgetary constraints.

No letter carrier deserves to be treated in a hostile manner, bullied, harassed, disrespected or treated with a lack of dignity. We must unequivocally demonstrate that we will not stand idly by when that happens. Moreover, we must show management that we will enforce the Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace, which states, “Those whose unacceptable behavior continues will be removed from their positions.”

We should work locally, by bringing the dispute resolution teams (DRTs) back to what they were initially intended to achieve. The Dispute Resolution Process is and was intended to be “joint.” The union and management team members were to work autonomously and to decide grievances based solely on the facts in the file. The Step B decisions were intended to be informative for resolving similar cases. Unfortunately, that’s been mostly discarded. Now, the decisions made by the DRT often influence whether a case goes to arbitration.

With the original guiding principles being abandoned by management, cases are impasse that should be resolved, and often when cases are resolved, the resolutions lack the informative component to aid in future disputes. Helping the DRT members adapt to today’s labor-management climate will mean working closely with the NBAs, but also working with USPS management at the headquarters level.

Management may not be receptive to what we have to say, and we may not be able to change the direction of the wind, but we can adjust our sails to reach our destination. We must believe in our mission and work toward its success. It won’t be fast or easy, but we will remain steadfast and use any opportunity when it occurs.

The mission is to protect letter carriers’ interests. That is at the heart of what we do as a union. Simply and unequivocally, the mission is... *you!*