

Building CCAs into the union



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In my last article, I wrote about the importance of welcoming CCAs and making them feel a part of the union from the very beginning. Here are some ways to do that.

Arrival at the unit—As soon as the new CCA arrives at the unit, someone from the union should make contact with him or her. Some branches have a specific person assigned to do this, usually someone who is friendly and has a warm and outgoing personality. This greeter/buddy welcomes CCAs to the unit and introduces them to the other members of the branch. The goal is to show that the union really cares about them and is there to help them. “We’re glad you are here; we really needed some more carriers

and we are going to do everything we can to help you pass probation and to see that you become a career employee. If you have any questions, or management is giving you a hard time about something, please let me know. Here’s my phone number in case you want to call me after work.”

With the OJI—The newly hired CCA will likely be assigned to an on-the-job instructor (OJI) for the first few days at unit. OJIs are in a unique position to spend a considerable amount of time with new employees. In most cases, they are the first “real carrier” CCAs will spend time with, so how they interact during those first few hours is critical. Therefore, having the OJI “talk up” the union during training will go a long way. The OJI also should let the CCA know that he/she will do everything possible to help the CCA get through probation and make it to career status. After the official training period is completed, OJIs should hang around after work a few times to be there when CCAs return at the end of the day to see how things went and to ask if there’s anything they can help them with.

Meeting the shop steward—Sometime in the first few days, the shop steward also should make contact with the CCA to let him/her know that they and the rest of the union are there to help them and will do whatever it takes to see that they pass probation and make it to becoming a career letter carrier. At a minimum, the steward should call or contact the CCA once a week to see how things are going and to offer assistance as needed.

Contact with branch president—Each branch should prepare a welcome letter and information sheet for the new employees letting them know about the branch, listing the officers and phone numbers, the time and locations of the

branch meetings and any other important information. This should be mailed or handed to the employee sometime during that first week at the unit. The branch president should make contact with the new CCA at some point in the first few weeks. In smaller branches where the president works in the unit with the CCA, this can be done right away. In larger branches where the president works in another location or is a full-time officer, he/she should make a station visit during that first month and make a point of meeting the CCAs.

A ride to the union meeting—Someone, whether it’s the steward, the greeter, the OJI or another member, should make sure that the new CCA is taken to the first union meeting after he or she gets to the unit. Rather than asking if the CCA is going, just say: “The meeting starts at 7 p.m., how about I pick you up at 6:30?” Some branches have an induction ceremony for the new members, including an oath of allegiance to the union. Others simply have someone stand up at the meeting with the new carrier and introduce him or her to the rest of the branch. Providing cupcakes and coffee or some other treats at the rear of the meeting hall following the meeting to welcome the new carriers and to allow the others to interact with them is a nice touch as well.

A welcome letter from the state president—Each branch should provide the state association with the names and addresses of their newly hired CCAs. State presidents should draft a standard letter to be sent to the CCAs welcoming them to the union and explaining, in a paragraph or two at most, what the state association does. A good time to send this would be about a month or two after they were hired and have had time to settle in.

Congratulations from the national business agent—When the CCAs pass probation, the NBA should send a letter congratulating them for passing probation, welcoming them to the union, and letting them know that the union is there for them. These are best kept short, sweet and to the point. Long missives about the important fights in Congress and battles with the Postal Service can come later. These should just be something along the lines of, “Congratulations on passing probation. I know you are very busy and have a lot on your mind as you are adjusting to your new job as a letter carrier, so I just want to welcome you to the NALC and to let you know that if there’s anything I can do to help you, please call me at...”

The goal to all these efforts is to let the CCAs know the union is there for them every step of the way. We want them to know that it is the union that will help them get through probation and make it to a career appointment, not management. That won’t happen if we don’t make the effort to spend time with them. It will cost only a few minutes a day and will reap huge rewards.