

Pay it forward



**Mack I.
Julion**

On an assignment back to Chicago, I was asked by several members, “Do you even miss us?” I initially laughed, but the truth is that I do miss the daily interaction with the carriers.

I was a fixture on the workroom floors within the branch because I believe that is the best way to stay in tune with what’s really going on with the membership. I love to hear directly from those who are doing the job every day. Wherever I travel, I ask the carriers about their issues in the workplace. Not surprisingly, the answers are consistent everywhere I go.

Carriers are being plagued by bad management. General safety, whether it’s a hostile work environment in the office or dealing with extreme weather and assaults while on the streets, is a source of concern. Most carriers say that management simply does not give a damn.

The other thing they worry about is the future of the Postal Service. Many veteran carriers express dismay at the “next generation” of carriers who don’t appreciate the job or the service we provide. They say that USPS is not hiring the best candidates and that the attitudes of Millennials and Gen Z carriers will be USPS’s downfall.

I agree that the hiring process is flawed. The battery exam and screenings were integral to getting good potential hires. They were eliminated because USPS is desperate to hire CCAs at sub-par compensation and with no real benefits.

When many of us started, it was via the career path. USPS hired us with career benefits and competitive wages. Without that—in this workers’ market—USPS is in a no-win situation. This is why the current round of contract negotiations are critical. The positions need to be desirable to attract good candidates coming in and remain viable for those who are already on board. Resolving this problem would address the current staffing crises.

As for the generational issue, that is something that letter carriers can help fix. I believe the attitudes of younger letter carriers are no different than those of

most of us when we first started. Back then, the Baby Boomers also thought that we Gen Xers were crazy. While they may have been right, many of them didn’t give up on us, which is why we are still here today.

Last month, I celebrated my 26th anniversary as a city letter carrier, but I could have easily been gone during my probationary period. Many of us would not have survived if it was not for the senior carriers at the Kedzie-Grace Post Office on the north side of Chicago. They took us under their wings and provided us with guidance and support. I’m sure that was true for many carriers in other locations as well.

I still remember vividly that one morning when I wasn’t “conducting myself” very well in the office. I was acting in a way that deserved some discipline, perhaps even removal. I made some comments to the manager on the workroom floor...*rather loudly*. Several carriers had to hold me back. The manager said, “No, let him go.” They didn’t. They took me off the workroom floor to calm down.

The manager immediately went to the carrier working next to me, Mrs. Cintron, to get a statement. She told him she had her headphones on and heard nothing. I went to her and thanked her. She looked me straight in the eyes and said, “I didn’t do that for you. I did it because we are letter carriers, and we must stick together. But let me tell you, if you keep behaving like that, you won’t be here for long!” She then put her headphones back on and kept working. She was right. I was married with four kids. I couldn’t afford to lose my job.

Those carriers protected us as best they could from bad management and mentored us on being professional letter carriers. We were taught that there is a difference between delivering mail and providing a service for our customers. They should be happy to see you coming. If not, it’s likely that you are the problem.

Working jointly with the NALC, USPS is piloting the New Employee Retention Program (NERP) in installations across the country. It is designed to ease new hires into the increasingly demanding job of being a letter carrier. They will be given extensive time with mentors and allowed the opportunity to learn the job effectively.

Remember, you don’t have to be a mentor to *mentor*. If you are here today because someone helped you when you started, pay it forward. The future of the service is still in our hands.

Thanks again, Mrs. Cintron!