

## Playing the role of a mentor



**Brian  
Renfroe**

**M**entoring plays an important role in the professional development of a letter carrier. Not just does it help develop the mentee, it also builds relationships and fosters a better work environment. Most carriers, whether they realized it or not, had a mentor when they started. Typically it was a veteran carrier who showed you the ropes. Whether they gave us safety reminders or tips on how to perform the day-to-day functions of carrying, we've all benefited from our fellow carriers' knowledge and willingness to help. Experienced letter carriers can take an active role in mentoring other carriers.

A mentor is generally an experienced and trusted adviser. Not to be confused with an on-the-job instructor, a mentor is more focused on the long-term growth of the mentee. Mentors can teach, provide wisdom, advise and support. Although an on-the-job instructor isn't necessarily a mentor, that doesn't mean these instructors can't be excellent mentors. What better way to establish a relationship with a new carrier than to provide immediate on-the-job training—and then maintain a relationship with the new carrier to fill the role of a mentor as the carrier progresses and continues to learn more about the job?

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**Although the overtime and unpredictable schedules for new employees hasn't changed much in the last few decades, the job has certainly changed and evolved due to an increased use of technology. Today's letter carrier performs a variety of tasks to improve customer service and meet expectations regarding tracking and transparency. New carriers have a lot to learn besides how to deliver the mail, which we all know is harder than just “following the mail.” Learning the technology, the procedures and protocols, and dealing with management are a lot to absorb all at once. Especially in the fast-paced, productivity-at-all-costs mentality that is prevalent on most workroom floors. A mentoring relationship can provide new employees with**

a resource to ask questions, get feedback and begin their journey to become a professional letter carrier.

The mentoring relationship doesn't end when the carrier is converted to career. Carriers need to learn how to maintain the route edit book, ensure that unsafe route conditions are reported and communicate changes with the carrier technician, to name but a few requirements. Proper route maintenance allows other carriers to professionally and accurately deliver all the mail on the assignment and is vital to providing the best customer service possible. Many of these skills will need to be taught to new career employees. Even if they've learned it before, reminders and active practice can make it routine.

**Besides the day-to-day tasks that revolve around getting the mail delivered, you also can mentor by teaching new carriers about the union. This can include getting them involved with the annual food drive, telling them about legislative issues or teaching them how the National Agreement is organized so they can learn more about their rights and how to enforce them. Even simple things, like making sure they understand their Weingarten rights and learning to consult with the shop steward when there are possible violations to the agreement, can be invaluable for new members.**

There are a lot of resources out there for letter carriers. A number of postal handbooks and manuals cover the many aspects of delivering and handling the mail. NALC has dozens of active publications: one in particular, the *Letter Carrier Resource Guide*, condenses a plethora of useful information for all carriers, but especially for new carriers. But these resources cannot and do not replace a mentor. These are just tools to be used in conjunction with a hands-on, personal relationship from a mentor that can help show them the big picture and focus on their priorities, whatever those may be at the time.

Consider whether you can be a mentor to any of your current or future coworkers, just as some experienced letter carriers likely did for you. Pass on your knowledge and skills. If, instead, you are a potential mentee, try to take an active role in seeking out a mentor. To get the most from a mentor and become a professional carrier, you should try to learn from all of your coworkers and glean some of their wisdom. If you engage with other carriers, ask questions and listen, you'll find that somebody is mentoring you, whether the other carrier realizes it or not.