

No CCAs left behind



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Do you remember your first few days as a letter carrier? Everything seemed new and a bit strange. It was sort of like being in a foreign country. You had to learn a lot of new words and terms and so much was thrown at you over a short period of time that it impossible to retain it all. You stood at a carrier case for hours, searching for addresses on labels that might as well have been written in Chinese.

Then there was the awkwardness of your first days on the street, holding mail in your hands and carrying flats in your satchel trying to put the right mail in the right box and backtracking (often) when you didn't. You had to find streets you never had

heard of in areas of town you'd never been in. You walked around and around looking for mail receptacles you couldn't find, only be told later by the regular that it was nailed to the

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backside of a tree, or inside of the back porch or that you were supposed to leave it in the milk box. You walked into businesses to deliver mail and got that funny look from the people working there who wondered why you didn't just put it in the mailbox in the alley like the regular does.

You had to remember to curb your wheels the right direction, place the vehicle in park, set the handbrake, turn off the engine, remove the key, and lock the door each time you parked to deliver a parcel or begin a loop. You were told that any accident, however minor, would result in your being fired and that you should never call in sick during your probationary period no matter how ill you were. Meanwhile, some supervisor who never seemed satisfied was hounding you to go faster and faster.

You wanted to do a good job. You were happy when you were hired as a letter carrier and hoped to keep this job for awhile, perhaps even make it a career. You certainly were looking forward to the decent wages and benefits that the job promised. But the work was much more difficult than it looked, and the bosses were among the worst you'd ever encountered.

If you could just make it through probation, you could breathe easier; but that was not guaranteed, not by a long

shot, and those supervisors made it very clear that your fate was in their hands. So you tried to keep them happy, or at least not mad at you, and you looked for a friendly face or two, other carriers who understood what you were going through and could empathize with your situation. Often, you found it in those just above you on the seniority roster, as they'd just gone through it themselves not too long ago. If you were lucky, you had a good shop steward or some senior carrier who took you under his/her wing and looked out for you. If not, you worked with a bunch of carriers who looked at you like you were a fraternity pledge during initiation, thinking: I had to go through it; so should you.

And it has to be even harder for our new CCAs. We went through all that as career employees, with all the rights, benefits and, after 90 days, the job security that came along with that. While in many respects CCAs are much better off than TEs were, including a path to becoming a career employee, for most, it will be a longer and more difficult path than many of us had to trudge when we came in as PTFs.

These are the future leaders of the NALC. We already have a former TE as one of our resident national officers, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer Nicole Rhine. It won't be too long before leadership positions in the branches and state associations will be filled with those whose first postal job was as a CCA. Does anyone doubt the importance and necessity of making sure we welcome the CCAs with open arms and do whatever we can to help them succeed? Can you imagine the consequences to our union if we don't?

Early reports suggest that most branches are doing a great job of getting the new CCAs to join the NALC. While it's still too early to report exact figures, it appears that nationwide, we are doing a significantly better job of signing up CCAs than we did with TEs. But signing them up is just the beginning of making them a part of the union, sort of like joining the army is the first step to becoming a soldier. We need to let them know that we are not interested in them only for their dues. We need to make them feel welcome to and “a part of” this great union—and this should start the moment they show up in the delivery unit.

Take a few moments to introduce yourself and to welcome them. Take time to make them feel important and needed—which they certainly are. Just standing back and waiting to see if they sink or swim is not the way to bond them to the union. We want them to know that the union is there for them every step of the way. We want them to know that it was the union that helped them get through probation and make it to a career appointment, not management. That won't happen if we don't make the effort and spend time with them. It will cost you only a few minutes a day, but you, your branch and the NALC as a whole will reap huge rewards.