



Joint route adjustment process

This column is being written as the Postal Service and the NALC are negotiating a future process for jointly evaluating and adjusting routes. If an agreement can be reached, the announcement should be forthcoming soon. I suspect, however, that some of the same complaints will exist in whatever process is negotiated as were experienced in the Modified Interim Alternate Route Adjustment Process, unless all levels of this union and its members deal with the prerequisites for success of that joint process honestly, intelligently and proactively.

Knowledge—It was pretty dramatic to me, when communicating to members who were dissatisfied with their route adjustments, how many never read the MIARAP agreement or the memorandum describing the intent of the agreement. Imagine filing a grievance without knowing your rights because you never read the National Agreement. Knowing your rights is a critical step in being able to enforce them.

Proactive communication—The MIARAP agreement was partially based on the premise that it was better to fix a problem before the route was adjusted than to attempt to do so after the adjustment. An issue resolution process was installed to cause disputes to be elevated within the MIARAP chain of authority so that, worse-case scenario, the issue reached the national parties for resolution within a week of the issue arising. Any issue in dispute could be elevated, whether it was a technical application of the MIARAP agreement, an unwillingness of one party to comply with its obligations, or an allegation that one of the parties was either attempting to control the process or was intentionally thwarting the process with delaying tactics. When the time line on elevating disputes was not adhered to, it resulted in those issues not getting resolved in a timely manner.

MIARAP considered input from the letter carrier on the route being adjusted. Unfortunately, some carriers did not provide the input necessary for the MIARAP teams to consider.

If a carrier did not believe the process was working and that his/her route was not going to be properly adjusted,

he or she owed it to themselves to bring this to the attention of someone who could check out such allegations before the route was adjusted, not after. If they read the MIARAP agreement, which was posted on the NALC website and appeared in *The Postal Record*, they knew that, in such circumstances, either speaking to the NALC local office contact, selected by the branch president, and/or a phone call to their national business agent was warranted, particularly since the latter was one of the area/regional parties overseeing MIARAP. Every NBA's phone number and address appears on the inside front cover of *The Postal Record*. Yet, a few chose to bring an alleged problem to my attention *after* the route was adjusted, without discussing it with the NBA's office *prior* to the adjustment.

In every set of rules, when something doesn't go right, it becomes easy to blame the system or the rules within that system, whether that set of rules is the National Agreement or an agreement like MIARAP. Any person who wants the set of rules to serve the purpose it was intended for not only looks at the rules, but looks at the application as well.

One conclusion may be to change the rules, negotiate something totally different. That might make sense if the original set of rules were properly adhered to and it still didn't work the right way. However, how does one come to that conclusion if the original set of rules were not adhered to correctly? The obvious solution, in such an instance, is to not only negotiate to tweak the original rules, but to ensure that the rules are applied correctly and serve the intended purpose.

No matter what is negotiated, we cannot guarantee that managers will always comply. We should, however, be able to ensure that the rules are properly applied on the union's side. The key to that endeavor is to convince our members of the necessity of their being knowledgeable of the rules and the necessity for continuing and ongoing communication among our members and all levels of the union in order to make that process a success. Together, knowledge and communication can be powerful and lead to success, but one without the other is a waste. ☒