

**THE
UNDERBELLY
OF THE USPS
AND THE
STRUGGLES
WITHIN**

BY

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Foreword

Thanks to all the employees and managers that supported me in my 30 plus years with the USPS. You are the reason I endured and did the best I could.

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The Strict Rule of Conformity

“Do you know what a direct order is?” my boss screamed through the phone. My boss had called to say I couldn’t claim any local mileage for running to get batteries when the power went out. “You should have been prepared for this.” Perhaps, but I had run numerous local trips on my own dime, and I was sick of it. This was a corporation, boasting to be worth \$65 billion, that wouldn’t pay for the mileage incurred for business reasons. “You need to get my authorization every time you need to go somewhere.” “Fine,” I said, “does that include when I have to run to Mahtowa to service the vending machine.” “Every time.” That was a big mistake as the vending machine was prone to frequent jamming and maintenance issues. The revenue it generated was also important to the office. Nonetheless, each time it broke down I emailed him for authorization. While I waited for a response, sometimes for many days, the office lost revenue. After numerous emails, he finally got tired of it, and said “just go.” Who would know a \$6

claim would cost the USPS hundreds of dollars in retribution?

Sure, I exacerbated the problem by making him hold while I waited on a customer and a little extra. When he started his 'direct order' speech, I had to do it again. The customer came first. I wish I had said "no, I don't know what a direct order is, let me google it." I could also have said, "Is this trivia, because I love trivia."

Yes, I know what a direct order is. It's when a pompous ass boss knows someone has done something that needed doing and didn't rely on his idiot boss to tell him." I knew he had a job to do, but I couldn't understand how this benefitted anyone. The only thing I got out of it was that my manager was a short, hot-tempered control freak. To his credit though, after this rude introduction everything was fine thereafter.

This organization, as I learned over 34 years, strictly adhered to sustained conformity for its managers. They took unlike situations and demanded the exact explanations. If things were different, why is a canned, pre-determined explanation the answer? This place really

was an asylum, being run by the most detached and separated managers in the higher ranks. This detachment included the thought that anyone other than themselves could have beneficial ideas or thoughts. The way they methodically shut people up and marginalized them guaranteed the same outcome. Doing the same thing repeatedly for decades had left them behind, yet they were going about business as normal – conformity.

I had an employee who I felt falsified his application as to his medical condition. The lower rungs of labor agreed, but when it got to the head of labor, she wouldn't produce an answer either way. After more than a year of follow up emails and some phone conversations, she simply wouldn't answer. The best she could do is have me pursue other progressive channels of discipline, unrelated to the falsification.

My frustration with labor was shared with my boss who said he would inquire. Naturally, he never did. After contemplating the situation, I could only see one other avenue to pursue, and that was a determination by the Law

Department. At first they seemed to be fine with my simple request for a recommendation, but that changed.

Ultimately, they ruled against charging him with falsification, and proceeded to give me the standard “Chain of Command” talk and that I shouldn’t be wasting their time. Of course, as elitists, why should a little minion like me be asking them anything. To make things worse, the head of labor had told them that she had given me a decision on many occasions, but the trail of emails proves otherwise. Nonetheless, she, like any unscrupulous individual, claimed she told me that by phone. It’s convenient to use the phone or keep things to a verbal conversation when you can’t answer or are unsure of your answer. I never even got that.

Phone calls are the preferred choice of individuals that don’t know their jobs because it always provides them with deniability. “I never said that, I told Marvin blah, blah, blah...” Same crap, different manager. If it wasn’t in writing, they probably had no clue and you had no chance of success if they were further involved.

I could have proved the head of labor lied, but no one cared. The last email I had sent her on the topic was on

December 26, 2019. She didn't respond in any form. Upon concluding the matter, the law department rep wrote an email to me on 2/13/20 that included the following: "In addition to expressing dissatisfaction with the outcome of this case, your email to Mr. [REDACTED] also referenced a perceived lack of response from Ms. [REDACTED]. When I spoke with her, Ms. [REDACTED] indicated she had spoken with you by phone on more than one occasion to convey her position." Absolutely false. The email record shows no answer at any time for more than a year. Why would the email record show numerous attempts by myself to get an answer if I had gotten one? I moved on immediately after the law department addressed it and I would have done the same if labor could have provided a response.

The same email from the law department also said, "I note that because email is discoverable and fair game for union RFIs, many people I work with in Human Resources and Labor Relations rightly prefer verbal communications to written, especially where they have concerns about the tone or content of a manager's message(s)."

I highly doubt there's much risk to an email discussing the generalities of falsification as they applied to employment applications. My experience from labor and management is that if they can't put it in writing, they can't be trusted. They are simply keeping it verbal, saving their right to plausible deniability.

My immediate boss called and said with his usually snarly voice, "You're just so much smarter than the rest of us." I wanted to say, "thanks, it isn't hard," but I refrained. He sowed distrust and his childish accusations made managers strive harder for any privacy they could manage.

I pondered what rose to falsification these days if failing to disclose chronic back problems on your employment application didn't apply even though it specifically asked the question. When you suddenly attempt to make it a work-related accident 10 years later, without establishing any causation with work, what the hell is it? It was preexisting as he demonstrated by never being able to work Saturdays or the mornings because lifting was involved. There was not a murmur from him over those 10 years that work was aggravating it. The first time it came up was after the APWU steward encouraged her to change her

claim from not work-related to work-related. Her words, not mine. Yes, she could have done the honorable thing and not claim it, but she did.

The only good thing out of the Law Department decision was that it was finally settled, more than a year after it was first broached. This wasn't the first time the head of labor lied to cover her ass when I was involved.

Tired of the endless 'direct orders' and 'chain of command' talks, I emailed Human Resources (2/14/20) for a written copy of the USPS policy. As I said in the email, "It seems to apply in certain areas and not in others. To bring light to the situation, please provide the official directive." Still waiting for a response...

When the Coronavirus (COVID 19) struck the postal service, they handled it well when it came to the protection of its employees. Every avenue was taken to get Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), even though it was difficult to come by. However, on the administrative end, they were killing managers. Every day there were certifications of supplies on hand, how much was on order, safety talks, and certifications of the talks. Instead of deploying short,

concise messages of COVID-19 updates, they were sending bundles of reading. In fact, in the short time frame of March 19, 2020 to April 3, 2020, we had more than a quarter inch of mandatory talks. There was an additional inch or better of COVID-19 reading. Our email boxes were overloading, and the additional certifications stretched an already long day.

The problem wasn't so much the COVID-19 crisis but the ongoing crisis within. Rather than trusting in its managers to disseminate information, every day they had to certify that they had. Much of the day for a supervisor and postmaster was already spent certifying things they had done, then re-certifying much of the same in additional applications/surveys. Instead of making managers mere observers and data clerks that filled many checkboxes every day, they should have let us manage.

Managers on the front lines commonly say some bean counter at District, Area, or HQ was justifying their own jobs. No doubt, given the layers of incompetent and out-of-touch micro-managers overloading the ranks. Most of them mandating the certifications were simply support staff taking the directions of their own micromanagers. We were

dysfunction from top-to-bottom, decades in the making. Every day, world crisis or not, was a crisis internally.

Every day the telecons kept managers in their chairs looking at figures, explaining them, or simply being disparaged by their superior. Those listening in the shadows got the message, “do exactly as you’re told, when you’re told.” The theme was always to ‘fly under the radar’, meaning stay off the ‘lists’ that were shared every day to shame the offenders. The usual offense was that you forgot to certify online that you did something even though you probably did it. You might be getting the call late at night, but you had to go back in or arrange for someone to go in to certify it as done. If it was a clerk, you often had to pay a guaranteed two or four hours for two minutes of time. All to just say online that you did something you already had did.

Any sane person could see the futility in what we were doing for most of the day. If it didn’t move the organization in the direction of its goal, on-time, reliable customer service, don’t do it.

My Qualifications for Writing this Book

Since starting with the USPS on February 28, 1988, I have held many different positions. Each contributed to my growth and knowledge of the working USPS. My permanent assignments included:

- Administrative Postmaster – Executive Administrative Schedule (EAS – 18) (8 Years)
- Postmaster (EAS – 16) (10 Years)
- Supervisor, Distribution Operations (3 shifts at Duluth MN Processing and Distribution Facility (P&DF) (EAS – 16) (9 Years)
- Mail Processing Clerk (5 Years)

Additionally, I have taken my temporary assignments (details) that include:

- Postmaster (EAS – 20)
- Supervisor, Customer Services (SCS) in two locations
- Postmaster (EAS -18) in two locations
- Supervisor, Distribution Operations (EAS – 17), Eau Claire, WI
- Plant Manager (EAS – 21), Duluth P&DF
- Tour Superintendent, Duluth P&DF

- Operations Support Specialist (OSS), Duluth P&DF
- Part-Time Supervisor (204b), Duluth P&DF (3 years)

During my management assignments, I received a Letter of Commendation for contributions in mail processing and two Special Achievement Awards.

As the acting Operations Support Specialist, I procured:

- A RTHS (Robotic Tray Handling System, called Big Bird because it was yellow and moved awkwardly)
- DIOSS (Dual Input/Output Sub-System) upgrade that allowed existing Delivery Bar Code Sorters (DBCSs) to also apply barcodes like Multi-Line Optical Bar Code Sorters (MLOCRs) did, simultaneously sorting letters to one of the many bins
- MLOCR Bulky Modification (allowed sortation of thicker letters to be sorted via automation. This was truly a disaster and did more damage than good. Another projected savings that didn't pan out.)
- Automatic Sleever (sleeved trays automatically before sending to Big Bird for sortation — this cut down manual labor considerably.)

- Verbex Systems (Voice Input) for the Linear Integrated Parcel Sorting (LIPS) machine.
- Automatic Air Contract Transportation (ACT) tag machine. I found a private company, secured funding, and had tags automatically attached to trays after they were sleeved.
- Additional DBCS modules that extended the sortation of existing machines, reducing subsequent handling pieces (SHPs) considerably.

I was tasked with many different roles and committees that included:

- Breakthrough Productivity Improvement (BPI) Coordinator
- Management Operating Data System (MODS)
- Review Team member
- Ideas Committee
- Management team member for Local Memorandums of Understanding (LMOUs) for Mail handlers and Clerks

Classes taken: Managing Performance and Conflict Resolution; Workplace Violence; Highway Contract Route (HCR) Box Delivery; Process Management; Corporate Messaging; Labor Relations; Operations Support Specialist

(OSS); Rural Route Counts; Diversity, Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO); Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA); Safety Training Observation Program (STOP); HAZMAT; OSHA; PowerLift; and accident reporting procedures.

Contemplating Private Sector Employment

After high school, I attended the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD) with the hope of becoming a Forester. I completed my Pre-Forestry program and scheduled to go to the University of Minnesota to finish in 10 months. It was at this time that I got the job offer at the USPS. I took it as the DNR was suddenly laying off long-term employees.

I changed my degree to Finance while I worked full-time. Four years after switching degrees, juggling work, and studying, I completed my degree in Finance with a minor in Economics. I had seen enough of the Post Office to know I wanted more. In fact, after the first year of work I explored the possibility of joining the Army as an officer. It just seemed there had to be more than the dysfunction I saw every single day.

I applied to Minnesota Power, but they never showed interest. I got an interview with Waddell and Reed, but they were looking for communication people to gather information from potential clients. After you took information from potential clients you gave it to personnel at Waddell and Reed. They would formulate a plan based on the financial instruments they owned. It wasn't a finance position if all you did was take information. I wanted to create a financial plan with all options on the table, not just the company plans.

The Franklin, an insurance company, offered me the opportunity to sell life insurance with the future ability to get a brokerage license. I wanted to trade stocks but there was no timetable set for that to happen and in the meantime, I was selling life insurance. At such a young age I didn't really grasp the importance of life insurance and it's hard to sell something you're not sold on yourself. I had to compile a list of 200 people, preferably family and friends, and then meet with them with a regular agent to discuss life insurance options. I didn't understand life insurance enough to be sitting in on meetings where my endorsement was implied. The second problem I had was

with the canned cold-calling speech they trained you to make. You were instructed to ignore questions and pressure them. I was introverted, wanted to answer questions, and let individuals make informed decisions that they wouldn't later regret. A key to sales is getting the customer to be able to justify their purchase and be happy with it.

Fortunately, I still had hope in the opportunities at the USPS. If only I could have seen how the future would play out... You get used to the decent pay and benefits, finding them hard to find with private jobs. The skills were largely non-transferable and getting a second look anywhere was difficult. Moreover, government workers aren't exactly a private sectors first choice — they have a bad reputation simply because they work for the government.

If you are going to make a change, do it as young as possible. Jobs are harder to find as your education fades and you're learning non-transferable skills. Most labor jobs and their organizations are similar. Unless you were a nurse or accountant, skills often don't transfer well.

President Donald Trump Assigns a Special Task Force to USPS

In 2018 President Trump created the postal task force via executive order. One recommendation that led to legislative disapproval was the proposal that the Postal Service join other government organizations in not allowing its employees to negotiate over pay. Personally, I don't see pay as the logical answer or driver, but the contractual obligations of the Postal Service needed to be addressed. Allow them to negotiate pay, but dramatically cut the numerous restrictions on using employees. The collective bargaining units went too far in defining positions, restricting management from the effective use of employees, and went too far in protecting bad employees.

In large part, President Trump helped the economy boom by cutting regulations nationwide. Most regulations created needless administrative costs for businesses, and in many cases crippled small business. As these burdens were lifted, many found the financial relief they so desperately needed. Contractual restrictions, like regulations, when overburdensome, make efficiency and effectiveness harder to achieve. The fact is that unions now micromanage

managers' actions. Then, there are the managers who micromanage workers, mainly by directive, and higher-level managers who micromanage lower-level managers.

David Williams, the USPS board member on the task force, stated that contrary to private shippers, “the role of a public infrastructure is not to maximize profit, but to maximize value to our American supply chains and to citizens, especially those in rural and underserved urban areas.” “High shipping prices steal value from American supply chains, all the way from producers’ assembly lines to the wallets of American citizens.”

As you will learn later in this book, the POSTPlan of the USPS absolutely stole value from the rural and urban areas. It is single-handedly the worst change they ever made. It ranks even higher than the intentional avoidance of the parcel market in the late 1980’s and 90’s.

One popular, bi-partisan supported proposal is to require all postal retirees to use Medicare as their primary form of health care coverage. This, however, would shift health care costs to taxpayers, and be a major turn from the self-funding requirement now in place for the USPS. To know

what they could possibly do, you must go inside the USPS to get a clear picture of some of the problems. I will take you inside and share my firsthand experiences with what is going on.

First, I will share the response of the United Postmasters and Managers of America (UPMA).

Testimony Submitted for the Record, Daniel Heins,
President, UPMA - A Path to Sustainability:

Recommendations from the President's Task Force on the
United States Postal Service, March 12, 2019

Chairman Johnson, Senator Peters, I am Daniel Heins, President of the United Postmasters and Managers of America (UPMA). UPMA represents more than 24,000 active and retired postmasters and senior managers for the United States Postal Service (USPS). We are in every state and every Congressional district, including 618 members each in Wisconsin and Michigan.

[Represent is hardly the work most postmasters would say. The UPMA is little more than a mouthpiece for

headquarters and has not meaningfully represented its members as far as pay negotiations went.]

UPMA applauds the Committee for holding this hearing to begin the 116th Congress's discussion of the issues facing the United States Postal Service. It is not hyperbole to say that the USPS touches every single American and that it serves an irreplaceable role that is as critical today as it was at the founding of our country.

UPMA members help supervise the delivery of over 500 million pieces of mail every day to 159 million households and small, medium, and large businesses in the United States, and that number continues to grow. We are a direct link, and the Postmaster General has called our members "the chief marketing officers" of the USPS.

Over the history of the USPS we have witnessed major changes in how Americans communicate and in what they expect of their Postal Service. In the past, letters were the primary form of communication between people, bills were sent through the mail, and receiving a package likely meant you were getting a gift. Today, much of the nation's communication is via email or text, many of our bills are

paid electronically, and the package you are expecting is more likely than not a household staple ordered from a private company on the internet, not a cherished gift. The USPS and the employees who have worked for the USPS throughout its history have always managed change. From stagecoaches to planes to automated sorting and being “the last mile delivery” for many other shipping companies, the Postal Service has adapted to serve American businesses and consumers. As a Postmaster I can tell you that I like a challenge, and I know the folks at L’Enfant Plaza can adapt to almost anything. But the challenge the Postal Service is facing now is unprecedented.

A world of email, online retail and online bill payment would be challenging enough, but the United States Postal Service is facing those marketplace challenges while also facing severe economic demands.

It is not the requirement that the USPS be self-sustaining that has caused this economic distress, but additional requirements that Congress has imposed, most importantly the requirement that the USPS pre-fund its retiree health benefits.

The 2006 Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (PAEA) required that the USPS pre-fund the entire sum of its future retiree health benefits. Congress imposed this requirement solely on the USPS and not on any other Federal agency or private companies. This requirement is the leading cause of the fiscal challenges faced by the USPS today. Without this requirement, the Postal Service would operate at even or a small net loss, rather than the record losses we have been seeing every year.

The USPS is required to pay \$5.4 billion annually to prefund future retiree healthcare costs, and this sum comprises more than 90 percent of the Postal Service's annual loss. [In 2007 the USPS was mandated to prepay retiree healthcare obligations. The most recent annual report states that the USPS has about \$114 billion in healthcare obligations recorded and has set aside about \$90 billion. In the period from 2007 to 2016 the USPS has contributed more than \$50 billion to pre-fund healthcare. Because the USPS recognizes it as an expense against earnings, this has accounted for most of their losses over those years.

Prefunding healthcare is mandated for the USPS, but no other company.]

The Postal Service's ability to move forward and thrive in a changing marketplace requires that this albatross be removed from its neck. We must think strategically and creatively about how current and future retirees access health benefits and modify the prefunding mandate.

I want to speak specifically about the President's Task Force report. UPMA applauds President Trump and Secretary Mnuchin for the thoughtful analysis and stakeholder engagement that they brought to the challenges of the USPS. To right the ship and get the USPS on a solid, sustainable course will require the kind of strategic thinking laid out in the Secretary's report.

The report includes a number of provisions to applaud. First and foremost is that the Task Force did not recommend privatization of the USPS. This is worth noting, because while the USPS has a monopoly on first class mail, the USPS competes on package delivery with FedEx, UPS, and a host of other companies. While privatization has its advocates, it would come at a cost—a cost in the price to

mail a letter and a cost to the universal service requirement that Americans have come to expect. UPMA and our allies in the postal and federal community strongly oppose privatization. We are glad to see that the report agreed with us and did not recommend privatization as a path forward.

The report also highlighted challenges USPS faces in responding to delivery trends and customer needs and opportunities for streamlining. No one wants to see a post office closed, especially a Member of Congress. But the USPS is sitting on a large property portfolio that can be better managed and right sized. These improvements would reduce costs and improve efficiency, creating a real estate footprint more appropriate for our Postal Service in the 21st century.

The report also discusses potential ancillary services and new products that the Postal Service might offer. UPMA believes Secretary Mnuchin got this part right. While many people talk about the Post Office doing everything from offering retail banking services to being a quasi-community center, the report states that the Postal Service should not expand into areas where they do not have a competitive advantage or an inherent awareness of the business model.

UPMA agrees with this. The USPS does one thing well—exceptionally well, we would say—and that is delivering mail and packages to American households and businesses. The USPS should look first to enhancing performance in areas where it already has a competitive advantage. An easy first step would be to allow the USPS to deliver beer and wine through the US mail system, which federal law does not currently permit. This would not only generate additional revenue for the USPS but would also provide micro-breweries in Wisconsin and elsewhere with access to a national market.

I want to be clear: mail delivery is already a net revenue generator for the USPS. Our core business, which is delivering letters and packages, is already efficient, effective, and profitable. Expanding the markets in which the USPS can provide these services would generate new revenue without creating any significant new risks. This type of change is preferable to authorizing entirely new services, such as banking, that would require the USPS to create new infrastructures before generating any new net revenues.

UPMA is concerned about the report's recommendation that the USPS should continue its pre-funding mandate and its conclusion that while payments should be re-amortized, the USPS should pay a further \$43 billion to pre-fund benefits. \$43 billion is an obligation so large it is bound to shape the USPS's path forward. At a minimum, we recommend a new accounting of the USPS's current and future obligations for pre-funding retiree health benefits, and the creation of a realistic payment schedule that extends any outstanding obligation over a longer period of time, as proposed by HR 6076.

Last Congress, the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee passed bipartisan Postal Reform legislation that would address key principles of the Task Force Report. This legislation was not perfect, and everyone had to give up something. UPMA and our colleagues in the postal community recognized that a severe operation had to be performed to save the patient. We compromised, and I can honestly tell you a number of my members didn't like it, especially when it came to retiree healthcare benefits. But UPMA's members do feel passionately about the USPS and the careers it provides. We want to ensure that the Postal Service remains viable and we were willing to give something up to see it succeed.

The plan outlined by now-Chairman Cummings and Congressman Meadows would make much-needed reforms that would dramatically change the fiscal outlook for the USPS, including retiree and health benefit changes for current and future postal retirees, innovations in delivery service, and fundamental changes in the USPS's business practices.

UPMA was a proud supporter of the Postal Reform Act of 2018. We are working closely with Chairman Cummings and Congressman Meadows on its reintroduction and hope to see its passage in the United States House of Representatives. On the Senate side, we are working with Senators Tom Carper and Jerry Moran, who continue to lead this chamber's effort on comprehensive postal reform.

Chairman Johnson, UPMA recognizes your skepticism about the approach proposed by Chairman Cummings and Senator Carper, and we commend both your business acumen and your stewardship of the public's purse. That said, we urge you not to let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

The USPS is in not only a critical time but also a historic time. Last year the House Government Reform Committee made significant progress by winning agreement from all

stakeholders. December's Treasury report made important recommendations about the framework for reform and highlighted the thinking of the President and his advisors. Momentum for postal reform is building as shippers, advertisers, large companies, and others have joined the group of advocates for change.

Chairman Johnson, Senator Peters and other members of the Committee, on behalf of the United Postmasters and Managers of America, I look forward to working with you to forge compromise and consensus so that we do not miss this opportunity to see postal reform signed into law by President Donald J. Trump.

The history of the Postal Service is the history of the United States. We have the opportunity to preserve and improve this fundamental national service. The time for reform is now, and we believe that this can be done. We urge you and the Committee to take up the postal reform legislation being led by Senators Carper and Moran and help develop the sustainable business plan that the USPS needs.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.

The UPMA has done little for its membership, playing dead when it needed to address the concerns about the grossly deficient pay-for-performance (PFP) plan. They talked about a lawsuit but did nothing more than talk. When the National Association of Postal Supervisors (NAPS) filed suit, UPMA enjoined the USPS, to stop their representation of postmasters they laid claim too. Yes, they wouldn't do anything themselves to stop the corrupt PFP, but they would be damned if some other entity took up the cause. They had long been a joke and mere messenger of HQ, proving it loud and clear with this action. They found the courtroom, but only to act against its members.

More than Finances to consider

During the discussions of the original Post Office Act, individuals that included George Washington and James Madison, didn't appear to care about the Postal Service being profitable.

The subsidized price for newspapers and magazines, said Jonathan Trumbull, the speaker of the House of Representatives in 1792, was "among the surest means of preventing the degeneracy of a free government." The

resulting boom in newspapers bore with it, a boom in literacy. The Founders wanted to make sure that Americans could affordably send and receive mail from anywhere.

Today, we have the internet, but how many of these articles are factually based? Not many. The ideals of a free government are now under attack by propagandist pieces, statements taken out of context, and flat out lies. True journalism is rarer than ever. Who can be trusted online? The best I've seen are the Wall Street Journal, Fox News, and JustFacts.com. Follow the claims and see what pans out. Currently, you are wasting your time to listen to CNN, MSNBC, The New York Times, and Washington Post.

Newspapers remain important to the small communities they serve. They have no other outlet, at least yet, for local news. In most cases, you will find your mid-sized newspapers delivering real news. The smallest ones are beholden to school and government advertising, generally glazing over their true issues. The largest ones, using their established base, tend to lend opinions and stories to support their ideologies. We can't afford to lose the sources that counter the fake journalism of so many large papers or the internet (Facebook, Twitter, and Google). In this

endeavor, does the Postal Service exist to be financially self-sustainable or serve all individuals in the United States, regardless of their location?

The Report of the House Committee in 1844 argued that the post office existed for “elevating our people in the scale of civilization, and binding them together in patriotic affection” not revenue.

In the Postal Policy Act of 1958 Congress declared that the Postal Service was “clearly not a business enterprise conducted for profit” but a public service designed to disseminate “social, cultural, intellectual, and commercial intercourse among the people of the United States.”

The concept of universal service without concern for deficits existed for 178 years until the Postal Reorganization Act of 1970. This act booted the Postmaster General from the president’s cabinet and downgraded the post office from a federal department to an independent federal agency. While still subject to congressional oversight, it now divided leadership between the postmaster general and a board of governors. The board of governors viewed the postal service more as a

business than a public service, and this is where the turn happened. This strange affiliation has led to a different vision than that originally meant by the original creators. It was now about being run like a business, but at the same time, being overseen as an independent federal agency. The hands on the wheel now struggled for direction.

The greatest and worst outcome came about by the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (PAEA) signed into legislation in 2006. Also known as H.R. 6407, President Bush signed it into law on December 20, 2006. The act divided postal products into market-dominant and competitive categories; created the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) out of the Postal Rate Commission and increased the PRC's regulatory powers; returned the obligation to pay military service costs to the Department of Treasury; and replaced escrow requirements to fund retiree health benefits.

Bill Pascrell Jr., representative of New Jersey's 9th Congressional District wrote that the PAEA was "hurried to the floor during a lame-duck Congress" and "Committee leaders told us that the legislation was critical to "saving" the post, and we were rushed into voting for the bill without

fully considering its motivations or long-term impacts. The legislation was passed by voice vote — without objection. It was a blunder, one of the worst pieces of legislation Congress has passed in a generation.” The reason congress is so distrusted is that they frequently pass legislation ‘Without fully considering its motivations or long-term impacts.’ That’s how we got ObamaCare. Thank you Nancy Pelosi for shedding light on the topic, “We have to pass the bill to see what’s in it. And yet, her constituency keeps her in the office.

The section of the Act that cast the USPS into the financial abyss was the “Postal Service Retirement and Health Benefits Funding.” Before this time, the USPS paid as it went, just like all agencies funded its pensions. Under the new Act, they now had to pre-fund the health care benefits of employees at least 50 years in advance. This requirement meant payments ranging from \$5.3 to \$5.8 billion into a pension fund each year from 2007 to 2016, followed by additional large annual payments.

So, who signed off on the horrible bill? Why, no one. In the house it passed by voice vote, so no individual votes were recorded. In the Senate, it was similarly passed by

voice vote, but unanimous consent. At the time of signing, the Senate was comprised of 55 Republicans, 44 Democrats, and one Independent. The House had 202 Democrats, 232 Republicans, and one Independent. No one on the floor at that time, regardless of party is without fault. Congress has earned its dismal ratings for its inability to fix this problem along with many others (deficit spending, immigration, abortion etc.).

There was no chance the USPS could make these payments and stay in the black. Discounting this outrageous sum being thrust onto its back, the USPS would have performed in the black for most years since 2006. The most recent annual report states that the USPS has about \$114 billion in health-care obligations recorded and has set aside about \$90 billion. In the period from 2007 to 2016 the USPS has contributed more than \$50 billion to pre-fund healthcare. Because the USPS recognizes it as an expense against earning, this has accounted for most of their losses over those years.

Although the USPS is not receiving financial support from the federal budget, it is subjected to its crazy legislation. Without the addition of an extra amount to stamp prices,

the money for pre-funding simply isn't there. The USPS, like all businesses, has a set budget and short of an influx of increase revenue, can't meet exceptional costs. It wasn't built to do that.

How Big is the USPS?

The USPS had 644,000 employees on its rolls as of September 30, 2017 making it the second largest civilian employers in the U.S. and one of the largest civilian employers of US. Veterans (more than 88,000).

In January of 2019, the USPS stated it was a \$69.7 billion business. In fiscal year 2017 (October 2016 through September 2017), the USPS delivered 149 billion pieces of mail to 157 million delivery addresses and operated more than 31,000 Post Offices.

My journey working through the vast incompetence of the USPS

I started as a machine clerk for the Duluth Processing and Distribution Center (P&DC) on February 28, 1988 while pursuing a degree in Finance from the University of

Minnesota, Duluth. I originally started college in the fall of 1984 with dreams of working in Forestry. I completed preforestry studies with the intent of transferring to the University of Minnesota campus in St. Paul for my final year in 1988. In 1987, I took the battery exam for the United States Postal Service (USPS). Thinking I had to finish the exam completely, I thought I bombed. I easily finished the math and address matching portions but in the timed memory sections got 92 out of 100 before time was up. I was pretty upset with myself and was surprised to learn I scored a 100. There were some other 100's and by tie breaking rules, I ended up second in the group.

We were invited to an orientation session for a couple of days and I left not knowing if I got the job. It wasn't until I received a letter telling me my start date that I finally realized I got it. As I pondered my decision to finish Forestry or stay with the USPS, a doctor's appointment steered my decision. While chatting with the nurse she said her husband of 15 years was in jeopardy of losing his job with the DNR. The Minnesota DNR was making massive cuts and getting a job with no experience was very unlikely. I took a 180-degree turn, accepted the job with the USPS and changed degrees to Finance with a minor in Economics. If you look at the DNR

now, it has grown immensely with more opportunities than ever.

I got married in 1989 and she made it clear she never wanted to leave the area. The decision was clear, stay with the USPS and see where it would take me. By switching to a degree in Finance I still had the possibility of jumping ship when I finished. It seemed like a lot of money when I first started working at the USPS. I made \$10.49 an hour with a 10% pay differential for hours worked after 6:00 p.m. and 25% more on Sundays, not to mention periods of overtime. Prior to this time the most I made was \$4.25 an hour as a groundskeeper. From the initial wage you had guaranteed wage increases and Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) that sweetened the deal. Additionally, you had matching contributions up to five percent of your pay that you allotted to your Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) which was a basic 403b plan. There was also a break on life and health insurance. All in all, a decent job when jobs were scarce.

Like any snot nosed kid, I thought I would someday revolutionize the USPS. Unfortunately, it took me longer than most to learn that politics, bureaucracy, and gamesmanship was what got promoted. Busting your ass,

being honest, and showing good results meant nothing except a pat on the back for your boss.

The USPS has transformed considerably from my Hiring in 1988

In the late 1980's and early 1990's the mail volume was at its peak, namely letters and magazines/large envelopes. The USPS had about 10% of the parcel market and was content with UPS dominating the market. They didn't see much of a future for parcels and had committed to building its other more profitable channels, namely letters and flats/magazines. Now, letters and flats/magazines have dramatically declined, and parcels are becoming the big-ticket item they are fighting to get back in the game.

The internet began to take off in the 1980's with the start of the World Wide Web (www) and the USPS should have seen emails lasting effect on First-Class mail. When news began going online, it was inevitable that print was looking at a long-term decline. Packages were the only thing that couldn't be digitally done. Yet, they waited 30 plus years to go after the parcel market. Many of the delivery vehicles in service in 2020 still lack the needed capacity for parcel growth. The USPS was not only far from the ball, but just entering the field. Their biggest advantages? Price and facilities in nearly every community. More on this

later...My group was hired to man (or “staff” for the politically correct readers) the new machine that was being brought into the Duluth Plant, the Multi-Position Letter Sorting Machine or MPLSM for short. The Post Office loves acronyms and it’s impossible to know all of them. Hell, they aren’t even the same from one place to the next. This mammoth sloth sat 12 operators (keyers) at a time and had more than 200 bins in the back. When fully operational, two employees would load six consoles (stations) each and four would sweep (unload) bins in the back and place them into trays. Two operators rotated every thirty minutes with a third person, either a loader or sweeper. During Christmas, we often started as early as 2:30 p.m. and ended as late as midnight. It was mundane, tiresome, and tested the strongest of hand tendons. It was built perfectly to cause carpal tunnel syndrome, a goal it achieved. The geniuses who engineered the machine decided that it was a good idea to have the keys kick back when your timing was off. When your tendons were sore, you certainly thought about these clowns each time you got their jolt. To this day, I bet they remain in hiding.

Before this machine was operational nearly all operations were manual (yes, by hand, for those a little slow to

understand). The first machine used for sorting letters was the Single Position Letter Sorting Machine (SPLSM). One person grabbed chunks of mail and keyed them one by one, while one person would sweep a few machines. It was inefficient, had few holdouts, and one could argue that manual sorting was just as efficient. As time would teach me, it was never going to be about efficiency but more about showing numbers where District designated.

Spread throughout the floor was a manual belt where thick letters, parcels, and magazines/large envelopes were culled (extracted and sorted to containers for additional handling) from normal letters before being canceled by a cancellation machine called the Mark (manufacturer name). Small parcels were hand canceled and thicker letters were canceled in a machine called the Model G. Flats were immediately canceled during extraction by dropping it on a moving belt that had a rotating die (canceler). There was a manual belt for first class flat (magazine/newspaper/large envelope) bundles and small parcels and rolls (SPR's, pronounced as 'spurs'). There was a manual belt for sorting Standard Parcels (slowest moving) and undated second-class bundles of flats.

Large parcels were sorted to large hampers (1046's), small hampers (1033's), nutting trucks (short flat beds on wheels), all-purpose containers (APC's, a steel cage), and general purpose mail container (GPMC, the largest rolling container). I warned you of the many acronyms. We'll progress through that and get to the heart and soul of the problems with the post office: forced conformity, politics, and a strict top down command regiment.

My first months of work involved the manual distribution of flats and letters. There were piles of machine canceled letters stacked on wire racks and cages (all-purpose containers that held approximately a three foot by three feet by five-foot stack of flats). In those days smoking was allowed, and most distribution cases had a smoking tray or one readily available. It was perfectly fine to light up anytime you wanted. Many people took additional breaks to the dock or other exit to have a smoke. Supervisors often joined them. Operations were simple, most people worked hard and somehow the post office made money. The USPS was making money despite duplicating managerial positions from facility to facility, had little technology, and more than 800,000 employees.

By 1990, we added the Single Line Optical Character Reader (SLOCR) and it read about 20% of the letter mail and sorted it. Not great, but the beginning of true automation. Next came, the Mail Processing Bar Code Sorter (MPBCS) and as it sounds like it sorted barcoded mail to one of 96 bins. It wasn't long before we had progressed to a Multi-Line OCR (MLOCR), which read significantly better and sprayed barcodes on non-barcoded mail, sorting to one of 60 bins. Then there was the Advanced Facer Canceler System (AFCS) which canceled and sprayed barcodes on letters at a throughput of up to 40,000 pieces per hour (PPH).

There was also a Rough Cull machine that could accept raw mail and quickly separate machinable letters from the parcels and flats. It didn't live up to its billing as you had to pull parcels, rubber banded letters and flats, to have it run decently. I would say it was even worse because it allowed problem pieces, like open-ended brochures, to enter the canceler. The pieces got damaged, jammed the machine, and slowed the operation down. It was no improvement whatsoever over running it over a belt and having someone just grab the biggest and most problematic pieces. It took a lot of space for literally accomplishing nothing.

The Rough Cull typified the approval process for machines, once they entered the building, they were accepted. Yes, they might have met the minimum qualifications, but some didn't serve the process whatsoever. The Delivery Bar Code Sorter (DBCS) was a successful addition and featured a wide area bar code reader that did much better than earlier models. Its 216 available bins dramatically increased the depth of sort.

The upgrades that increased the readability on the MLOCR had significant impacts on the amount of manual and mechanized work (MPLSM).

In 2019, automation would be finalizing 98% of its mail.

ID barcodes were applied by ink jet sprayers, images lifted, and what couldn't be completely resolved (unique 5-digit, 9-digit, or 11-digit) were sent to Remote Encoding Centers (RECs) for deeper coding by keyboarders receiving the images. After the encoding was complete at the REC site, the pieces were rerun on the DBCS and sorted. In time the machines effectively eliminated most RECs and MPLSMs by their increased ability to resolve pieces immediately. Whatever couldn't be finalized was sent to manual operations for finalization. This meant you had to have a keen eye to leakage (mail not

sorting in automation for one reason or another) and take steps to recover as much as you could.

My Experience with the Federal Organization

Equipment deployments are determined at headquarters and rolled out on their schedules. Sometimes it takes years for smaller sized plants to get the efficient machines found in larger plants. These machines were more efficient, saved hours and costs, yet it took a lot of time to get them in small facilities. Rather than buy new, better equipment for everyone meeting the required volume thresholds, many older pieces of equipment got transferred from larger facilities to smaller ones. This requires taking the old machine apart, trucking it somewhere else, and reassembling it yet again. This is expensive and still results in less productivity and more hours than a new machine. Eventually, the new machines will replace these, but why later? Why not right away?

All policies and procedures roll out from headquarters, the area, or the district. Manuals, policies, and handbooks fill

Multiple objectives that demand equal attention have a paralyzing effect on operations.

bookcase after bookcase. There are tens of thousands of pages of reference material for even the smallest office, and much more for larger offices.

Every form and printed copy have retention times, some indefinitely, and as the number of forms grew so did the space required to store them. Some would think that once we did some certifications online, printed forms would be unnecessary. Think again. The paper reduction act didn't get any traction in the USPS. Where we did it once before on the internet, we now do it twice. Sorry trees.

The focus of the organization seems lost in the bombardment of ever-changing goals, objectives, people, processes, and equipment. Although it employs hundreds of thousands of people, and most would utter "customer service" when asked, the focus doesn't resound clearly. Although its' purpose is to provide service, the primary focus seems to vary from cutting hours and costs, to higher productivity, to higher delivery scores, ...and service be damned. The focus is lost on a multitude of goals and objectives. The biggest problem in determining these goals is that, like equipment deployments, top management computes them alone. They control the means, the goals,

limit decisions by others, and then, ultimately judge their performance on one-sided, subjective measures.

The limited or restricted means of getting the work done include:

- Some plants are so short on people that a few sick calls cause serious service issues
- Some plants do not have the necessary equipment to do the job effectively
- Decisions regarding policies, equipment, and even the complement of people are determined somewhere else
- Recording requirements require supervisors to leave the workroom floor for large lengths of time. This also leads to an increase in supervisor hours.
- The discipline process is both difficult and time-consuming*

*An employee can successfully have poor attendance issues for their career and be impossible to fire. Different types of behavioral infractions required its own discipline. For example, discipline for insubordination is separate from that of attendance. For each type of discipline, you

generally start with an Official Job Discussion (OJD), documented by personal notes, and kept private from anyone else, even managers. In fact, you were to be specifically asked by another manager if you had an OJD on an employee before you could give them the date. It is effective for one year and the same infraction within that time leads to more progressive and corrective discipline, a Letter of Warning (LOW). If the OJD expired before the next infraction, you had to start over again with the OJD.

If the OJD was “live” you could issue a LOW. If the LOW were “live” you could issue a 7-day suspension for a similar infraction. This would proceed to a 14-day for the same violation if the 7-day were still active, maybe another 14-day suspension, and then termination. If he were a veteran, he would likely get a ‘last chance settlement’ from the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB).

Let’s examine an MSPB case I had.

One Sunday I discovered that one of the employees was drunk. Another employee had told me had been cleaning himself up in the bathroom at the start of the shift and shoving gum in his mouth when he knew I was in the area.

This Sunday, I approached him at the Express Mail desk and asked if something was wrong because he had been grumbling indistinctly about something. He pointed at the calendar and said the day is wrong. I looked but didn't see anything wrong. It was just a normal calendar.

I told him to grab his jacket because I was taking him to the clinic for a Fitness for Duty exam. "Why, because the calendar is wrong?" he said ripping the front page off to show the doctor.

I could not technically call him drunk because I was not a doctor (the APWU constantly reminded me just in case I suddenly thought I was), but I could say he was displaying odd behavior. I had to assign another person to cover for me, so I could take him in for a medical evaluation. We waited five hours before he was finally seen. During the wait, he rambled aloud, on and on. On a few occasions, he told the nurse on duty, "Hey, did you meet my good-looking young boss." He made a complete fool out of himself while embarrassing me.

When he finally took the urine test, I stood outside the door with the nurse where we heard him fumbling around inside.

When he handed his sample to the nurse, she commented that it was cold. He had added water to it.

The doctor proceeded to ask him for a blood test that he vehemently refused. After the doctor said, “How can you expect me to release you to go back to work when you can’t manage to take a urine test?” He finally gave in to a blood test, the doctor wrote instructions for him to be off work, and I drove him home. During the drive home he told me how he was an expert rifleman in the military and one of the best assassins they had. I refrained from responding to the blatant intimidation attempt. I did make notes of the day including this incident and included it with the request for termination.

I proceeded to fire him, but he had special rights as a veteran and received a last chance settlement by the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB). In the six to nine months prior to this, I had given him an official job discussion, letter of warning, a seven-day suspension, two 14-day suspensions, and two 21-day suspensions for attendance related issues. Making discipline difficult was that he was over 40 and disabled. His disability – asthma –

was aggravated by the nightly drinking he did after work in smoky bars.

After coming back, he received approval for leave under FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act). This protected him from any leave related to his asthma. Just a few days after his return, he walked up to me with a paper bag over his hand, put it to my chest, and went “bam, bam.” This was after an incident in California where one of the workers had shot other employees, killing some of them. I told him that I was not amused and made notes of the incident.

He continued to be late and take unscheduled absences. His tardiness was uncovered by FMLA. When he failed to recertify his FMLA paperwork, his absences became unscheduled again. One day when he failed to show up for work, I was tipped off that he was sitting at a bar in west Duluth. I stopped after work with another supervisor and caught him there. He immediately approached us and accused me of following him. I asked him how much he had to drink, and he said a beer. The bartender said four to five. It didn’t matter, he had called in again, and wasn’t truly sick. Before we left, he came up to me and said, “I’m going to jump off the high bridge.”

When I got back to the USPS to record the incident, I called the police and reported his threat of suicide. He made one final attempt to schmooze my boss, but he stood firm. I terminated him again just two to three months after his last chance settlement. There was no appeal available this time. He accepted a reduced retirement and left.

The process of firing him from beginning to end took over a year in which time I had about an inch of paperwork.

During the process, some people had come to me to ask me to give him yet another chance. They felt sorry for him and did not want to see his lengthy career taken from him. Avoiding privacy issues, I told them that everyone was entitled to the grievance process.

I felt for the guy. He was intelligent and nice enough but there could be no tolerance for the many incidents of tardiness and absence. It was not going to do him any good if no one held him accountable. Unfortunately, within the year he had drank himself to death.

In 30 years of disciplining employees as a manager, this is the only full-time employee I ever managed to fire.

Another man that threatened to shoot me, was caught with a gun on site, hauled off in a strait jacket, was returned after a four-month suspension. Shortly thereafter, he made a similar threat. He worked there until he took his regular retirement. Zero tolerance was meaningless.

If at any point the discipline is no longer “live” you must start over with the OJD. Simply, this means if I got a 14day suspension for attendance, got a one year “live” record settlement, it would be completely removed in a year if I didn’t commit the same infraction. Even better, when I got suspended, I would generally get a working suspension, and no one will even know a thing — and still get paid. Once my record cleared, I was safe to start abusing my sick leave again. To complicate matters, I can mix in some Sick Leave Dependent Care (SLDC), Family Medical Leave, and some emergency leave. Yes, the emergency leave will be unscheduled, but it is difficult to discipline someone for it, if legit, particularly as a triggering incident for discipline.

Even if I had received a 14-day suspension for attendance and I was charged with insubordination, I would be disciplined for a separate infraction altogether and I would most likely get an OJD or LOW.

Every processing plant has two craft unions, clerk, and mail handler, with divisions within them. Each union negotiates its own contract nationally, and their local chapters negotiate their own Local Memorandum of Understanding. It was clear to me that employee protections were too strong when the employer had little effect on what was acceptable.

Learning in Preparation for Managing

Upon accepting the position at the USPS, I changed to a degree in Finance and literally started over. I had dreams of working at Minnesota Power, a brokerage firm, or on the exchange floor itself. Between working six days a week and keeping at least a half-time status at the University of Minnesota Duluth, I was tired. The MPLSM was the worst torture for the tired and I took any opportunity to do anything else.

Two jobs always required assistance and only a few of us would do it. One was managing the mail that ran across a conveyor belt to the canceling machine. A mail handler would dump mail on the belt after extracting the biggest items. The aim was to extract any flats (large envelopes/magazines), parcels, heavy letters, or items that wouldn't cancel properly like flyers/brochures that had open ends. You had to be fast and efficient enough to keep the canceling machine fully fed. The entire outgoing operation hinged on the timely cancellation of mail.

The second job was as an Expediter whose oversaw the dispatching and receiving of trucks. You would record the

times they left and came, issuing late slips for anytime they were late leaving (when it was requested). Many drivers wouldn't demand a late slip because they knew they could make up the time, while others requested one every time because they would accumulate time and be compensated for it. If a driver made up the time while delivering his or her route, they wouldn't be compensated for the time. It is a stupid rule because it discourages efficient route performance. The contracts specify they are to get out and in at an exact time. If they came in early, no one ever complained because it gave us an opportunity to move things along earlier. The highway contract routes (HCR's) were designed to credit drivers with a speed of 55 mph on the freeway and 45 on other roads. Obviously, they could make up time if the road conditions were decent, but why punish them when they did.

The HCR routes that brought mail to the Post Offices were incredibly rotten jobs to have until PostPlan (realignment of operations including shorter office hours). For example, Duluth had a trip from Duluth to Grand Portage about four hours away. I believe it left Duluth at 4:20 a.m. and arrived in Grand Portage about 8:30 a.m. It had stops in Two Harbors, Silver Bay, Tofte, Lutsen, Finland, Hovland,

Knife River, and Grand Marais along the way. The HCR was due back to the Duluth plant at 7:45 p.m. and had to leave Grand Portage about 3:25 p.m. The time between 8:30 a.m. and 3:25 p.m. was a layover and many drivers would simply sleep in the truck. There was a little casino in town and little else. This route consumed your life. After PostPlan (realignment of employee/office hours, personnel, transportation, and processing), all routes had to be back into Duluth no later than 4:00 p.m. to be loaded onto semi-trailers bound for Eagan, MN. Finally, a schedule that allowed HCRs to deliver morning mail, have a shorter layover at the end, and then pick up the same points on its return.

Prior to PostPlan, several HCR routes rented apartments at the last town they served in the morning and later started in the evening. While the 2012 PostPlan was good for HCRs it was a disaster overall. The GAO (Government Accountability Office) found that it saved at most only one twentieth of its projected savings. More on this later.

I also learned a lot by working as a mail handler (basic sortation of mail equipment/parcels/flat bundles, loading/unloading trucks, and cancellation operations) and

different clerk positions (manual belts for sorting parcels and flat bundles, manual separation of priority to hampers/APC's/GPMC, express mail, and registry).

Additionally, I worked on the Mail Processing Bar Code Sorter (MPBCS) and Single-Line OCR (SLOCR), Duluth's first foray into automation for letters.

When I was asked to supervise part-time, called a 204B, in 1990, I accepted. As an introvert with low self-esteem and fear of public speaking this was a big stretch. I knew it was time to work outside of my comfort zone, especially if I wanted to overcome my fears. The skills I lacked I hoped to make up for in other ways. I reflected on my mistakes as I made them and learned from them. I learned to take calculated risks, weigh the result/outcome as soon as I could, and either keep the new process, modify it, or abandon it. I knew progress required a change at times, and the sooner we found more efficient ways the sooner our operation would improve. With the ebb and flow of employees (too many or too few) we had to make the most of what we had. I learned everything I could about operations from the minute to the most complicated.

An employee echoed the sentiment expected of all people you supervise, “We expect you to have the answers or to get them when you supervise.” That was a fair statement and employees not only deserved them, they were necessary to build trust as a manager.

As hard as it was going back and forth as a part-time supervisor and craft employee it was also transformative. As a worker you did the actual jobs and learned them in depth. It’s difficult as a manager to learn many functions of craft positions from a distance. In a union environment like that of the USPS you were forbidden from craft work unless it was for training purposes and emergencies. Emergencies had nothing to do with making the service standard but with “acts of God such as electrical outages due to a windstorm” or similar natural event. If you were short as we often were, and the truck was due out at 0015, the union would have you sit on your hands rather than assist in sorting the mail. On occasion, I would throw mail and let them grieve for the actual time I worked. The message was well worth it. As a craft employee who supervised, there was also the need to demonstrate what you expected when supervising.

When supervising it was equally challenging, because the person you worked with the day before was someone you must direct today. Their expectations and the way they respond to you were suddenly different. You had to manage personal conflicts while you did your best to process all committed mail in an efficient, productive manner.

Others, including friends, attempted to gain favor or take advantage of you in your position. Some tried to take longer breaks, ask for certain jobs, and challenged your resolve to stand firm and fair. The fact is many will posture to see what you will or will not allow. Everything you say and do is suddenly viewed from different lenses.

Productivity required a supervisor to know where the numbers originated. Sure, it was volume and workhours, but the volumes came from many different sources. The type of mail (metered or stamped, machinable or manual) weighed and entered at the scale made a big difference when it came to conversions. Sometimes, someone would completely skip the scale and bring the mail directly to where it was being sorted. This meant all first handling

pieces (FHP) volume was missed and a lower FHP productivity. Likewise, if the proper tare weight of equipment used to transport mail wasn't properly accounted for it either boosted or hurt FHP numbers. The correct scale entry was necessary for an accurate productivity score.

Of course, if things don't look quite the way you think they should, there is another way. One day I was summoned to the Plant Managers office to settle a dispute between him and the Operations Support Specialist (OSS). The FHP from the previous day was lower than the Plant Manager felt it should be and figured someone must have missed weighing something. He wanted the OSS to enter more and he refused. The Plant Manager asked me to give my opinion. I said that without some meaningful evidence of an error we could not add in volumes. If it was missed, we lived with it. He was unhappy with my answer, but it was the right answer. He wanted to show a certain productivity and was prepared to add volumes to make it happen. Errors were unfortunate, but it was our jobs to make sure they didn't happen. Fudging it later to suit our needs wasn't right.

It wasn't much later that he said it was probably time for me to move on. I didn't disagree. If we were resorting to cheating to make the numbers he wanted, I wouldn't play on that team.

Likewise, when weighing it was important to weigh things to the proper operation. If something was going to the manual outgoing letter operation and was mistakenly credited to manual incoming, it understated the productivity of the first and overstated the second. The weighing and operation errors were ongoing issues.

Letters were FHP only if they hadn't been processed previously. Any downflow pieces, like machine rejects, were considered Subsequent Handling Pieces (SHP). The FHP productivity was the primary measurement by which productivity was determined and SHP productivity showed the overall productivity. It was important to understand how much SHP there was and reduce it as much as possible. Less handling meant less workhours and better productivity. As the machines streamed in, it became critical to get a handle on these pieces and control their downflows.

The workload (volumes), workhours, and machine utilization by operation number and facility type were tracked by the Management Operating Data System (MODS). MODS data is used to plan workloads, project work hours and mail volume, track mail processing activities, evaluate the efficiency of facility, and estimate staffing requirements. Naturally, the information coming from MODS was only as accurate as the information that went into it. Basically, MODS ties clock rings and volumes to specific operations to figure out your productivity. Accuracy depends on the right clock rings and scale entries.

The OIG reports the Postal Service requires 226 (about 35 percent) of the total 652 MODS operation numbers to have workhours and mail volume entered. Source: <https://uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/document-libraryfiles/2018/CP-AR-19-001.pdf>. Experienced clerks and mail handlers often made errors, so you can infer that newer employees did so more often. The supervisor was tasked to monitor for accuracy. If you were seeking to boost your productivity, proper clocking and weighing was a must.

The same OIG report said there “were 10.3 million workhours recorded without associated mail volume (about 5 percent of total workhours recorded) and 24.4 billion total mail pieces recorded without associated workhours (about 2 percent of the total mail pieces processed).” These were just obvious mistakes and doesn’t reflect the wrong operation numbers being used or wrong scale entries. Errors result in bad productivity numbers and incorrect projections of staffing requirements, labor and operational costs, and improperly allocating costs to cost pools and postal products. I did everything I could to ensure the best accuracy possible while working at the Duluth Plant, but errors still occurred. Its complexity required ongoing training and monitoring. If I did as much as I did to still witness errors, I could only imagine the plight of other processing facilities.

When I began supervising, I understood that the workers were the key to success. There was a lot of room to improve relationships. Mainly, disruptive, and/or lazy workers had to be held accountable. If people had horrible attendance records, they had to be dealt with in an expedient, progressive, and corrective manner. And when a good worker got ensnared with attendance issues, he or she

also had to be given the same treatment. Fairness was key to discipline that stuck, as well as in building trust and loyalty among employees. The most intimidating bullies and disruptors had to be dealt with or everything and everyone suffered. The fulfillment of this task comes at a great personal cost in threats, grievances, interventions, harassment claims, and personal turmoil.

Grievances and petty arguments over job assignments ate me alive for the first 10 years of supervising, at work and at home. Finally, one day when I was working it all seemed to roll right off me and I realized it was all part of a dysfunctional bureaucracy crippled by unions that sought to box everyone into certain tasks and no more. Even worse, the union was generally loaded with stewards/leaders that were lazy or hell-bent on destroying any attempts by management to be more productive.

Grievances allowed stewards to sit in the union office while others worked. Their absence from a working capacity often forced others into overtime. Other than two decent presidents, the APWU, had no one else in charge that cared about the mail getting out and serving the customer. I guess they didn't understand or care that the USPS would

cease to exist when it didn't serve those that paid for its services.

Gamesmanship

In my first year of supervising one of the regular supervisors bumped me from a Saturday I was scheduled to supervise.

The fact was that anytime he wanted or 'needed' extra money he would simply manufacture a reason to work his day off on OT. He requested I put in a change of schedule, and he signed it. He could not justify changing me to worker status, so he asked me to change my schedule. I agreed because I rarely got weekends off.

It was a holiday weekend and because I was off a more senior person was forced to work. If I had been supervising that day, there would have been no issue. He filed a grievance, and all hell broke loose. I received a call at home by the supervisor that had bumped me and said they wanted to fire me. "Fire me, for what?" I took an approved change of schedule that he suggested and approved. He said that labor officials, then housed in the same building, wanted me fired.

When I returned from my days off, I followed the typical path with a grievance and was assigned a steward. The supervisors and steward were pressuring me to accept a 7day suspension without pay to settle the charge and keep my job. I said, “absolutely not, I am not taking anything.” One day as it was ongoing, the steward and supervisor were eating lunch at the same table and the steward agreed that I would accept the suspension. He was making a deal without my authorization, and even worse, publicly. I told him, like I had the supervisors, I had no intention of accepting discipline of any form. Furthermore, he had breached my right to confidentiality. This was the kind of thing that unions got sued for. There was no way I was going to take a suspension because the supervisor wanted me to secretly take the fall for him.

I wrote a letter to the two labor officials and explained what really occurred. In no time, the two labor officials and the floor supervisors were in a heated conflict. In the end, I got nothing, but I learned how quickly and seriously things could get amid political gamesmanship. The biggest issue, going unchecked then as it did for the following 20 plus years, was this supervisor taking as much made-up OT as he wanted.

No one did anything, and when anyone said anything, he would threaten to call the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

I wish I could say it ended here, but it was only getting started. The senior person forced to work his holiday in my place stayed fixated on it. It came to a head one day when he told other workers that he was going to crawl on the roof of the Vehicle Maintenance Facility (VMF) where I routinely parked my car and shoot me as I left work.

When I got to work the next day, I heard the threat and learned he had been placed on suspension (paid leave) while it was being investigated. My boss would say the Postal Inspectors arrested him on site and he was in possession of a loaded pistol. Supposedly, he was placed into a strait jacket and hauled to the psych ward. He should have gone to jail for making a terroristic threat.

Despite the threat and pistol, he returned to work after four months. Shortly thereafter, he was making new threats directed towards me, but nothing ever happened. So much for zero tolerance.

Even one of my regular friends commented that I should have received discipline for that incident. I never explained it to her, but I was certainly looking like a dirt bag, so a regular supervisor could get OT at the expense of the USPS.

Fiscal Year Shenanigans

The fiscal year for the USPS runs from October 1st to September 30th. To preserve your workhour budget for the next year, you had to use the hours of the previous year. This has changed since the 1980's and early 1990's, but the number of hours wasted-to-keep-them each year was mindboggling. Any hour that was saved between October 1st to July 31st was simply wasted in August and September each year. Overtime was brought in during the week and in mass on Saturdays until they were all used. August was a demotivating month for anyone that was fiscally conservative and worked hard only to see it all squandered.

The supervisors were rewarded with double step increases yearly and usually hit top scale in five to seven years. Everyone quickly advanced in pay, regardless of performance. Now, under a pay for performance plan, it has been reduced to being in the right place at the right time. No one makes it to the top fast, if at all, without direct help from their superiors. As of 2020, I have been in management full time since 1993, 27 years, and I am only approaching the mid-level pay for a level 18 postmaster. I couldn't work long enough, or even live long enough, to

reach the top scale. The current system is designed to keep everyone in the lowest pay scale possible while dangling a “bonus” in front of them all year they know is likely to be less than three percent. More on this later and how it has harmed the USPS significantly.

Reorganization of 1992

A major disruption in business as usual happened with the reorganization of 1992. Suddenly, the vast experience of many employees was gone, and newer employees were called on to fill expanded duties. Along with the many valuable employees that left, many of the problem individuals left too, providing an opportunity for a new culture. Gone were most of the managers that lived to be at war with union officials. Leaving were also many midlevel management employees. These were the labor relations, human resources, safety, address management, logistics, express mail supervisor, director of mails, etc. Where these were once housed internally in every plant, they were now consolidated at District, Area, or HQ. Eventually many of these district jobs would be abolished, and duties

The loss of so many experienced employees caused great pains for the USPS

given back to lower-level managers to perform and/or consolidated at area or HQ. Many postmasters retired, leaving jobs available for those managers having their jobs abolished.

The safety personnel that could never tell you when or if injury cases were settled had their jobs abolished. The only answer was “the case is in adjudication,” meaning still pending. After 33 years in the USPS, I learned that it wasn’t a case where things were being disputed but rather where it hadn’t been looked

at yet. Nearly every case was ultimately accepted. Labor told me they had won some of the

Nearly all work-related claims are accepted.

contested cases, but I had never heard of one myself until a case I had won in 2018. When injury compensation was involved, it took a long time to get people back to work in any capacity. Too often, they remained on restrictions for the rest of their careers. Injuries have always been a huge operational and financial issue for the USPS.

The manual nature of operations in the 1980’s and 90’s resulted in many injuries. These were the days that full semi-trailers of catalogs (JC Penney and Sears) and sacks

had to be offloaded by hand. This was a laborious task, requiring a lot of heavy lifting for a long period of time. Pallets of magazines also filled a lot of loads.

I was often tasked with sorting pallets to containers or sacks across a conveyor belt on Saturdays and Sundays. A single clerk could dump pallets and sacks over a manual belt and sort them to sacks. Once you added a second clerk to the belt, you now were required to have a mail handler dump. Sorting pallets directly to containers, regardless of how many, was designated as mail handler work. By mere definition of mail handler duties, their right was to basic sortation, and the lines blurred between sorting to racks of sacks or rows of containers.

Alternating Plant Managers

In 1992, I witnessed the arrogance that accompanied many in higher management. The postal service was undergoing reorganization and early outs (retirements). During that time, several wannabee Plant Managers rotated in and out of Duluth.

One of them, Jim F., fit the typical profile of male managers in higher levels. He was about five feet five, a little paunchy, and pompous. I was in my second year of managing as a 204-b when he took temporary control.

He became miffed with me because I kept supervising when he visited the workroom floor. The other part-time supervisor, Ron, simply stood side-by-side with him, both crossing their arms crossed and leaning backwards. He told me directly, “When a superior comes on the floor you stop your job and follow them around.” My response was, “I thought my job was to supervise.” Ron was the master at mimicking the behavior of his boss, knowing it was a sense of flattery and the means of getting him to like him. Yes, kissing ass, brown nosing, etc. were his talents and he

employed it masterfully. The actual work, he knew, meant nothing to most managers.

Jim called a staff meeting in the conference room to discuss operations. During the meeting he suggested we demand a doctor's slip for any absence, even for a single day. I piped in saying that the ELM (Employee Labor Manual) prohibited us from asking for a doctor's slip until it exceeded three days or if the person was on restricted leave. He demanded we do it anyway. The next day, he instructed us that we couldn't do it. Why, because it wasn't contractual!

Another time, Jim F., brought me to the manual letter unit to look at mail he thought was machinable. "Why aren't you running this on the machine?" he asked. We were looking at TV Guides that were open on one end. They were about one-quarter inch thick. Manual distribution was logical as it took just a couple of minutes to throw an entire tray. I told him, "Those won't run because they are too thick and open up." Thinking our conversation was over, I went back to supervising.

Shortly afterwards, a full-time supervisor, Harry, told me that Jim F. told him that he didn't want me to supervise again. If he, Jim F., wanted me to run it, he should have directed me too instead of asking me if it would. If it had been run, it would have caused problems when the machine tried to pick it up to feed to the keyboarder for coding. Once it entered the machine it would have jammed it when they opened while dropping into bins. Every jam shut the entire machine down and idled 16 people while maintenance cleared it. Everything in the system was then dumped into the reject bin for rerunning. Assuming it did run, it would have been a nightmare for individuals in the back who swept the bins. Obviously, Jim had little knowledge of the limitations of the MPLSM. Harry said as soon as Jim moved on, I would be back to supervising and I was.

Another time, this same plant manager held a meeting for all managers to establish his expectations. During the meeting, he suggested that we deny all limited and light duty employees any overtime opportunities. Contractually I knew we could not do this if the work was within their restrictions. I let him know the repercussions of such a policy, but he was not interested in what I had to say. He

maintained his position throughout the meeting, but subsequently withdrew this part of his plan.

Around 2000, we had another interim plant manager, Wendy told me I couldn't leave to visit my dad in the hospital. My sister had found him in bed after he had taken a fall and hit his head. His wife helped him to his bed when he needed to see a doctor. He had been bedridden for weeks without anyone knowing. He incurred a brain injury they had to operate on. Wendy, having heard the story, said I couldn't go. "I'm going," I responded and did.

The following day, I learned she had revoked my computer access to everything except my email. I was fine with it because it lessened my workload. At the time I was the BPI (Breakthrough Productivity Improvement) and MODS (Management Operations Data Systems) coordinator. In her quest to teach me a lesson she had created an issue for herself. Who would do these functions now? It wasn't a regular function of a floor supervisor, just ones I had taken on. Realizing her mistake, she came to me and asked if I would take them back. "Nope, not interested." Two weeks

later, she asked again, and I agreed. All this because I wanted to see my seriously injured dad in the hospital.

The Duluth P&DF saw around six different managers come and go as the interim Plant Manager before Jack was selected as the permanent one. In his first couple of years, he was his best as he was getting his feet under him and left supervisors to run the floor.

In those first years, employees knew they had to deal with their supervisors. This eventually changed as employees who were denied days off by their immediate supervisor went over their head and got it approved. Next, the boss demanded the vacation calendar. Finally, he was meddling in other personal conflicts on the floor that should have been left to the floor supervisor.

The best executive is one who has sense enough to pick good people to do what he wants done, and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it.

Theodore Roosevelt

This problem grew to the point where people got what they wanted from their supervisor or they would say, “Fine, I’ll just take it to Jack, he’ll okay it.” The problem was when

he approved them, he didn't know he had bypassed other requests submitted earlier – a contractual violation. He undermined the floor supervisors and jeopardized operations for his own personal need to flex his authority. Eventually, Jack realized we were being played by some of the employees and stopped this bad practice.

The vacation calendar was used to schedule employee 'Prime-time' picks (vacation guarantees for the year). Employees signed up by seniority, first taking their first guarantee period for up to two weeks. Once every employee took their respective turn, it started over again for the second pick for another week of time. It used to take until May to complete, but I was getting it done by late February. The earlier time benefited less-senior people who often waited months before they got a look. It allowed everyone to book tickets and lodging, as necessary. Once the calendar was completed, it was easy to see what incidental leave employees could take. Employees were happy with the expedited process and ability to pre-plan for their vacations. All Jack did was waste three weeks before giving it back.

One day while Jack visited the floor, he was attempting to make a point about the jobs. I believe I was discussing a labor shortage the day before when he loudly said, “Even a monkey could do these jobs.” The worst thing was that he said it in the vicinity of machine operators. I saw the mail processor shoot me a look of hurt. Everyone sacrificed a lot working afternoons and midnights. The pride people took in his or her work was their motivation for doing a good job, and he had just insulted them. Moreover, it wasn’t inspirational to managers to hear him say, “All postmasters are stupid.” Even so, that was better than making the promise to me for years to get me into the Plant Manager position if I stuck around. In the end, given two opportunities, he didn’t even try and to prove I was stupid, I became a Postmaster. Hell, his parents were once Postmasters.

Jack gave all managers the same raise every year, regardless of performance. One year, I got irritated by it and told him that if we were going to get the same, I could do the same as some of the others. He got enraged and was throwing such a fit the next day that one of the managers called the Postal Inspectors. I should have scheduled a private meeting to discuss it, but my emotions caught me

off-guard. When you become as heavily vested in doing your job as I had, you come to expect a little more than average recognition. Even average would be fine if you gave worse performers less.

Everyone has Significance

When I first entered the Eau Claire plant, I personally introduced myself to every person. I worked hard to remember all the names and call them the same when I saw them again. One woman stopped me and said, “You are the first person who has ever introduced himself to us.” She was visibly happy that I did. Time after time, people complimented me on talking to them and listening to their concerns. Sadly, there had been a lot of manager turnover before I had arrived and not one of them took time to learn about their employees.

A primary rule of leadership is that leaders must get to know their employees personally, yet not let that affect their business decisions. Leaders generally extend their hand and offer their name first in initial meetings. Stating our name up front in a positive, affirmative manner, we are projecting self-worth and giving others an immediate

reason to accept us as someone important to remember. Extending your hand first and giving a firm handshake is a way of showing value to others. Leaders should also offer a warm smile and use direct eye contact to spur interest in communication. If you are sitting down in your office when an employee enters, make sure you move to a posture signifying respect and interest. This means that you are sitting upright, towards the front of your chair, and not distracted by other things. If you are in the middle of something, put it aside and give them your full attention. You're not going to win anyone over if you are lounging back in your chair, feet up on the desk, and doing other things while they are trying to talk to you.

After introducing yourself, become an active listener. Listeners learn talkers do not. This a proven way of drawing people out, giving them value at the same time.

In 1998, the afternoon shift at the Duluth P&DF welcomed a new supervisor on detail assignment from the Duluth REC site. On her first day, she introduced herself to employees and actively listened. Employees were approaching me and saying, "She's really smart." When I told her that the employees liked her and thought she was

smart, she responded, “All I did was listen.” Her warm, open smile, direct eye contact, and active listening skills had quickly won over many.

There is nothing more important to an individual than a feeling of self-worth and value to themselves and others. Seek first to understand, then to be understood.

Forget levels and position when you talk to people.

Everyone is equally important and if they aren't treated that way, they won't feel that way. Employees will talk to each other, and everyone will know the way you treat them.

Everyone in the organization is critical so you cannot afford to isolate anyone.

During my temporary assignment as a delivery supervisor around 2000, the unit was visited by Candy L. from the District. She was checking to see how things were going in the delivery unit. She came up to me and introduced herself, “I'm Candy Why-Are-They-Standing-Over-There.” My first thought was that she had a hell of a name, but then I realized she was looking in the direction of two city carriers who were outside of their case talking. It meant I should walk over there and tell them to get to work, so I

did. The substance of the conversation didn't matter to her, one way or the other. Candy was as cold a group of ex-wives.

As part of the security measures in the Duluth Processing and Distribution Facility (P&DF), we were encouraged to challenge unknown individuals we saw on the floor. One of the mail processors approached Candy and asked her for her I.D. She wasn't showing a visible I.D. and refused to produce one. She was pissed that anyone dared ask her. How dare anyone ask someone of her stature for her I.D.? The sad truth was that many managers, particularly higher-level ones, acted just like her. It wasn't about building relationships, but rather imposing authority.

Sunday Operations

Sundays were my favorite day to work. Most employees were great workers and it was a day of handling mostly standard mail. It was my day to get schedules done and get caught up on paperwork. The schedules were designed to match workhours to the expected volumes.

Unfortunately, Sundays was also a day that some employees took off from bathing. One was a mail handler who stunk to high heaven as he broke down pallets, sorting the bundles to containers. He would cash his paycheck at the bar and proceed to spend everything he had on pull tabs and booze. By the end of the weekend he would be borrowing money from his normal lenders and any new ones he could find.

His odor would literally hover for a good 30 yards around him and left others gagging. He was a good worker, albeit a bit high strung. When he ran the canceler and things made it through, like license plates, he would chuck it in the direction of the person responsible. In his defense, they slammed through the belts and he was lucky not to have his fingered injured.

Employee Recognition

If you reward mediocre work, you get mediocre results. If you reward superior performances, you get superior results. Just as important as rewarding the proper people is rewarding in the proper way.

I have seen some ridiculous recognition programs and methods of handing out awards. The worst case of recognition involved post it notes. Every supervisor received a pad of post it

The perceived possibility of winning is high when the number of awards is also high. Under these circumstances, the average person will do more to achieve.

notes and whenever he or she witnessed good work he or she were to write a short message and post it in their work area. We all laughed when we saw them, thinking how tacky it was. We gave them out, but halfheartedly. People were unimpressed and embarrassed when they received them. In fact, some people said that if they got one posted up in their area they would slow down. What a motivator!

There were a few obvious problems with this program.

One, it was cheesy. Who wants little post-it notes posted for everyone to see? Second, supervisors did not believe in it. Third, even when properly done, it was not motivating to employees, who received them as a joke.

Another program we used was the STOP program developed by Dupont. It involved observing employees work and seeing if they were working safely. Supervisors had to complete a card that outlined what they did wrong, the possible injuries or accidents, and what they should have done. When the supervisor was done with it, they would take it to the worker and discuss the results. This program showed great results with Dupont, but it did not seem to do much for us. Sure, it refocused our attention on safety, but many of us felt that we already addressed safety issues as they occurred. We felt we had enough to do without burdening us with still one more thing. This program would have done much more for us if our manager had explained it in beneficial terms rather than just dropping it on our desks for us to do weekly. He said it was important but did not treat it as important.

I have found the best rewards are those the employee can share with his or her family. For example, gift certificates or movie passes allow the employee to share quality time with the person(s) they really want to. It tells them that their personal well-being is important to the company. Of course, with each award, regardless of size, a letter should be included specifying why they are receiving it. A monetary award is also good because it recognizes how valuable they are to the organization. And when you live paycheck to paycheck like most of us do, it helps to get a little bump. For additional weight, a copy should go into their official personnel folder at work.

I am not fond of the special recognition award being presented to an individual in a group setting as it demotivates many others that feel they have earned the same. I know this feeling by knowing what I did in comparison to others, yet seeing them get the award, and me getting nothing. It was the natural feeling of anyone that worked hard and felt their contributions went unnoticed. It's best to give it in private unless it is for years of service or another award that wouldn't offend the rest of the workforce.

In the years from 2017 to 2020, the Northland District Manager Anthony C. Williams has shown his appreciation by approving up to \$5 for a meal per employee. In 2017, his motivational email included, “As we push to be great, sometimes thank you’s are missed. This is my way of saying thank you for a job well done.”

The funds required you to talk to your employees and determine where you would get your meal. Next, you would make a purchase request via their online procurement system, properly listing three parties in the approval chain and including the justification “*Meal approved by the District Manager as recognition for significant contributions during peak season...*” Then, the General Ledger account code had to be correctly list and the total cost should not exceed \$5 per employee. Finally, once the meal was distributed you had to notify District and complete a completed journal voucher request form to charge the cost to their finance number.

The Highway Contract Routes (HCRs) did not get included in the meal because they were not regular employees. Aren’t their contributions as equally deserving?

This process was tedious and overly time consuming for a mere \$5 per employee. In small offices, it was more of a nuisance and many postmasters simply paid for it out of their own pockets. Similarly, when the cost ran a little more than the \$5 per employee, the postmaster also picked that up. Pretty sad when the manager had to subsidize the token gesture of the District.

The fact was the sheer cost of processing the \$5 per employee was more than the payout. On top of the processing costs, there was the mileage and time it took to get the \$5 meal to each employee who either had a day off or worked in one of the associate offices.

The Ideas Program

After suspension of their ideas program for two years, the USPS introduced their IdeaSmart program. Now, you could submit your idea online. There, people would either add comments or “like it.” The combination of comments, likes, and submitted ideas determined your total points and place on the leaderboard. Many would simply go down the list “liking” each one because that got them points. Yeah, great, well-thought out program.

I gave it a whirl, submitting numerous ideas. As expected, they got likes and comments to varying degrees and I made the leaderboard for a while. To get an automatic review you needed to meet or exceed 100 points. Yes, it was a popularity contest. The ones that didn’t make the 100 points, sat for a period, and seemed to be blanketly declined.

After witnessing its many flaws, I submitted an idea to rectify the problem. “IdeaSmart is nothing but a popularity and comment driven evaluation system with serious shortcomings. Many comments are not adding value to the suggestion but done merely to garnish points. Ideas are

only evaluated if they reach 100 or more supports. Some of the most valuable ideas lack support at first for a variety of reasons (lack of specific knowledge, limited experience, lack of vision, etc.). The truth is, how invested is each person in another's idea on a greater scale. The USPS is dismissing many potentially valuable ideas because they are leaving it to a popularity contest”

Proposed Solution: “If the USPS respected and valued the opinions of their employees, they would give personal consideration to all ideas not just those winning a social experiment. Right now, “it’s not much more than a ‘like’ system of selection. It’s quite insulting to the innovative process and the creative spirits of every person submitting an idea. Show them that you really care for their ideas, big and small, present, and future looking, by having skilled employees evaluate each idea. The problem right now is that people are going to present the same idea and be rewarded for conquering the social contest. What will you tell the original submitter? Likewise, it hurts morale to see ideas that were shot down suddenly come to fruition via the department itself. Their idea or one taken from IdeaSmart, the mine that keeps on giving but not receiving.”

The response was classic.

“We at IdeaSMART understand your concerns, however, we are all professionals. Please always keep your emails professional. The platform was designed to collaborate and share ideas with others. “Currently the IdeaSMART platform is set up to allow all ideas an opportunity to move forward. Please note that all ideas are being reviewed for content regardless of vote count. The idea you are continuing to submit *does not provide an alternative solution for reviewing ideas. “Inappropriate behavior, such as posting an idea numerous times in which the idea was moved to “Requirements Not Met” by an Administrator because the idea did not prove a proposed solution or clearly address opportunities for improvement to the Postal Service, or commentary in which the user is venting, will not be tolerated on the platform. Please ensure that all of your comments are contributing to the submitted idea you are commenting on. All ideas or comments suggesting inappropriate use or inappropriate comments, will not be tolerated and will be removed from the platform. Continuous postings will result in the user being banned from the IdeaSMART platform. Continuous misuse of the platform and or*

posting inappropriate comments or ideas will result in being permanently banned.”

I had posted a revision to the original idea once. To the ‘anonymous’ moderator this was ‘numerous times.’ I responded to the general email.

“For the record, I thought my resubmission clarified what you denied it based upon originally, the faults of the existing problem and the solution, evaluate all ideas. That seems to have been missed in favor of shutting me down. You win, a bad process with good follow-through beats one with a great process and poor follow through. The USPS loses big with the current process until someone with vision realizes it with more than 90% of all ideas hitting the waste basket without any consideration. Suggesting inappropriate behavior for merely restating an idea a little differently due to for being considered unclear is a big disingenuous. By all means, if you need to ban me from this or any other platform for resubmitting what had a clear problem described and an even clearer solution, please do.

It makes me wonder how destructive this process has become if a warning must follow a submission or simple, justified venting of a poor process.

Thanks for understanding that many of us are trying to make a difference and are continually marginalized for doing so.

My arms are up. I surrender. You win, the USPS loses.

One minion of thousands.”

The response I received when attempting to log on was: “You have been banned from this community by a Moderator.”

Naturally, I didn’t get a personal response, and I was banned. The message during my entire career had been to conform to the wishes of higher authorities, no matter how misguided it was. Everything was about conformity. Do what you’re told and leave the thinking to higher ups — I was told that verbatim by the Plant Manager of St. Paul. Lower-level managers were simply the puppets of higher

ups and the hand up your ass working your mouth wasn't yours.

Eight months later I received an email from an Operations Support Specialist in Georgia asking me to vote for her idea on shipping "lives" as I had once submitted an idea on it. I responded by saying that "I was banned by the moderator for suggesting the 'like' program was silly and all valid ideas needed consideration, regardless of its support. I lost belief in it.

She responded, "I have been told that it was "silly" my (sic) several people when I have asked for support. They stated the same reason you said. If the idea is a good one, why are we playing "games"? But I will continue to push my idea, if this is the only way."

Her response made me feel I hadn't run off the rails when I said it was a foolish system. Unfortunately, a snowflake moderator promoting her own version of political correctness felt otherwise. What 'she' felt was a waste of time was the very ire of many employees.

Killing its Managers

As I write this in 2020, I long for the end of my time at the USPS. Managers are being overwhelmed with endless work before them. The tipping point had come.

It all started with the reorganization of 1992 when they eliminated middle managers from the field and consolidated into HQ, areas, and districts. The elimination of positions and ongoing consolidation continues to this day. Well, what's wrong with that you might ask? With every position that was abolished, the remaining skeleton staff picked up more duties. When the timekeeping department was abolished, we picked it up. When local labor went, we picked it up. The same for transportation (logistics), mailing requirements, bulk mailing, injury compensation, accident reporting, budgeting/finance, etc.

Fast forward to 2020 and it has worsened. New programs and reporting piled upon itself as managers learned to prioritize the impossible. There wasn't a living soul now or ever that could do everything demanded of each manager every single day. Things simply had to be set aside so you could deal with the day's crises and mandatory reports.

I feel for the new managers and do everything I can to help them in their development. The strategy of transferring an office in a couple of hours and throwing them to the wolves in the stupid attempt at saving hours was absurd. I felt compelled knowing very well how that felt and how unimaginably stressful and defeating it felt. I couldn't do that to another person or merely ignore his or her situation. It wasn't an opportunity for development unless you did what you could to make it one. Bosses came and went, yet none seemed to understand the brokenness in the way they trained and grew people.

Ironically, as I volunteered my own time to help a new manager, my boss discouraged my help. Why? Did he want her to fail? Did he want to show me my place? Either way, with just three years left, I was keeping my course. I was a runaway train at this point and not turning back for anything. I can see the end and the freedom that it brings. I can sense the silence and see everything clearly. My mind is free and with it I am liberated.

The truth was that I finally saw the way and that course would now be taken by the future managers coming on

board. If we failed them, we didn't benefit the company or them. I knew that I was not above instruction and authority, but my first loyalty was to God and carrying forward his principles. I made mistakes, picked myself up and went on trying to do better. I don't allow myself to forget my errors and that allowed me to empathize with others who fall. We fall together and help each other get up. Together we went forward...

It took me nearly 30 years to surrender my idealism, insecurities, and combativeness to unfairness to realize I wasn't going to change the system. All I could do is to influence the people I did manage. This was enough. If we all did that in our avenues of life, the world would change. And as those that are willing and able to witness, the world needs changing. The wonderful thing is that huge things can come from small acts. A small break in a dam can lead to its complete destruction. Likewise, a small act of kindness can change a person's life. In turn, that person may bring more to their family, and from there it grows. Helping others is truly more fulfilling than helping yourself.

Ridiculous Projections

The USPS generally makes projections highly favorable to itself that never come close to reality. The following are some examples of how they did that.

The United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General (USPS OIG) audited the Postal Service's management of mail processing overtime during fiscal year (FY) 2018. The Postal Service had a goal to reduce mail processing staffing costs by about \$130.5 million, reduce OT workhours by 1.3 million, and reduce penalty OT (double-time) workhours by 93,000 in FY 2018.

Ultimately, mail processing OT costs increased by \$257 million (31%) from FY 2017.

https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/documentlibrary-files/2019/NO-AR-19-005_0.pdf

In FY 2018, processed mail volume declined by five billion pieces (1.65 percent). Total mail processing complements however decreased by about 5,000 career employees and workhours decreased by 4.3 million (about 2.1 percent). Accounting for all factors, overall mail processing staffing costs increased by \$37.4 million (or 0.44 percent), due in

part to the increase in OT, as well as contractual general increases and cost of living adjustments.

The OIG found that the Postal Service did not effectively manage mail processing OT in FY 2018. It planned for total OT costs of about \$732 million, but actually incurred \$1.09 billion, a difference of \$358 million, or 49%.

Moreover, the USPS planned for about 18.5 million OT workhours and 767,000 penalty OT workhours for FY 2018. The actual OT workhours used were 26.7 million (44% over plan) and actual penalty OT workhours were 1.7 million (126% over plan).

The OIG also found that in FY 2018, \$136.6 million of OT was not authorized. This was 3.4 million OT workhours and 13% of total overtime, as compared to 1.1 million OT workhours and seven percent of OT in FY 2017

In FY 2018, there were over 47,000 mail processing OT grievances filed, costing the Postal Service about \$8 million, compared to less than 43,000 in FY 2017, costing \$7.6 million. There was also an employee availability issue with over 13.6 million sick leave hours and 13 million

leave without pay hours in FY 2018, with an average of 5,600 employees unavailable every day.

Machine Throughput Exaggerations

The USPS OIG evaluated the performance and functionality of the Postal Service's High Throughput Package Sorter (HTPS) at Queens, NY, Processing and Distribution (P&DC). Part of the evaluation was to determine whether transportation savings were realized. The Postal Service projected the HTPS would save transportation costs of \$131.1 million for fiscal years (FY) 2018 through 2028 (\$8 million for FY 2018) by eliminating trips between the JFK ISC and other facilities.

The OIG found that the Postal Service only achieved \$269,000 of the projected \$8 million of transportation savings in FY 2018. If those actual figures hold, the USPS will save \$2.959 million over 11 years as opposed to the \$88 million projected. That equates to 3.36% of the projected savings.

Moreover, the OIG found the lower-than-expected throughputs cost the Postal Service about \$2.1 million from

December 2017 through November 2018. Over 11 years that amounts to another loss of \$23.1 million from projections.

In all, the USPS projected \$131.1 million in savings and realized \$22.959 million.

<https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/documentlibrary-files/2018/NO-AR-19-004.pdf>

The Joke they call Training for Managers

The USPS has one of the most archaic training processes for existing managers going into new positions. When I first started supervising mail processing, outgoing operations, I had the benefit of having worked most of the positions on the floor first. This served as a solid foundation for progressing as a supervisor. Two years later when I was promoted to the position (rather than part-time), I was sent to Minneapolis for two weeks of class training.

In 1997, I accepted an assignment (detail) as the Officer-in-Charge (OIC)/Postmaster of Grand Marais. Immediately after transferring (signing over stock, keys, and accountability), I was left to my own devices. I came from mail processing with absolutely no training in customer services. In the Grand Marais office, the PM assisted with sorting mail and running the window (retail counter). Window transactions all required the use of an Integrated Retail Terminal (IRT) that I didn't have experience using. When you did something wrong it beeped. Believe me, there was more beeping in my first day than there was in any construction zone.

The contacts I was given for assistance dismissed me as they didn't know anything about level 18 offices – gee, thanks. The employees, having distrust for managers, were of little assistance. There were three highway contract routes (HCRs) in the office and two of them were problems. The office was disorganized, making everything difficult to locate. Let's just say that a little more training would have gone a long way. I tried to overcome it by doing what I could during a normal 12-hour day and then retreating to my hotel room and studying until I went to sleep.

In 1998, I accepted a detail to the Ely, MN Post Office. The transfer went the same and within a couple hours of being there, I was on my own. This went smoother because the office was in better shape and fully staffed with excellent, experienced workers. A bonus was that the lead clerk was highly respected and knowledgeable. He essentially kept people in line without creating a stir. Thanks to the conditions present and my prior training, this assignment went well.

In 2000, I detailed to delivery operations in Duluth for about six months. Again, little time to transition and left on

my own. Luckily, there were another three supervisors in the area to consult with if needed. At that time, there wasn't a lot to have to learn and everything went smoothly. The main things were getting an accurate count of the mail and getting carriers to commit to a return time. This was challenging at times because there were 18 vacant routes in delivery.

In 2001, I returned to delivery for about six months before downgrading to a level 15 position in Barnum, MN. I was getting divorced and needed day hours for any chance of visitation. The Manager of Post Office Operations was very understanding when she told me that I was no longer of any use to her. Really? She used the previous postmaster for assignments, but I was of no use. Used and discarded like garbage. Sure, the previous guy was in the reserves and like her husband, the Postmaster of Duluth, she didn't care what performance they had as employees. They might not have created the initial good boys club, but they certainly kept it alive and well. Some people could do no wrong no matter what they did while others that performed well and ethically were treated like crap.

Fast forward to 2019, when I accepted a detail as Postmaster of Eveleth, MN, I was transferred out of my office in Floodwood, MN and into Eveleth in the same day. Because of vacancies in both offices, training time was largely impossible, leaving both of us to figure things out on the fly. I returned to Floodwood the next day to work with him, but any other questions had to be answered by phone or email. I had to learn the new programs associated with city carriers and my replacement had to learn window operations. If he had been just a window clerk, he would have received three weeks of classroom training and three on-the-job. As a manager he received none, other than the little I gave him and that of the existing clerk.

After the transfer, the gentleman was transferred yet again three weeks or so later to a full-time position as a delivery supervisor. His replacement was another newer employee who had no window or distribution experience. Once again, after the transfer and minimal training she was left on her own. It was madness repeated.

The higher-level manager(s) thought he (they) saved money by saving hours. The fact is that every training dollar is returned multiple times over. Likewise, when you fail to

train your manager, you frustrate him or her when they have enough on their plate fitting into their new job. It undermines the relationship between the new manager and the employees counting on him or her. Similarly, customers don't feel especially confident being helped by someone that is overly confused. This shortsighted strategy has existed for decades in the USPS and seems to have no end. All craft employees are trained, but we don't do the same for the managers. Does that make any sense?

Transfers were costly. You paid someone to drive in to facilitate the transfer of accountability and you have both managers there doubling the hours. The office was budgeted for eight hours, and the additional time now put the new manager behind the eight ball to start the new assignment. The USPS had continually chipped away at the work hours so that making the budget required the manager to take at least three weeks of leave and praying that no outside help was needed. To earn any kind of raise, you were expected to cut your hours by at least four percent. Making the budget became harder each year as they removed any possibility of that happening. Your office had a fixed number of hours it had to be open, working postmasters (Level 18) were restricted to 15 hours of

bargaining unit work a week, and vacancies existed. The fact was that they didn't want managers to have any chance at a significant raise.

Strategic Deception

When I was converted to an exempt manager, my extra hours were supposed to be returned, in part, with personal leave. For example, when you started a day and fell ill, you would take personal leave (paid) for the duration of the day. The plant manager at that time interpreted the personal leave as up to four hours with advance approval.

That wasn't true and it certainly wasn't the case in the front offices where managers routinely left early, including the plant manager.

Why the difference? If we left the floor a clerk would have to be given higher level pay to fill in and we would likely be short on staffing. If they left the front office, no one would replace them. If they could leave early any time they wanted when did they work any extra hours? They didn't.

The truth was that you didn't have to work extra hours to get personal leave, you simply got it as needed because you

were exempt and had to take leave in eight-hour increments. Whereas floor supervisors were pressured and restricted from personal leave it was readily available to support personnel.

Thirty years later and we still have restrictions on personal leave yet expected to work whatever hours are necessary to complete our duties. And if we missed anything, we would be called and had to go back to do it or arrange for someone else to do it. And the bonus, the extra time was unpaid. I have been forced to go back to work to run a report saying that I had no bulk mailings that day. It took 35 minutes to drive each way to do two minutes of work to verify something that didn't even occur. Another time was when the door fell loose from the building because the framing rotted out. Yet another time, a courier was dropping off a parcel locker that he didn't come prepared to unload.

The USPS focused on the miniscule, unimportant, and make-work duties for too much time every single day. There was a reason it wasn't keeping pace with competitors and it included meaningless tasks.

Hiring Fiasco

You must spend the time necessary to hire a core group of the best people you can. It will more than pay for itself over the long haul. The best managers will maintain control, service, and productivity at top levels, whereas bad ones will cause the opposite effect. This takes the right employees. Similarly, a person moving from worker to manager must show the characteristics of a valuable employee, such as excellent attendance, good attitude, and good work ethics.

The same policy must be followed for new employees as well. If you hire someone who did not perform well during their probationary period, do not expect them transform into a good worker. In fact, most slackers do their best initially and once they are in, will give you much less effort. And once they have made probation, getting rid of them becomes extremely difficult.

I worked with another supervisor who was soft when it came to hire. I could see we had some bad workers in our new set of hires and told him so. I told him to make sure

we cut them during their probationary period. I noticed he was somewhat tentative, so I offered to terminate them myself when the time came. He assured me he would take care of it. When the time came, he claimed to have misplaced the paperwork and was late in filing. This was his way of saying they were hired. I was not happy. It was not long before he realized what a grave mistake he had made. They were lousy workers, other employees were upset that they were hired, and we were stuck with them. It's one thing to inherit bad employees, but to hire your own is inexcusable.

Making matters worse, one came in with a huge chip on his shoulders. In earlier hiring, his dad failed to pass the proficiency test and let go. He immediately became a union steward and later president, using his position for many of the wrong reasons. He filed many unfounded grievances that did not constitute contractual violations and many that were for miniscule violations (five minutes or less, cease and desist). Rather than work with management to correct perceived violations, he used a substantial amount of union time to investigate and file nuisance grievances. When he did not receive the amount of time he demanded, he alleged unfair labor practices.

Hiring & Promotion of Managers

In 2005, I applied for the Postmaster position in the community next to mine in Barnum. When I didn't get an interview, I asked the chair of the hiring committee, the Cloquet Postmaster, about it. She said they didn't get my application (Form 991). At the same time, they also turned me down for an interview for the Esko post office.

Naturally, she just oversaw the hiring of her good friend, Dodge, for Moose Lake and my application was irrelevant. After arguing that my 991 was submitted, she changed her story to say they used my application for Esko, and it wouldn't have mattered. How did they know the applications were the same? Wow, this was iron clad cynicism. I wrote to the MPOO overseeing the hiring on April 5th, copying the three board members. I addressed the issue by tearing apart the application process.

After reviewing the Review Committee Checklists and the Northland District EAS Applicant Information and PS Form 991 Preparation guide (June 1998) I came across some items that show that a proper review of 991's was not

done. According to Personnel Selection Methods (PSM) (Course 21553-00), page 7, “all applicants can be assured that their qualifications are being judged against published position requirements rather than an evaluator’s opinion of required qualifications.” Nowhere does it mention or suggest the following reasons you used for rejecting my 991:

1. No recent training (I had plenty)
2. No recent special projects and assignments
3. Lack of recent activity (details)
4. The lack of desire for career advancement relative to that of other applicants

Your board defined “recent” as within the last three years. Your suggestion that you determined “desire” by an applicant’s 991 is subjective and impossible to measure by the same. Per the Review Committee Checklist, you were supposed to evaluate the qualifications of each applicant.

Your board had the authority to interview any or all candidates applying and chose not to. Considering my experience, it would seem like the right thing to do before dismissing my 991. I wonder if you weren’t predisposed in

some way to eliminate me from this process. When I attempted to discuss my 991 with [REDACTED], she was very evasive and quick to hang up. I had been completely cordial, but she didn't want to talk to me period. That seemed to speak volumes about my chances of ever getting a fair shake when she behaved in such a manner.

'Recency' PSM, P. 37 states "The value of this consideration will vary with the nature of the position and the KSA." [KSA stands for Knowledge, Skills, and Ability.] This position has not seen a rapid state of change that necessitates recent training in this position. Even if it did, I'm currently in the same position and doing the same duties as expected.

[The Moose Lake office was just being raised from a level 16 position to an 18. As it just met the justification for an increase to a level 18, it meant the workload service credits (WSCs) were not much higher than that of a level 16 position. How more recent could my qualifications be then doing them daily as I was? The winning candidate had been acting as the manager of customer service in Duluth, but his regular position was a delivery supervisor. As a delivery supervisor, he had a couple of rural routes, but the

rest were city carriers. His only experience as a Postmaster was for a short stint in Nashwauk, several years earlier. He had no recent or relevant experience for this position other than he had some rural routes.]

The proper evaluation of KSA's were not done. I adequately addressed each KSA, showing the ability required. Nothing in the Review Committee Checklists and the Northland District EAS Applicant Information and PS Form 991 Preparation guide (June 1998) require that KSA's originate only from your current position, only that they address the stated requirement as my 991 did.

The PSM specifically states on page 33 that "the review committee may not demand more of the KSA than what is appropriate to the position."

Contrary to your claim that I recorded no training since 10/93, page 2 of my 991, specifically references 29, 31, 32, 42 - 46, and 48 are all current. This is in addition to the required training every EAS employee takes each year such as Sexual Harassment, and OSHA. The dates were missing only because they are ongoing, and the Northland District

EAS Applicant Information and PS Form 991 Preparation guide (June 1998) does not require them.

I used some of my KSA's from former years because they were stronger and more extensive than my job currently demands. For example, my KSA on labor involved numerous step 2's I negotiated as Plant Manager. By showing my ability to negotiate at higher levels, I assumed board members would find my ability at lower levels to be adequate. There are far fewer labor issues in the field than you'll find in the plant with the large number of employees, different crafts, and different unions. This is one of the six considerations that the review committee was to use to determine the degree to which each qualified applicant meets the stated KSA. Specifically, item 3, page 37 of the PSM, Complexity of Work would grant extra consideration to KSA's displaying a higher level of ability. Instead, the board used it as an excuse to deny an interview.

Item 1, page 37 of the PSM, Relevance to the Job, "The more the training or experience of the person ties directly to the job, the more likely the applicant is demonstrating the required KSA." What more relevance could there be than holding an identical position?

My KSA for Safety and Health apply directly to my ability to deal with internal emergency procedures and that externally (vehicle accidents). These are universal to any position held as an EAS employee.

My KSA for "Planning and Scheduling of Work" addressed the same by discussing the same regarding HCR's [Highway Contract Routes]. Specifically listed as "Functional Purpose" for both positions it asks in part for supervision of highway contract routes. Each AO [Associate Office] is serviced by an HCR and thus a required, necessary part of operations. Again, I established a greater ability to manage HCRs through former experience, rather than anything I'm currently responsible for now. This should not be a strike but another plus in terms of evaluation.

KSA's alone do not determine the strongest candidates and never will. Again, I assumed experience in the same position and level, as well as former experience would be factored in. Instead, I heard the words "we do not promote for convenience." [Referencing my denial for the Esko position.] You assumed things you couldn't possibly know

from a 991 alone. When I asked Ms. ■■■, how she could suggest convenience, she responded that I lived there. Ms. ■■■ explained how her MPOO had once passed her over for a move closer to home because he or she felt it was for convenience only. She carried that wrong with her and used it herself in my case. A previous bias became her bias and affected the review of my 991.

There is no area on the 991 to explain why or why something isn't convenient as that is not a requirement. "Convenience" is not a valid reason for rejecting a 991. Instead, it should be considered a great plus as the Vacancy Announcement specifically demands.

Regarding "Residency Requirements" Ms. ■■■ said, "If you had put in for a level 18 office, you would've got an interview for sure." We know that's untrue as I didn't receive that level of consideration for the Moose Lake job. This falls under Common Selection Problems (Page 10) of the PSM, item 3, Biases and stereotype affect judgements and item 4, One consideration overly influences judgements. I believe the appearance of "convenience" clouded the ability of at least Ms. ■■■ to weigh my 991 fairly.

Ms. [REDACTED] also said that to be considered that an applicants' office must be in good shape as well. When I asked where she could find this on the application, she said that you can tell. To some extent, by looking at a flash report (volume and workhour summary) or other financial report, but it's a limited perspective. No OPF's were reviewed, no calls were made, and no reports were pulled. This falls under Common Selection Problems (Page 10) of the PSM, item 3, Biases and stereotype affect judgements and item 4, One consideration overly influences judgements.

You failed at any point before your March 31, 2005, letter to suggest you cross-referenced my Moose Lake 991 to my Esko 991. I think this just surfaced as a more justified response than those given prior to this. In fact, your earlier response (March 25) suggested the two missing KSA's as the reason I lost two stars and didn't get an interview. On March 23rd, Ms. [REDACTED] left a message on my answering machine at home at 1448 saying the board discovered that two of my KSA's were missing and that cost me two stars. This was after a collective discussion between the three of you, yet just two days later you suggest you cross referenced this to my Moose Lake 991. Had two pages

been missing from my 991 I would have failed to meet eligibility requirements (PSM, page 34) and it should have been sent back to the personnel office. However, you knew I had viewed the complete 991 when I went to St. Paul to review my OPF. With that knowledge you knew this excuse would never fly. Of course, “eligibility should have been determined before the committee receives the application” (PSM, page 34). Therefore, the error would have originated with personnel, overlooked by you, then you disqualified me from further review, and then I had to question you before the truth was known.

In the event of an incomplete application (PSM, page 35) the application would also be returned to the personnel office and wouldn't be evaluated. The board, however, simply disregarded my 991 without sending it back, calling personnel, or notifying me. If it was missing parts, which it wasn't, they were not allowed to evaluate it at all. The board that originally stated collectively that I was denied because of two missing KSA's, suddenly claimed they cross-referenced my 991 for Esko to another 991 I had put in for Moose Lake.

It's unlikely that you'll find a stronger candidate than one already doing the same position. I also live in Esko and am active there. No other candidate can claim the same.

You are wrong in suggesting you found people with more desire for career advancement. [One resigned to take a position in the private sector and the other was forced into early retirement due to inappropriate conduct. The board injected personal thoughts to justify their lack of sound evaluation practices. In fact, the one that beat me out for Moose Lake, took a downgrade later.]

The applicable PS Form 991 Preparation guide by the Northland District, page 2, specifically answers their own question. "Does this mean that only people with excellent writing skills need apply? Emphatically, NO! What it does mean is that applicants need to clearly explain their qualifications." I did this. My application for a level 18 (Moose Lake) also shows my desire for advancement. [The application was only one of the tools used to determine eligibility and qualifications. By denying other qualified individuals like me from the process, they had shown a personal bias in favor of the chosen candidate. If they had interviewed us, they could have claimed he provided better,

more thorough answers, and what could I have said? They couldn't even muster the neutrality to do that, having already made their decision. They seemed to forget, or not care, that this was a promotion opportunity for each one of us, not a lateral. As such it was supposed to be competitive, not a selection by nefarious means.]

I showed you a career of seeking advancement opportunities, not just one of three years or less. I may show less of that over the last three years, but that is because my role as a non-custodial father limits my range that I can move too. In no way, does that mean I can't seek advancement or gainful opportunities within the local area. You used a limited perspective to derive your candidates for interviews and it failed the process. I don't buy your reasons. I know the candidates selected and their postal history as they are both friends of mine. They are both excellent workers deserving this opportunity, but are not as qualified as I am. You may convince me that their 991's are excellently written, but they lack the qualifications that I showed. Any prosperous, honest business would be seeking the most qualified employee and not the winner of a writing contest. As Ms. [REDACTED] also said, she knows two people who have their 991's done professionally that get an

interview for everything they put in for. She said they weren't competent enough for any EAS position, yet they automatically get an interview because their 991's are nice. This is a travesty. There again, more qualified individuals were passed over for a nicely written 991. Surely, the better candidate should have been deciphered but the limited view of the committee failed the process.

A lot of weight is supposed to go to judging applicants based on past behavior. In my favor I've received a "Letter of Commendation" and a "Special Achievement Award."

I notified all parties of my problems with this process well before the final selection was made, receiving nothing in return but insinuations and a revolving door of excuses. This process was a travesty, hastily done, and without due regard to the applicants' abilities, experience, or knowledge. When we talk about treating others with respect and trust, you failed miserably. I heard many ridiculous excuses for rejection...convenience, performance of office, old training, lack of recent special projects/assignments, weak KSA's, and missing KSA's. I feel cheated and for good reason. In the same position, you would too.

I was once passed over by a craft person because he was the “best suited.” Because he knew more people in the office he was selected. [I argued then what a crock that was because it wasn’t related to any knowledge, skill, or ability. In fact, I argued that knowing people doesn’t make you the best candidate, even the best suited, because you must be able to make business decisions that others may not agree with. If you can’t do that, it doesn’t matter how many people you know, you won’t be effective.] That hurt, but you can’t even make an argument that your selection was the best suited. [They could have made the honest confession that it was based on the board chair’s friendship with the pick. It was the only factor any of them seemed to weigh.]

What did I get for a response from my direct boss?

Nothing. Why would I, she was as bad as they came. [As a white male in my thirties, I had no rights, and they knew it. I could take any line of argument with the EEOC, and the facts wouldn’t matter. I wasn’t part of a protected class, and therefore, the inequities I endured were sad but not actionable. The lack of any recourse empowered the process of discrimination for many of us in the

management ranks. We didn't have to like it. The unscrupulous people in power did what they wanted too and no one could stop it.]

It had become apparent that something else was going on behind the hiring. After the Esko and Moose Lake positions came and went, I wanted to see my Official Personnel File (OPF). I took a day off work and traveled to St. Paul. The lady from personnel who retrieved the folder asked why I wanted to see it. I told her I had been passed over a job without consideration and wanted to know if there was something in my OPF that didn't belong there. When asked what that might be, I said my claim for hearing loss. Her response was, "well, what do you expect." It was a clear inference that any claims would kill any chances of future opportunities. I didn't tell anyone up to this point about the claim because I heard repeatedly through the years that any claim led to blackballing. However, PM [REDACTED] of [REDACTED] brought it up to me shortly before retiring. Clearly, the claim wasn't kept confidential.

In 2002, I had a routine ear appointment to discuss ongoing problems I had hearing with background noise around. The doctor made the diagnosis that it was work-related as the

loss was unusual for a person of my age. Whereas craft employees could wear hearing protection around machinery, as a supervisor, I could not. It was this ongoing noise that the doctor attributed to the loss. Approximately 1% of people of my age at that time (36) had the same high frequency loss. I tried a set of hearing aids, but they wouldn't fit my small ear canals and I didn't try again.

In 2003, I was off for about six months due to an off-the-job injury that led to back surgery. I had a bulging disk they repaired. After I returned to work, I was good for a while, but on January 15, 2004 my back began to hurt badly from dumping sacks of mail. A doctor ascertained I had reinjured my previous disc as well as another one.

Contesting my claim, the MPOO wrote in part, "Employee changed the operation that was efficient to one which is actually more strenuous. Flats came carrier route in tubs from Duluth. Teat (sic) sacks are diverts [Not legible] to carriers —The amount of lifting and dumping should be minimal & should be performed at waist level."

I responded to the erroneous claims of the MPOO. "*The operation that is now in placed is far more efficient and safer than it was. Originally Mr. Pirila had to pull the sack*

from the APC [All Purpose Container in the vestibule], drag it across the workroom floor to the flat case where it had to be lifted to nearly waist level and dumped. With the restricted space there was little space to pull the sack without tripping. All the flat tubs also had to be carried the same distance [and down a step] making fatigue far more likely. The flat case is now located as close as possible to the vestibule and a dumping table was purchased. The dumping table rolls over the one step and allows me to dump the sack directly without pulling it across the floor. It is also lower than stated as I'm one step higher than the table. Prior to the dumping table, the Barnum clerk was dumping mail onto the floor and bending continuously to sort the mail. That was a gravely dangerous situation.

██████████, the clerk in quest already has existing back problems. The other clerk that fills in, ██████████, likewise has existing back problems. The OIC's that have worked there over the last three years will tell [you] that they hated the situation with the breakdown.

The MPOO, ██████████, to my knowledge has not visited the office since the design has changed or the table has been purchased to see the improvement. A simple visit

would prove it. A phone call to a previous OIC would be beneficial as well.

Furthermore, flats do not come carrierized from Duluth in tubs. They are all working flats. Likewise, sacks that come carrierized are rare during the week. Nearly all of them are working flats and parcels and must be dumped. The box section remains at about 160 rented boxes, a figure that has remained steady during Mr. Pirila's time there.

That is significantly more than the "less than 100 boxes" that was written in the narrative [by MPOO ██████████].

It doesn't help that the vestibule is often packed so tight with mail that a person must enter from the front of the building. [Mr. Pirila often had to meet the driver at the office as he could not get everything in the small vestibule.] The office itself is too small to allow the space necessary for spreading mail. Parcels must be carefully stacked to allow room to maneuver carefully. Likewise, carriers are forced to load their vehicles one tub at a time, as a step and limited door width eliminates the possibility of using a hamper. [Carriers had to park their vehicles on a single lane one-way road headed the wrong direction.]

Mr. Pirila was involved in a rollover that has no correlation to this injury. The appointment to see a doctor regarding his back injury was made prior to December 31st, the day of his car accident. Note that it was not January 1st as stated in the narrative [by Ms. ██████████] These are the true facts regarding this injury. Collaterals should be contacted for additional information if needed.”

Now, I had made two claims and kissed my career goodbye. That’s the way it was and continues to be. Keep your mouth shut, conform, do as you’re told, and never have an accident. The MPOO had previously labeled me as a difficult manager and now she had the weapons to make sure I never moved again —and she used them. This was a tough and depressing situation for me, now just 38 years old with a lot of ambition. I was injured, not permanently, and surely not dead. If they couldn’t fire me, why not make the best use of me that they could. I hadn’t given up; they had given up on me. I knew what it meant and was determined to try anyway. The USPS successfully derails any person that has an accident and once you’re blackballed it’s impossible to prove. And even if you could, you better be in the “protected class” as defined by the EEOC or it simply doesn’t matter. The conversations were kept verbal

so no record was available, and God forbid, we couldn't have honesty. I was blackballed but no one would say it, just follow along like dutiful sheep.

I heard the talk frequently when working at the Duluth P&DF. If someone got injured, they weren't to get any opportunities. It was a bad precedence. Yet, it wasn't bad precedence to have lying, cheating supervisors, supervisors that slept on duty, or others that created overtime for their own benefit—for nearly three decades? There were bad supervisors just like there was bad employees. On the same hand, some employees got injured and wanted to get back to full capacity. Should we write them off for the rest of their career because they got injured?

I was passed for the Postmaster positions in Esko and Moose Lake in 2005, the Plant Manager job in 2003, and would again in 2006. Yes, my career path had ended.

When the Customer Services Supervisor, EAS-17, got the position in Moose Lake, he was given an 8% raise. When I downgraded from Supervisor of Distribution Operations to Postmaster, one level, I received a 7% drop in pay, courtesy of the MPOO. She had the option of paying me

the same if it was in the same pay range, which it was. I never heard of anyone else being forced to take a similar cut, especially when I had a stellar performance record. It showed that it paid to be the friend and favorite of the husband-and-wife duo, Duluth PM and MPOO 4. In two strikes of the pen the MPOO sets two individuals with on different career paths. These two started the USPS at the same time (same day in fact to the same position) with me having considerably more management experience (longer and broader). You punished one for lacking the *perceived lack of availability* and rewarded the other for being a phony. All to the tune of a 15% pay disparity. This is the USPS promotional path.

The 15% disparity didn't sit with me well then and still doesn't. I was 36 years old at the time. The difference of 15% resulted in about a \$15,000 year. As both of us were retiring in 20 years, that amounted to \$300,000.

It also changed the amount contributed to our Thrift Savings Plan (TSP). The USPS provided an automatic 1%, met the participant equally for the first 3% contributed, and 0.5% for each additional percent up to five percent. In all, you could say they matched your first 5% of savings. At

\$15,000 more a year, his TSP gained a minimum of \$750 a year in contributions or \$15,000 over the next 20 years. On top of this would be the returns earned on the added contribution.

Lastly, the higher salary gave him a bigger retirement and social security payout for the rest of his life. It's amazing how a personal issue of such pettiness can cost you roughly \$500,000 in lifetime earnings. This is what happens when you build a network of favoritism.

In 2006, I was passed over a second time for the Plant Manager position at the Duluth MN P&DF. The longstanding promise by Plant Manager [REDACTED] was that if I stayed the course in mail processing as supervisor, he would help me get the position.

The first time, maintenance manager [REDACTED] presumably got the position because he was in the fast track program. He knew nothing of mail processing operations. The second time, EAS-15 Postmaster, [REDACTED], got the job. He had left mail processing around 1991 when the only automation was the Mail Processing Bar Code Sorter

(MPBCS). He had no knowledge of how dramatically operations changed since that time. He had no PS Form 991 [application] or experience worthy of the position.

A cursory review of our competing applications easily proved the huge difference in qualifications for this position. He had minimal time as a part-time supervisor at the plant, whereas I had nine years full-time and three part-time. He worked as a mail piece analyst with minimum duties. I had worked on all tours, coordinated several programs, and acted as the Operations Support Specialist and Plant Manager. He had knowledge of operations from 1991, where I had just recently left in 2002. The contrast was stunning, leading several managers to say I should have gotten the position. Maybe, but then again, I didn't hang out and drink with the former plant manager.

The District Manager hired this person, choosing buddies and clones, instead of the most qualified. He got what he deserved, a lower and less efficient operation. His selections reflected his character, and the returning image wasn't flattering.

My application demonstrated my ability to move mail and manage people. Yet, that lost out to politics and favoritism. I knew I was expected to answer like the other parrots in the room, but instead, I answered honestly. The numerous sacrifices on afternoons and midnights for several years, details out of town, ended in nothing but broken promises. With two special achievement awards, a commendation letter, and an excellent track record of productivity, I couldn't understand how I was denied twice for the Plant Manager position.

The promises of the former Plant Manager constituted an Express agreement, meaning "That's what I was promised. [My boss] expressly said to me this is what I'd get." In almost all areas of life, oral agreements are just as good as written agreements. An oral agreement is an expressed agreement. The only problem with oral agreements is proof—the reason [lawyers] always say "get it in writing" is to have proof. [But] either oral or written, if someone was promised something, the person should get it. Source: Alan L. Sklover, New York City attorney. [In the USPS, a verbal promise has proven to be the equivalent of “I will say whatever is needed to prey upon your ambitions to get myself promoted. After that, who are you?”]

Employee Retention

The Postal Service finds their inability to retain non-career employees a mystery. It couldn't be the varying schedule, where they work every day or hardly ever. Any life outside of work is difficult because of the long days, no days off, no schedule, working holidays, etc. Second, could it be that their wages can be found in other jobs that offer better opportunities. Even though they are doing the same job that a new career might be doing, they get paid far less, few benefits, and are often treated poorly by workers and managers alike. Fourth, might it be that they are poorly trained and still expected to be fast and accurate. Fifth, for their hard work they might get laid off or remain a non-career for decades. Sixth, union hawks monitor your every move to see what they might grieve. Non-careers can feel the tension and sense that some feel they are somehow stealing their work. As much as management does to cause noncareer employees to quit, employees that hassle them for being too quick or working too hard are also to blame. Finally, if they become careers their time as a rural carrier associate (RCA), city carrier associate (CCA), or Postal Service Employee (PSE) doesn't count towards their retirement.

How to fix the problem

Even though an office is limited by budgeted hours for training, managers would be wise to use whatever training is necessary to bring a new employee up to speed. You're putting your investment up front, so everyone benefits long-term. It requires a lot of time and money to hire new employees, so it makes sense to train them to the extent needed regardless of the budget.

In 2020, individuals successfully being awarded a job and quitting the job after training continued to trend upwards. They would take the classroom training, normally out-of-town, for seven days to a couple of weeks, work a couple of days on the job, then quit. The USPS would be left holding the tab for mileage, lodging, per diem, and parking. They will also be out the costs of the trainer, training materials, meals/snacks, and room rentals. It was estimated \$4,000 to train a new employee and far too often got nothing in return.

Once they quit, you could go to the next person on the list to take your next bet. If there was no one on the list, you were forced to repost the position again and start over. In one

office that I have managed for over eight years, we have had just two new hires, both lasting short periods of time. In between, the job was repeatedly reposted, usually with no applicants whatsoever.

With no backup on the rolls, the carrier was forced to work his day off every week. Occasionally, he would take time off and I would cover. Never mind that I already had a full-time job to cover.

If the USPS is hiring anyone, they are obviously in need of their help. Why not make them career Part-time Flexibles (PTFs), and eliminate non-careers altogether? If the union agreed to a certain percentage of PTFs instead of non-careers and didn't force their conversion to regulars, it would work. A 10 or 20% workforce of PTFs would be superior to the current non-career one.

There would be no need for annual six-day breaks or layoffs. The six-day mandatory breaks for non-career employees each year was ludicrous. You had to give them the time off, pay for any leave they had, and start them over as new employees six days later. During their break you had to find a way to cover their absence with an already stretched staff.

Next, because PTFs are earning time towards retirement and receiving benefits, the retention would dramatically improve. Everyone is paid similarly, with only differences for seniority. Retention is vital due to the ongoing changes and knowledge needed in each position. One could argue that there aren't similar positions in the private sector for comparative purposes for postal employees. The fact is that they are asked to do far more than scan and deliver packages. Wages and benefits are the key to retention. At the same time, the costs for these benefits are rightly debated during contract negotiations. As each reorganization or dramatic change shows, experience is the key to survival and productive longevity. The value of experience cannot be overstated for the Postal Service and keeping employees long-term is in the best interests of everyone, internally and externally.

Worker Sabotage

One night, when everything was wrapping up nicely, about five trays or 2,500 pieces of letters were taken from the DBCSs and brought to manual. On the DBCS this would have taken two people about four-and-one-half minutes

(34,000 pieces per hour/2500 pieces), but in manual it was estimated to take about 2.8 hours (2500 pieces/900 pieces per hour). This completely changed the outlook and I was forced to ask people to stay for OT. It was late, the other tour was coming in, the bins had all been swept clean, and there was nothing else to do.

The next day, I brought the machine operators into the training room. I let them know I could have run this mail and identified the culprits, but I wanted them to know that their job was to capture as much mail as possible in automation.

I didn't appreciate the stunt that created so many problems at the end of the night. I should have identified the offenders and disciplined them. My intent was to drive home the point that I was not going to let that pass again and everyone better get on board. For a guy that usually was a little shy about speaking I found words flying out of my mouth in anger for a good 20 minutes.

The following days saw some letters being sent to the Plant Manager about my blow up, but all in all, this act did not occur again. Everything rode on our ability to maximize our

productivity while minimizing leakage (mail leaving automation for manual). Leakage led to manual hours and manual hours chewed up time and money.

To control the leakage, gatekeepers were assigned to go through all machine rejects and re-enter them where appropriate. Many were upside down, backwards, or simply rejected when a jam occurred in the machines. They were rerun before being taken by the gatekeeper.

The rejects from the AFCS were largely postcards, bright colored cards, or lacked the proper phosphorescence or stamp required to sort. The canceling machines determined the position of the meter or stamp by its phosphorescence or reflective qualities, respectively. Some businesses also designed their envelopes and postcards with a Facing Identification Mark (FIM). This allowed the machines to know which side and location held the stamp. Customer errors were reported to them for correction. We were going after every piece we could. The gatekeepers were terrific, and we had some of the lowest leakage rates in the country.

Injury Woes

In fiscal year 2018 the USPS reported \$887 million in injury compensation costs for its first quarter. Source: Form 10-Q, Quarterly Report. At that time, the USPS owed \$14.569 billion in workers compensation costs.

The problem was that once someone claimed an on-the-job injury, the post office almost always saw the claim approved by injury compensation. It didn't matter how flimsy an argument, how many different times they filed, or their medical history. Yes, there were many legitimate claims, as well as many unreported injuries that many felt pressured not to report. They didn't want to be "one of those people."

The weaknesses of the injury compensation department led to numerous individuals capitalizing on the system. Injury Compensation officials for the USPS routinely challenge (controversy) the claims but still largely lose. The arbitrators seem more inclined to accept nearly every claim.

This quickly became an epidemic that continues to plague the USPS. In Duluth, we witnessed a microcosm of the

bigger problem. Some employees simply would not return to a capacity of value to the USPS, yet because you carried them on the rolls you could not replace them.

A lady on afternoons mastered the art of making injury compensation claims. She had separate claims for her left wrist, right wrist, back, and shoulders. Carpal tunnel syndrome was the leading claim and perhaps valid, but people generally returned to a working capacity after surgery. She never did. After an individual in maintenance received a cash award for a back injury, she made similar claims. Once the process was disseminated it became a money train for many. Supposedly, she was awarded tens of thousands of dollars for each separate claim. With a handful of others, she would end up working at our nixie/rewrap desk, patching together torn mail pieces and looking up bad addresses. She stayed in this capacity until she desired a transfer, then lo and behold, her restrictions were lifted. She got the transfer.

This same lady came back from a vacation and showed everyone pictures of her parasailing. In another case, she was reported as skiing. They were reported, but neither of these events hurt her claims.

Another lady would hold a can of pop between her hands like a seal and try to open it with her teeth because her hands were supposedly so bad. However, every Sunday she could play piano for her church. The doctor specifically said this was okay. Furthermore, she was a regular wind surfer on Lake Superior. I guess your hands improved a lot when you weren't at work.

Cases like these went on and on. People got on the gravy train and never left it, finding they liked the easy work better than their regular position. The unfortunate problem was that many hard-working people who had legitimate on-the-job injuries wouldn't file a claim because of his or her despise for those bilking the system. They chose to hurt rather than be labeled as one of them. Those forced to make a claim almost always recovered as scheduled and resumed their normal duties. Personal pride and work ethic were the difference. That is not to say that some weren't permanently harmed and couldn't do normal functions again. One woman, let her carpal tunnel go too far, causing her permanent neurological problems. To her credit, she did the best she could with her condition.

Moreover, there were several individuals that were on restrictions that weren't milking the injury compensation system. At one point, my boss asked how I could claim to be shorthanded in some areas when I had people working in other areas. I went through each one explaining the restrictions he or she had. At that time, we had 21 people of about 45 that had restrictions. Yes, they were there but they couldn't help in some areas because of medical restrictions.

On-the-job injury versus off-the-job

An on-the-job injury claim accepted by the Office of Worker's Compensation (OWCP) meant the employee was entitled to limited duty. Limited duty was simply work, generally at the same work site, that accommodated the injury. If there was no available work in his or her permanent workstation, you had to canvass a 50-mile area to find some. If there was none found, you had him or her report to work to train, watch videos, answer phones, etc.

An off-the-job injury was called Light Duty and if there was work for them to do you could accept their request. However, the distinction was that you didn't have to 'make-

work' for them. If there wasn't legitimate work they could do that benefited the USPS, they could be denied. Limited duty required finding something for them to do, even if it were to simply answer phones.

By 2018, light duty requests became harder to deny. In labor's view of the contract, it meant referring it to the committee for Reasonable Accommodation. If, after you did and still denied the request, you had the grievance process to overcome. Regardless of some alleged procedural issues, there was still plenty of merit to argue. However, higher level management had become so eager to settle cases they challenged few.

The lengths the union went to just to undermine their own employers' interests were unimaginable. Sure, they had an obligation to defend their members and non-members, but to do so ethically. In a case I had as Postmaster, the union advised the employee to change her claim of not work-related to work-related after I denied her light duty request. Naturally, they denied it, but the employee insisted several times they told her to change it. In conversation with labor officials, they said it had become common practice. If so, the union had been complicit in making a non-liability into

a liability for the Post Office. Why wasn't the USPS filing a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)?

Thinking of the many times the union president verbally accused me of committing an unfair labor practice by asking him to help on the floor when it was critical, I wondered how he could feel this wasn't an unfair labor practice. It bewildered me how it was an unfair labor practice in his eyes for me to ask him to fill some part of his bid position occasionally. Unfortunately, the Plant Manager and Labor officials had no answer for it and wouldn't stand behind me.

In one case, I involved the heads of Safety, Labor, and Injury Comp at the very beginning. All their guidance was followed to a 'T' in denying the light duty request. When I asked the head of labor if you could discipline him for being off so long, she said, "You need an employee don't you?" 'Yes.' "You can charge her with Unscheduled SLWOP [Sick Leave Without Pay]." This meant he could be progressively disciplined for his absence from work. His absence was placing a heavy burden on our office.

This was a newer trend because in the past we simply waited for them to heal and return to work. The biggest danger of returning someone to work on light duty was that it often led to it becoming work related. In other cases, employees were suspected of injuring themselves off the job, making it to work, and then claiming it as work related. And honestly, doctors write notes for just about anything employees request. In fact, they couldn't define the jobs they were saying the employee could not do. The employee may as well have written their own restrictions and given it to the doctor to sign. There would have been little or no difference.

A year prior to this accident claim, this individual hurt his hamstring at home and was off a couple of months. Before he returned, I checked with the medical unit to see if I could request a fitness for duty. We used to do this all the time when we suspected they were not ready to return and safeguard against the liability of it becoming work related. I was told to accept the medical report provided by his doctor. In fact, he was still being treated for it at the same time as her new injury. Coincidence or causation?

It started as not work-related, became work-related, the claim was denied, and back to not work-related.

Nonetheless, via the grievance process, the step 3 designee for the USPS signed off to remove all discipline and give him back pay to two weeks prior to the first grievance being filed. In all it was about 16 weeks at 20 hours per week at roughly \$23/hour or \$7,360. Even as a healthy PTF clerk without restrictions, she wouldn't have received 20 hours a week, especially since there were seven holidays in that time. Jimmy took the statement of the union steward verbatim and agreed in whole. He sold out and I was determined to find out why.

We talked by phone and emailed back and forth while I tried to get a legitimate reason for his decision. He said I didn't address each duty identified by the union for her light duty request. I knew I had so I asked for a greater explanation. He sent me the step 2 paperwork (I was the step 1 designee) and I saw the union step 2 designee had identified duties she could possibly do by simply putting stars by different duties from the clerk/Postmaster standard operation procedures. I never saw this form and it didn't accompany the light duty request. How could I possibly respond to something I never saw? I informed him of the

same and questioned how they could sneak this in at a later stage. He said it wasn't sneaking it in and was contractually acceptable. How could it be? I had worked with grievances since 1990 and never heard of new information being entered at step 2. It was sneaky, deliberate, and in my eyes, unethical. If you want good labor relations, you don't sneak things in but present them at the proper time with the right people. The time to present it was when the light duty request was made. Either way, he said the actions were procedurally defective.

“Procedurally defective?” What? I followed the contract and department heads advice, had labor review each request for discipline and got their okay, and it was defective? Normally, you never hear from your step 3 or 4 designee. All you got, if you were lucky, was whether you prevailed. This guy had just called me to light me up for going rogue and doing this on my own.

“What are you talking about?” I asked. “I personally contacted each department head (labor, safety, injury comp) and worked with labor initially and throughout.”

“I just spoke to the head of labor and she said she doesn’t know anything about this case. She implied that you must have done this on your own,” he responded.

“That’s a lie and I can prove it,” I said. “I have copies of all the emails that went back and forth between their office and mine.”

“Can you send them to me?” he said.

“Yeah, I will send them.” He said I could send them by regular mail, but I couldn’t wait. I thumbed through the roughly five inches of paperwork I had on this case so far and copied every correspondence with their email or name on it. I highlighted their names and faxed him a total of 40 pages showing the numerous individuals and departments I had consulted with. He thanked me by email and said he would talk to District about it. I doubt he did.

The next day I sent him an email asking, “Did the district get over their collective amnesia?” I got no response. At the same time, none of the hotshots at labor were answering my phone messages or email. They were acting as if they

screwed up, even as one labor official said the step 3 designee had sold all of us out. Whatever the case, it would have been good for them to research the problem and see who was right. Then, accept the facts and move forward. Avoiding all correspondence and communication was unacceptable.

It wasn't until the union sent me an email with attachments that I saw the settlement terms. Hell, he was going to continually be paid 20 hours a week for doing nothing until a new denial was given or he was returned to work. That's incompetence and complacency at work. I immediately began forming a new denial based off the new information and emailed safety for a reasonable accommodation referral. Of course, the employee already said there was nothing I could do to accommodate him, but I needed paper confirmation.

I contacted labor to pursue falsification charges for this employee as he failed to disclose his existing medical conditions on her employment application. They initially wouldn't pursue falsification before the workers compensation was controverted as "it could make it a forever problem." [District Labor Head] What? That

made no sense. If they tried her for medical falsification and proved it, there would be no need for the comp claim. I waited and once the work-related claim was formally denied, I asked they review the falsification aspect and got no response. I tried the OIG, who shuffled it back to me stating that it was an administrative issue that needed to be pursued by the labor department. With the onslaught of new employees in labor, a department head that had convenient memory lapses, bad/incomplete advice, and poor review procedures, I might as well bang my head into a concrete wall. After a few inquiries and several weeks passed, labor got back to me and said I should take the matter to the OIG. I said I already had (and had emailed them the same) and the OIG said it was administrative and a function of labor to address. The labor supervisor said he would talk to the department head.

You would have hoped for a more orderly transition of trained employees in a department that is so critical to operations. As it was, the APWU was winning landmark decision after another, tying the hands of managers even more. Managers had no real chance of making positive changes as they were bogged down heavily with make-work from higher level managers and ever-increasing rules

on how you could use employees. There was a reason every manager had a mental timeclock of how much time they had left, well beyond five years in many cases.

Failure was built in.

I sought the advice of the head of injury compensation before forming a new denial. She was floored with the decision of the step 3 designee Jimmy (yes, real name). She said there should have been no payout of any kind and that he couldn't have looked at the case close. She also agreed that if it were a worker's compensation claim, there could be no payout for light duty as a default to losing the comp case. Jimmy overlooked the fact that it was an injury compensation case and once that was denied, it then became a light duty case. His settlement paid her for all time lost since the initial request for light duty. It came full circle, but the time it took to be denied as a compensation claim was not compensable (or shouldn't have been). Furthermore, I was contractually justified to deny the light duty request based on the submitted documentation and there should have been no payment for that time. More than \$7,000 down the drain and the hours were charged back to my office, even though that time had been covered by other employees already.

The added benefit was that with the settlement, the hours were charged back to my office and my measly raise, if I got any, would be affected. Doing the right thing now only increased your workload and exposed you to the unethical actions and charges of the APWU, but you got gigged financially too. Great system USPS!

This case was a full-blown sellout by Jimmy, the cocky and misinformed step 3 designee. Throughout the years I heard how unpredictable the settlements were at higher steps of the grievance process and particularly by arbitrators. Facts that conveniently got lost in the settlements meant handouts to prevent a possible negative arbitration decision. The arbitrators, like the normal legal system judges, often deviated from the written rules (contract/laws) to form their own opinion of what it really should mean.

It was alarming that Jimmy seemed to be confused about whether this was a light or limited duty case. His demand that I canvas a 50-mile radius for available work was required for limited duty (work-related), not light duty (not work-related). There seemed to be no credence to his requirement that each individual duty claimed to be within

her restrictions be answered individually. He never produced anything in writing nor did Safety or Labor. I was told to take Jimmy at his word because he's been at it so long. Time is no guarantee of facts. Some are rotten from day one, some burnout, and others start to instill their own sense of what's right or wrong. I'm guessing Jimmy was the latter. I took Labor and Safety at their word, and it went bad, why would this be different? Sorry, but history said that questioning was justified. Why couldn't they simply produce the written documentation supporting his claims? I would accept that.

Who was this clown to sell us out without a solid understanding of the case? When a settlement was reached why wasn't it sent back to the originating manager with detailed reasons citing contractual and arbitration sources? Jimmy would respond that the District Labor Head got copies of the decisions. I guess she didn't feel compelled to let me know. Hell, even her own staff claimed not to have it and I had to fax it there on three separate occasions. Seriously, this is how you run a labor department? The designated department that received all settlements and arbitration awards had to ask the field employees to send

copies. I imagine the staff working in close conjunction with one another and yet couldn't share a simple email. Ridiculous. Instead, she assured us of yet another cash award due to the time delays.

When I told Jimmy that Safety didn't agree with the settlement, he replied, "I don't care what Safety thinks. I do more than 1,100 grievances a year." Sure, but how many did he immediately settle without knowing the facts, and how few did he proceed with that won? Anyone could give away the farm, but how many would fight when the merits deserved it? Not Jimmy. His cockiness and unwillingness to work with managers assured the USPS would continue paying out money needlessly.

What irked me the most were the countless hours of work, phone calls, emails, and note-taking that had been wasted. For what, so Jimmy could just toss it? Yes, this is what it feels like when you get sold out. Jimmy only pursued those cases he felt he had a 70% chance or better of winning. The rest of the cases he assured us we lost by settling. I laughed when he sent me a case he had won that he said I should follow. It was dated from 2007 and had nothing different from what had been done. Was 2007 the last time

he won a case? Where was a recent case or at least one from the last decade? Pathetic.

Just over a year later, I received a call from a labor representative apologizing for screwing up on the previous decision. I had followed protocol correctly and had rightly denied her request for light duty. There should have been no settlement, no return to work, etc. Good job Jimmy, you gave away the farm. The worst part is that the district likely followed this settlement and applied it to all outstanding cases, probably resulting in hundreds of thousands of dollars being wasted. The time to have disputed it was when the decision was made, not 14 months later after more damaged was incurred.

The grievance payouts were motivating the union to file endless grievances. If management wanted to deter the free money train, they had to fight them with the most aggressive, talented people. They needed to educate the front-line managers on up with the latest arbitration awards, causes of failures, and the means to building a solid case. Generally, when a case left step 2 you rarely heard anything again until you got a decision, albeit vague in nature. The

underlying reason for failing or succeeding was what managers needed to better prepare.

Every step 3, 4, and arbitration decisions should be copied to every participating person with detailed notes explaining the reasons for the decision. Of course, it didn't work that way, but it would be instrumental in educating the individuals that needed it most, the front line. No one seemed to want to do this, yet lower-level managers continued to follow what they knew repeatedly, only to lose the case. The unions clearly communicated more effectively.

The problem at lower levels of management is that we rely on the contracts and manuals. They are outdated by the time they are printed (after the union and USPS have agreed to terms, or an arbitrator does it for them). Arbitration decisions generally clarify contractual terms, and in others, change them. Without knowing what has changed since the contract was ratified, you are going to lose more cases than you should. Of course, labor and safety are supposed to stay abreast of changes and keep the rest of us informed.

The large turnover of managers in every sector of the Northland District was making us easy pickings for the unions. The deer was barely hit by the car before the union was sitting on its dead carcass pulling its flesh. Labor told me directly that the unions did a better job of communicating with their stewards. Hell, yeah, they did, and they profited immensely from it. When was management going to get on top of the situation and stop the hemorrhaging?

In 2017, the USPS was telling us that we lost more than two billion dollars to unscheduled leave. In 2018, they said they paid out more than \$800 million in injury compensation costs in the first quarter. Over the last decade the USPS has paid out a \$1 billion for contractual violations, many of which were cases that could have been won. The union was kicking their ass, slowly driving them deeper and deeper into debt and long-term problems.

Managers were already strangled with contractual obligations that prevented them from efficiently running their operations. Everything they did was critiqued closely by the union, who capitalized on any error or contractual violation. The union may as well have the motto, “The hell

with doing what the business needed, let's grieve the shit out of them. I'm going to get mine." It seemed to be the ongoing theme. The more money they drained from the USPS the happier they were, caring less and less if the company survived. And what was the USPS doing to stop it, little but giving away the farm. I personally wished the USPS would go private and everyone was hired and kept on merit, not by a test score. If you didn't want to work and make the business better and stronger, you got fired.

Let's dive back into the step 2 segment and see what the union may or may not do.

First, the grievance is supposed to detail facts, not conjecture, personal biases, and unfounded claims.

CORRECTIONS AND/OR ADDITIONS

of the most powerful rights the Union has, to rebut Management's Step 2 denial letter, is through the usage of **corrections or additions** as outlined in the *Collective Bargaining Agreement, (CBA), Article 15.2, Grievance Procedure Step 2(g)*, which states, "*If the Union representative believes that the facts or contentions set forth in the decision are incomplete or inaccurate, such representative should, within ten (10) days of receipt of the Step 2 decision, transmit to the Employer's representative a written statement setting forth corrections or additions deemed necessary by the Union. Any such statement must be included in the file as part of the grievance record in the case. The filing of such corrections or additions shall not affect the time limits for appeal to Step 3 or arbitration*

Tips for the Steward

The most important rule for processing a grievance beyond Step 2 is to file corrections and/or additions when the denial does not accurately reflect the contentions made by the Union or is incomplete.

Corrections and/or additions should be factual, brief, and to the point.

When pointing out inaccuracies in the Step 2 denial, do so by referencing facts. It is difficult to prove something false without facts and evidence.

List all documents shared at Step 2, in the corrections or additions.

The Management official may fail to report facts and arguments raised by the Union representative at the Step 2 Meeting. It is imperative that the steward submit corrections and/or additions to clarify facts, raised by the Union, which were either not mentioned or misstated in the Management's Step 2 Decision Letter.

Remember to include the corrections and/or additions with either the appeal to Step 3, within 15 days, or the direct appeal to arbitration, within 30 days after the Employer's Step 2 decision.

Under the Direct Appeal from Step 2 to arbitration, the corrections and/or additions become the final written record of the grievance prior to the arbitration hearing.

Stewards are encouraged to make copies and use the **Statement of Corrections and/or Additions Form** located on the pages that follow.

Unions running off the rails!

I don't know another organization with as many unions as the USPS. They have the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU), National Association of Letter Carrier (NALC), and the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA). At

the plant I mainly worked with the APWU and Mail Handlers. Within the APWU, there were craft divisions for clerks (manual and machine), maintenance, and electronic technicians (ETs). Every division and position demanded a great division of labor. A clerk couldn't do Mail Handler work and vice versa.

The divisions of work were ridiculous in some cases. For example, a mechanic could do simple machine fixes if a computer wasn't involved, but if it was an Electronics Technician (ET) had to fix it, regardless of the complexity.

When I worked at the Plant, I did my best to learn and keep up with changes in the union contracts, including reading arbitration awards. A contract is viewed as a promise between two parties that are a result of union/management negotiations. Unfortunately, the incremental increase in union concessions ultimately resulted in a stranglehold on operations. Once there, like the USPS, the ability to manage effectively is lost. Making things worse for managers is that higher ups micromanage everything, completely missing the main point — giving goals and letting managers find the way. Drowning managers with

endless reports telling them what they already know, only hinders their effectiveness.

The importance of the contract aside, it is necessary at times to break the contract to serve the customer. The job had to get done and many individuals acted as if time had no consequence and there was no end customer to serve. ‘As long as I get mine’ seemed to be the theme of too many. A union that crippled operations with nuisance grievances, endless investigations, and endless union time sitting in the office doing whatever didn’t serve the customer. When we failed to deliver on our promises all our jobs were at risk. The thinking of the union was the work belonged to them, even if the customer was ultimately dissatisfied. It belonged to them even if some drug their feet in hopes of pushing the work into OT. It was a shame they didn’t recognize the USPS as a business that lived or died by its service. When service was at risk, you must do everything you can to get the job done. After it’s done, you can address the issues.

At the USPS, the union has indoctrinated many workers into believing it’s a “management versus them” war. Management is cheating them by doing “their work” by

whatever means is necessary. It should be “us” working to provide the best delivery and customer service possible. A strong “us” benefits all of “us.” This division is literally destroying the future viability of the USPS, particularly its productivity, effectiveness, and profitability.

The strict division of labor is destructive to efficiency and more importantly, the ability to satisfy the needs of the customer. A labor shortage in one area, without the ability to supplement from another area, led to grievances and paying for the same work twice. Shortages also contributed to overtime, late trucks, and unprocessed mail. Managers and other crafts (maintenance and custodians) should be allowed to help when necessary. In their idle time, mechanics, and electronic technicians (ETs) generally just sat in the shop waiting on their next call. Custodians could let their routine duties slide until all the mail was out, prioritizing serving the customer first. Instead, custodians, ETs, and mechanics were never used to sort mail, and no manager I recall, except for me, on rare occasions. This is what is wrong with unions. They had become too strong and stringent to care first about the customer whose service was key to their employment. They would rather the ship sink than compromise in ways that mattered.

A union that would work with its employer would do more to strengthen itself. A focus on benefits from a position of strategic alliance beats one where you buck every operational decision.

For most of my fourteen years at the Duluth MN P&DF, the mail handler complement was inadequate and required the use of clerks to move mail efficiently. Naturally, this led to numerous grievances. The local animosity between management and the union was predicated by the failure of District to approve the hiring needed to properly staff mail handlers.

The situation presented a monetary award system for the steward who was also the most senior mail handler. When he grieved clerks working in the mail handler craft, he wrote the settlement to award the most senior mail handler, himself. This went on for a long time before another mail handler steward brought the complaint of other mail handlers to the chief steward. Sometime after that, he started to share the treasures for work not actually performed. Even worse, mail handlers could call in sick, force coverage by clerks, and still grieve.

After 32 years of watching the USPS create financial issues for itself with its failure to properly staff facilities, it still goes on. In the mail handler case just mentioned, they were not only paying a clerk to do the mail handler work, they were also paying a mail handler who didn't do it. In effect, they paid for two positions while gaining the work of just one. Genius.

One union stewards' assault on management continued endlessly and it wore on me. All I wanted to do was manage the operation as efficiently as I could without his undermining. Sitting upstairs in the union office doing non-productive work, while everyone else was carrying the load did nothing for me. One day, when things were busy, he took the opportunity to serve me a grievance while I was talking to employees working on the back of the MPLSM, giving me a sneer. After reading it I gave it back to him and said, "You cited no contractual violation of any kind. My kindergartner could write a better grievance with color crayons that would make more sense. You can't submit a

grievance that doesn't cite a contractual violation!" I did not wait for him to say anything and walked away.

Listed right in the shop steward training manual, revised July 2020, the APWU provides tips. They are:

- “The steward should always request a private meeting with the supervisor to discuss issues, grievance, and concerns
- The steward should remember that his/her responsibility to uphold the rights of the member. To accomplish this goal, the law allows the steward to assume the status of an equal when dealing with Management.
- However, the steward should keep a cool head and not become enraged or indignant, and should avoid confrontations on the workroom floor.”

This clerk craft director and now local president always tried to address issues in the public arena, drawing as much attention as he could to himself. Likewise, there wasn't any right to embellish or exaggerate the claims to fit your own personal agenda — another common trait of his.

I was new to managing and I should have handled it more professionally. I let him get to me and I took grievances far too personally. This reaction led to a harassment claim and months of investigation, interviews, and work disruptions. The union first asked for an apology, and I adamantly refused. For what? He was grandstanding and presenting a bullshit attempt at a contract violation.

On it went...the union offered a settlement where I and the other two supervisors would take a human relations course at the local college. I said, hell yeah, and signed off on it. I was into getting out of the office and get paid college credits. The three of us high fived each other and looked forward to some college time.

The next day my boss got a copy of the settlement on his desk. He hauled the union president in and said there was no way this was happening. By the time I got in the following afternoon, there was no college course. Oh well, maybe another time. His unfounded harassment claims officially died, but not before it wasted a lot of time.

This 'intervention' took about six months to resolve and included interviewing numerous employees. For what,

disparaging him face to face on an unfounded, meritless grievance.

A couple of years later, he would file another request for 'intervention' after I gave an official job discussion to a man, who was my friend, for his outbursts. I regularly played basketball with him including 3-on-3 tournaments and saw him at some get togethers. We were friends and I would never have guessed a conversation about his inappropriate behavior would explode out of control.

It went wrong as soon as I got him into private in the supervisor's office. I told him he was getting an Official Job Discussion (OJD) for inappropriate behavior. He got up to leave and I told him to sit down or clock out and go home. He sat down at the farthest desk, chair turned, with his back to me. He pretended not to hear me, overdramatizing his gaze on the ceiling. An OJD cannot be grieved as it isn't considered discipline. It is simply a discussion to inform the employee of his or his inappropriate behavior/action and what it could lead to if not corrected. The supervisor takes personal notes, that will remain only his, and keeps them for a year. Within that year, the manager tells the employee, if you commit a

similar offense, you would be considered for discipline. The date of the OJD would go on any future discipline merely demonstrating the employee was already informed of possible action for similar infractions.

Similarly, it meant you took a separate line of action for different types of conduct. If you got an OJD for attendance, that had no bearing whatsoever on insubordination. For that and other infractions outside of attendance, you would start at ground zero. At one point in time, I had one employee on 10 different OJD's. He loved to create disruptions, and I was trying to stop it. When I told him how many OJDs he had, he said it sounded like harassment. I told him it sounded like someone who liked to create problems.

Yes, you could jump the progressive process of discipline in more egregious and serious cases. They don't happen often, but someone who is having an outburst and won't settle down, must be placed on emergency placement, and sent home immediately. A suspension was usually in order, or it used to be. Even if you got a suspension now, it was a working (full paid) suspension. Employee rights have gotten so strong and management so feeble, that even that

doesn't happen much anymore. The policy is to talk to them, retrain them, give them another chance, another, yet another, etc. until you're both retired and dead.

In the last five years or so, the self-entitlement of many has grown more tiresome. "I want more hours, but I'm not going to clean." "I'm not doing that (even though it's part of the job)." "You're not supposed to touch mail, that's our work (although a manager may fumble through letters to check its quality and proper sortation)." "Do I get two hours? (employee wanting two hours of pay for returning to work to do five minutes of work)." "The former manager and I had a deal (personal deals that fell outside the contract and shouldn't have been agreed to)." "Why can't so and so do that? (employee wanting someone else to do work that is beneath him or her, right is a direct function of their position)."

Yes, for doing the right, equitable thing I was subjected to six more months of union interviewing people, making false accusations, and management reps sitting on their hands. During this circus I heard the union president present three different stories. The person's wife this originated from boarded dogs at home. The union claimed

I had threatened to let the dogs out, then I threatened to kill his dogs, and then some other version. I asked the president, which one it was, but he bumbled his way to some convoluted gibberish.

While this was going on, I was on my own. Management did nothing to ensure a fair process. In the end, it was the employees who ended the charades. They started talking back to the union president, questioning his motives, and saying that Marv only wanted people to work. Even people that didn't like me didn't like what was going on. Nonetheless, it carried on for several months and contributed to a lot of wasted work hours. To some unscrupulous individuals, the time wasted was itself a victory.

Eventually, the employees began seeing how the union handled matters and became upset with their actions. Much of it had to do with less combative managers as well. Many employees began to leave the union, and its power diminished significantly. When I first began working there, in 1988, I would estimate that roughly 90% of the employees were in the union. By 2002, this same building had about 50%. When you serve your own interests and

not that of your organization or members, you are destined for failure.

Employees often became stewards after having their own discipline issues. Others did it to poke holes in management's operations or the belief that union contracts trumped all other needs. I would be remiss to mention that some did it out of the need to serve union members. They were a great service to everyone as they upheld the contract and worked to moderate conflicts.

The other supervisor continued to express his regret for hiring this individual, aware of the many problems that it had caused. Employers should always spend the time and effort needed to hire the right person(s). They must also stand firm on the characteristics they are looking for. Spending time up front is much cheaper than dealing with a problem employee long-term.

The division of labor and the shortages in one craft led to conflicts about whose work was whose. Opposing unions challenged the USPS as to who should be assigned this work. In the 1990's this was lumped under RI-399 Dispute Resolution Procedures. The RI stood for Regional

Instruction. In 2019, following a couple of decades of dispute, the arbitrator finally decided the matter and awarded both the APWU (clerks) and NPMHU (mail handlers) \$14.5 million each. Just like that, \$29 million awarded for work that was already paid for initially.

The Post Office created a monster in allowing their contractual obligations to become overburdensome. The union was handing them their ass award after award. The USPS made it easier and easier for them to win. While the union played hardball, our representatives always sought to settle. The easily won money highly incentivized the unions who could now boast of their endless wins. It also implied that the union was right, and management was trampling the contract. It wasn't true but settling cases you had enough merit to win didn't send the right message.

As a USPS step 3 designee told me, he wouldn't pursue any case that he didn't feel he didn't have a 70% chance or better of winning. This wasn't seven out of 10 cases, but a discretionary 70% of the cases he personally felt he could win. The settlement argument was always presented to managers as a precaution to a poor arbitration decision that

would become precedence. Hell, I thought arbitrators were supposed to be neutral experts of the contract and ruled based on the agreement and intent. There should be no risk other than an arbitrator clearly deciding gray areas of the contract. The step 3 designee was basically settling nearly everything. This surely satisfied the unions who came back time and time again for the next settlement. There was no deterrent. If a case had the most miniscule error, the USPS representative would settle rather than argue it based on the overall merits.

My feeling was that if a case had any chance of success based on its merits, it deserved to go to arbitration if an agreement could not be reached between management and the union rep. It cost the union as much as management to try a case in arbitration and they had just as much to lose. The APWU had so much success winning its grievances that they often looked beyond the step 1 and 2 designees from management. Yes, you were supposed to try to resolve the conflict at the lowest level, but in many cases, the union wouldn't negotiate with managers anymore as they felt confident about their chances in the later stages. And why not, as I was told, they typically settled, and when taken to arbitration the USPS lost 55% of the time.

District labor officials said the Postal Service lost 55% of the cases brought to arbitration so they tended towards settlements. I reminded them they lose 100% of those they don't even argue. The math was becoming clearer, Jimmy was arguing some percentage of the 1,100 grievances he received, and of the 70% he felt worthwhile, he won 45% of them. Say he took one-third of the 1,100 cases or 363 cases which is probably a realistic number. If he won 45% of them, it would be 163 cases. Out of 1,100 cases he won 163 cases and lost 937. Sure, some would have been settled to managements' favor, but very few. He was giving away the farm, largely because he was going for a success rate, much like district attorneys with political ambitions. Pathetic. Even more pathetic was the fact that the reasons for the settlements or arbitration losses/wins never made it back to the ground level. How was this percentage going to change by allowing the same failed process to occur endlessly? Educate the damn people who need it and provide the expert advice you're supposed to provide. The 1,100 could conceivably be cut way down, and those cases going to arbitration could be won at a much higher percentage. It was unbelievable that this was occurring repeatedly, year-after-year, decade-after-decade. Hundreds

of millions of dollars flushed because higher up officials won't communicate with us little minions – the ones the grievances originate from. Brilliant.

When President Lincoln was an attorney, he bolstered his chances of each case by riding horse to his clients and getting the story firsthand. He did what background was necessary. This clown, Jimmy, couldn't pick up a phone and call for any background. He was a sellout and hack.

There was no clear amount disclosed on how much the USPS had paid out for grievances each year. However, if we look at a few known cases, it easily rises to its own crisis.

In 2017, the Western Pennsylvania (WPA) District was reviewed by the Office of Continuous Improvement. They reported, "For the past several years the WPA Building Equipment Mechanics (BEM's) have received Payments in excess of \$1 M for work being subcontracted out when contractually it was determined to be the work of the BEM's. The current Process is to contact the FSO which leads to work being subcontracted out. Scope of work changes is the majority of what causes the grievance

payouts, as well as Subcontracting costs.” The project was led by Michael Bashioum and reported 9/14/2006. Note: FSA refers to Facilities Service Office.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2015, the Arizona District averaged over \$306,000 a month in grievances. Project team: Kerry Conway/Esther Mendoza.

In FY15, the Fort Worth Duty Stations paid out \$284,011 in city carrier OT grievances, and in FY16, \$846,978. Project: 2B OT Payout Reduction, Marvin B. Coleman, 3/30/17.

The success of the unions put the USPS in serious peril. In 2017, the USPS reported they had \$2.1 billion in sick leave usage and were paying out untold amounts in settlements.

In just the first three months of FY19 (October 1 – December 31, 2018), the USPS reported \$889,669,000 in worker compensation expenses. They also had more than \$24 M in workers compensation chargeback. If these numbers continued to stay the course for the rest of the fiscal year, they would exceed \$3.6 B in workers compensations costs alone. Injury costs also included limited duty \$1.647 M, accident costs of \$21.8 M, and

rehabilitation of \$100,000 for this period. Accidents and injuries cost the Postal Service a hefty sum every year.

The fact was that the handcuffs were on, and any changes inevitably led to grievances and disputes. The ability of the USPS to shift gears was slow and clumsy in an ever-fastmoving world. It was always behind its competitors because it lacked flexibility, a fair contract (self-inflicted), and rampant incompetence in management. The sad fact is that many union and management individuals simply think the money train will never end. Continued deficits, losses, and additional contractual obligations almost certainly guarantee a tragic result. Sure, maybe they will get bailed out, but to what end. When and at what cost will the USPS find its way back to profitability in an increasingly technological world. The future is in packages, yet they lack the appropriate means of handling it efficiently.

The bigger point is that the unions and management must find a way to co-exist where true flexibility prevails, corporate changes can occur rapidly, and everyone works together to get things done. Do away with the strict division of labor, monetary settlements for work that has already been performed, and demote incompetent

managers. If a policy or procedure doesn't contribute to the bottom line, throw it out. Simplify everything to every extent possible, allow more decision making at local sites, dump the needless TelCons, endless posters and talks, and concentrate on day-to-day operations with a view of the future. Currently, you are told what to do, think and speak. Decisions are given to you, and you merely carry them out. If you were in management, you were a puppet with numerous higher levels or support personnel working your lips. Conformity, instead of ideas and innovation, was demanded. For managers, the environment is oppressive, the reward is small, and the recognition is reserved for pets. B.S. trumped substantive work.

Bad Step 3 Decision rears Head Again in 2020

After more than a year after the horrible ruling by Jimmy, the USPS step 3 designee, the case is still haunting me. While I took a nine-month assignment to another office, the same individual got new medical restrictions. This meant the District Reasonable Accommodation Committee (DRAC) would review them again. This time, armed with the actual contractual interpretation, DRAC denied the

employee Reasonable Accommodation. He was instructed to follow the contractual procedures for requesting permanent light duty, appeal the decision, and/or file an EEO.

He filed an appeal immediately, as well as the EEO, without requesting permanent light duty as required by the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). This was the first EEO filed against me in my 30 years in managing. For good measure, he copied the appeal to the current state senators and a congressman. This was the standard practice of trying to coerce management to cave to demands. None affected me, having seen these tactics played out time after time. The facts didn't warrant an EEO or grievance.

I presented the denial to the employee on July 22, 2020, when he showed up to work without first getting his mail. His mail had the denial from DRAC and until he was cleared to return to work, he couldn't. The point was that he couldn't work without having a light duty request submitted and approved.

The kneejerk reaction to filing an EEO and grievance without first making a request for light duty was all telling.

The employees' sense of entitlement and the personal feelings of the union president (the same one who failed on two six-month interventions almost 30 years ago) were behind the ensuing charges. You would think 30 years would have been enough to let go of vendetta. Hell, I had, and I was the one who endured his false allegations, misinformation, and horrible abuse of his position. This time I wouldn't just sit back and take it.

In his grievance outline for step 1, the union president presented an absurd argument, absent of fact or substance. When I learned about the outline I submitted my response to the step 2 designee.

Step 1 Denial - Reasons

Ms. [REDACTED] explained that she understood in the DRAC meeting that she was no longer qualified for Reasonable Accommodation (attended by herself and OIC/PM [REDACTED]). It was during this meeting on June 11, 2020 that she made her arguments and was subsequently denied formally by letter dated 7/20/20. Note: PM Marvin Pirila had not yet returned to his position in Floodwood when this meeting was held. Furthermore, he did not make the decision.

Ms. [REDACTED] acknowledges that PM Pirila provided her the letter of denial of continued reasonable accommodation from DRAC on July 22, 2020. She also received a copy in her mailbox that day. Upon receipt of that denial, PM Pirila had no choice but to restrict her from working until a light duty request was submitted and approved, if it was. Those exact details were outlined in the DRAC letter. Without an approved light duty request on file, she cannot work and risk injury. As of this writing on August 6th, 2020 Ms. [REDACTED] has not submitted a request for light duty. This requirement was discussed with local APWU president [REDACTED] on 7/29/20. On 8/3/20 PM Pirila sent an email to both Mr. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], steward, stating that no light duty request had been received. This grievance is moot because it is presented prior to any request for light duty.

The duties she has been performing since the settlement are not relevant. DRAC reviews medical changes/updates as it did for Ms. [REDACTED] latest set of restrictions. They, and only they, decide whether an employee qualifies for Reasonable Accommodation. In this instance, they denied her request. In its step 2 grievance submission dated 7/28/20, the APWU in representation of Ms. [REDACTED], included her most recent medical restrictions from 5/27/20. They were:

Lifting/Carrying: 0-20 pounds intermittent 5 hours/day

No lifting/carrying greater than 20 pounds
Sitting: Intermittent 5 hours/day
Standing: Intermittent 5 hours/day
Walking: Intermittent 5 hours/day
Driving/operating moving equipment; Intermittent 5 hours/day
Climbing Stairs: 5 hours/day NO climbing ladders
Bending: Intermittent 5 hours/day
Kneeling: intermittent 5 hours/day
No stooping, twisting, pushing/pulling, mopping
Simple grasping: intermittent 5 hours/day
Fine manipulation: intermittent 5 hrs/day
Reaching above shoulder: intermittent 5 hrs/day

These restrictions make it clear that Ms. [REDACTED] had knowingly violated them by pulling sacks and pushing empty hampers. They are confusing in that they allow intermittent bending but no stooping. They are equivalent. In any position there is always going to be some twisting to some extent, but her restrictions don't allow for it. The mopping, additionally, is a required part of cleaning.

At step 2, Steward [REDACTED] makes an unfounded accusation of continued harassment and discrimination by Postmaster Pirila without any *prima facie* showing.

The step 1 summary by APWU president [REDACTED], states that "Management made a decision to deny grievant light duty which the union contends is failure to comply with the 2/14/2020 step 3 grievance settlement pertaining to the same issue. Postmaster told her not to report until case is resolved. Union asserts that the only thing that changed is that the postmaster who tried to terminate her employment, came back to the office. In addition, the union asserts that the grievant's restrictions improved and that she has worked in that office since the settlement without any issues. Management isn't looking to accomodate grievant, harassing her and making her life miserable." Again, DRAC reviews any changes/updates to medical restrictions, and determined she no longer qualified for Reasonable Accommodation. The reasons are stated in their letter. Postmaster Pirila followed the CBA in restricting Ms. [REDACTED] from further work until a light duty request was approved if it was. Any claims to final adjudications of cases is *res judicata* and barred from further consideration. Like Steward [REDACTED] claims, President [REDACTED] makes unfounded claims of harassment without any *prima facie* showing.

Marvin Pirila – Postmaster

In addition to the step 1 deviations from reality, he presented a self-serving document regarding a separate, unrelated matter. This was his summary of a day-in-court

(DIC) I held with this employee on July 22, 2020, that he personally attended. This too, was not presented at step 1, nor discussed, nor should it have been as it was not the basis of the grievance. Furthermore, a DIC is simply an investigatory meeting to ascertain facts and is not a violation of the CBA or other policy. I refuted the claims as they were now part of the record.

August 7, 2020

Re: The [REDACTED] statement

After reading Mr. [REDACTED] statement, entered at step 2, it is necessary to correct many of his claims.

Mr. [REDACTED] wrote, "Prior to my arrival, the postmaster provided [REDACTED] a light duty denial letter and told her she was fired."

Neither are true. PM Pirila provided Ms. [REDACTED] with a copy of the letter sent to her by the Northland District Reasonable Accommodation Committee (DRAC). She received it in her home mailbox the same day. This denial required Ms. [REDACTED] to request light duty and until it was submitted and

subsequently approved, if it were, she couldn't work. This is not being fired.

The day-in-court (DIC) that Mr. [REDACTED] was attending at the behest of Ms. [REDACTED] was regarding her claiming additional hours for time she did not work. Mr. [REDACTED] says "He even expected her to remember dates that went back almost a month. I thought it was interesting why he waited so long to ask these questions? He tried to twist her up, but she answered all his questions the same way." The DIC was done July 22nd, 2020 and PM Pirila was referring to a conversation that Ms. surely remembered having with then OIC/PM [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. On July 30th, Ms. [REDACTED] had completed her [REDACTED] workday without working her cleaning hours but recorded them as if she had. OIC/PM [REDACTED] told her that she personally observed her hours those days and she had not worked the cleaning hours she claimed. Ms. [REDACTED] told her that she always took [REDACTED] without writing the actual times she worked them. Additionally, OIC [REDACTED] said that Ms.

██████████ said she claimed those hours for the intermittent cleaning she did between customers for Co-Vid. Ms. Clarke told her she could not claim those hours, yet Ms. Suhonen refused to change her timecard. She took 1.47 hours for cleaning she didn't work. Ms. ██████████ was transferred out of the office on July 2nd and had no opportunity to address it further. PM Pirila did not return to the Floodwood office until July 3rd, notably after the DRAC meeting and the timecard situation.

Mr. ██████████ proceeds to claim that "██████████ resigned her position with the post office shortly after her detail was done in Floodwood. Postmaster claims that his legal department said they could use her statement. I told him that faced the facts, she is not going to testify and that they was fishing. How could one cross examine? I asked him for her phone number but did not receive it. I have requested it in writing because of grievant denial of light duty."

Ms. ██████████ did resign but had a statement of the incident on record. A labor official said that Ms. ██████████ could testify if needed. PM Pirila was advised not to provide her personal

phone number as it was confidential, and similarly not difficult to find online. In fact, Mr. [REDACTED] did talk to her shortly thereafter, but neglected to state the same. The union, having engaged Ms. [REDACTED] into the matter has invited her future testimony, if required.

In Mr. [REDACTED] personal assessment, he added, "It was evident that the postmaster has such a hatred he will do anything to terminate the grievants' employment." Any 'diagnosis and prognosis' is reserved for medical experts, yet Mr. [REDACTED] injects his own diagnosis based on a short investigatory meeting. Mr. [REDACTED], the local APWU president for two decades or so, makes no *prima facie* showing that PM Pirila has hatred for Ms. [REDACTED]. The fact is that even a licensed medical professional wouldn't make one based on such little information. PM Pirila merely asked questions and took notes.

PM Pirila finds it incredulous that Mr. [REDACTED] would claim "the grievant told him that she was never shown on how to submit

her cleaning time. He admitted that he never showed her but asserted that she should have been shown when she was hired.

I expect this was never done and when did the clerks take over the cleaning? It may have been after the lady was hired.”

After 10 years of employment with the USPS, Ms. [REDACTED] routinely demonstrated she had been doing her timecards correctly. Suddenly she was deviating and then it was discovered that she hadn't been working the hours she was claiming (June 29th and 30th, July 9th and 10th). Ms. [REDACTED] stated that Ms. [REDACTED] admitted to not working extra time for the cleaning, because she was taking it for the time she spent cleaning between customers. Ms. [REDACTED] was doing her timecards correctly, showing that she would include any extra time in her work hours (begin tour, out to lunch, in to lunch, end tour). Mr. [REDACTED] speculates that maybe she wasn't present when the clerks took over cleaning. Even if so, she showed she knew to write down all the hours worked. In this case she did but added extra hours to the side to increase her pay. There is

no other explanation for taking time that you didn't work. All this aside, this grievance isn't about a DIC.

Mr. [REDACTED] says, "Management never discussed with her the denial of light duty except for telling her not to report to work. He told us that he interpreted the letter of denial that way and it was out of his hands." PM Pirila let the letter from DRAC speak for itself, as he didn't attend the phone conference or take part in its deliberation. The letter states that "You may appeal this decision with 10 business days ..." It also states that "Even though we have determined there is no reasonable accommodation available under the Rehabilitation Act, this does not limit you from pursuing permanent light duty under the Collective Bargaining Agreement with your station. I encourage you to pursue this option." The decision and appeal procedures are clearly outlined in the DRAC letter. Also, the letter directs her to file for permanent light duty and encouraged her to do so. PM Pirila was simply stating that he could not allow Ms. [REDACTED] to continue working until she had as an approved light

duty request. It was the procedurally correct process that Mr. [REDACTED] asked PM Pirila to circumvent.

His statement continues, "I could not believe the day in court even happen. He was looking to punish the grievant rather than try to assist, correct any issues. He did not have any suggestions on how to submit the hours. He told us that he tried to deny her time on 6/9 and 6/10/20 but was instructed to let the time go through." Mr. [REDACTED] can have his opinion, but the fact is that it was an investigatory meeting is to get Ms. [REDACTED] version of events. Punishment, if any, is only ascertained after the facts are gathered. The fact is that OIC [REDACTED] has just spoken to Ms. [REDACTED] about her timekeeping problem (claiming cleaning hours she didn't work) on June 30th, telling her then how she was supposed to be recording them. There was no point in being redundant in covering the same process again. The point was to get to her reasons. The dates were not 6/9 and 6/10/20. "He confused her but she reiterated that she splits the hours and writes it down the same way she did in Wright, MN" Mr. [REDACTED]

wrote. Mr. [REDACTED] was present and could have asked for greater clarification, but he did not. Ms. [REDACTED] had the same opportunity and did not. The fact, supported by the timecards from Wright, show she didn't do it the same way.

"I requested that he drop the fishing expedition as he is stopping her employment. He told me he was going to review the statement by [REDACTED] and would not commit on anything. Obviously, he is trying anything in his power to terminate her employment." [REDACTED]. PM Pirila is not stopping her employment, but merely following the collective bargaining agreement in the placement of light duty personnel. By reviewing the statement of Ms. [REDACTED], PM Pirila was doing his due diligence to derive a fair and proper resolution. Nothing was said or done by PM Pirila to suggest he is doing anything inappropriate.

Mr. [REDACTED] inflammatory, unfounded accusations are unsupported by facts. PM Pirila remained bound within his ministerial duties, which are granted under Article 3. It

specifically states, “While management has the basic power to “manage” the Postal Service, it must do so in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, contract provisions, arbitration awards, letters of intent and memoranda of understanding.”

The APWU lacks any foundation in asking for a violation of that article to expedite the process or circumvent the established postal procedures. The immediate conclusion to submit a self-serving statement at step 2 before appealing the DRAC decision or requesting light duty under the CBA is a showing of ill will in the negotiating process. There is no legitimate contractual claim in this case as the grievance was filed prior to a request for light duty as specifically stated in the DRAC letter.

Marvin Pirila

The APWU clerk craft director made the same statement “continued harassment and discrimination by Postmaster Pirila...” in his step 2.

I discussed the use of RFI’s by management to counter the unfounded claims of the union with labor and the law

department. The law department acknowledged that management knowingly operated at a distinct advantage in grievance negotiations. Time after time, they allowed their claims, often unfounded, to enter the process without any challenge. This record, often skewed in favor of the unions, was all that could be relied on at later stages. The USPS designee or neutral arbitrator was reliant on the record to make a ruling and if it favored the union, right or wrong, it decided a lot of cases in their favor. These false claims deserved to be challenged, the CBA upheld, and the decisions rendered based on facts not falsehoods.

Despite my arguments to labor and the law department, they remained reluctant to utilize a request for information (RFI) with the union. We constantly got theirs, but we weren't supposed to ask anything of them to substantiate their claims. Tired of staying within the boundaries given managers that led to unfair labor practices by the union, I made a request for information from the local APWU. They shot it down cold, one steward replying by email that "it wasn't contractual" so therefore they wouldn't. He couldn't be more wrong, the CBA is not a one-sided requirement for fair bargaining practices, it went both ways. My RFI followed the union sneaking new charges of

harassment and discrimination in at step 2 without discussing them at step 1. I was asking them to support these charges.

If management refused to answer a RFI, the steward was instructed as follows from the Shop Steward's Training Manual, Revised July 2020, page 109: "If information is denied, either at step 2 or in the investigatory stages of the grievance, it should be documented in the file. Also, note in writing, that the union was denied due process."

So, it is a violation of due process if management doesn't provide answers to an RFI, but meaningless when the union doesn't meet the same threshold? Hypocrisy and untrue. The union bears the same obligations of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, such as bargaining in good faith and answering RFIs, as management does. Both the local president and chief steward refused to answer, so I filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB).

In the 1990's, I heard the repeated threats from the current APWU president that it was an unfair labor practice to limit his union time. My attempts to limit his time was hinged

on his inability to explain what his time was being used for. He always said he was investigating something. When I asked how long that should take, he responded, and I said he should be on the floor after that. Naturally, he then claimed he was investigating other matters as well but wouldn't give specific issues. Unfortunately, higher ups had no balls to hold him to any reasonable period and he rarely worked the floor.

Most grievances fall into the usual categories, OT, scheduling, cross-craft work, etc. and didn't require any investigation other than ascertaining the violated time. Even when I suggested he just write up a settlement, bypassing the normal grievance process, he creatively found ways to demand more time. He was working to file grievances, stay away from real work, and punish his employer for hiring him. He was the kind of guy that gave unions a black eye. And now, he had a mini-him. Twice the trouble for little work. With this local, they spent nearly all their time defending the worst workers. Yes, they had too, but they should have encouraged workers to do their job and follow the same rules applicable to the rest.

For more than two decades, this same union representative decried unfounded claims of harassment, unfair labor practices, and managers wrongly making medical diagnoses. In the last step 2, he again made claims of all three. He also included a self-serving summary of a fact-finding investigation I held with the employee. His comments were nothing more than another failed and unfounded attempt to bring trouble to my front steps. It wasn't enough that he pulled this same stunt twice, unsuccessfully in the 1990's. Some personal hardships are hard to overcome. Someone needed therapy. I know, I can't make a "prognosis and diagnosis", one of his catch phrases, when making accusatory remarks to managers. The fact is that the CBA demands the front-line supervisor make the final decision on limited/light duty offers based on their medical restrictions, even if they weren't medical experts. Yes, you probably would consult with labor and safety first, but the decision was left to the manager.

The Wild West

The Post Office had many difficult individuals to deal with the late 80's and early 90's. Veterans received up to 10

extra points on battery exams and among the rolls were many individuals with real problems.

As an employee I witnessed many acts of misconduct that would go unpunished by supervisors.

The one incident that particularly stuck with me was when a full-time supervisor asked Chuck, a huge guy, to do something. Chuck's response, "Do it yourself or I'll shove that f###king lolly-pop down your f###king throat," chuckling. The supervisor said nothing and walked away as everyone in the area watched. No one deserved to be talked to like that, witness that, or feel uncomfortable while at work. There had to be consequences for such behavior, or it would embolden similar actions.

Percentage of a company's employees that Jack Welch says should be eliminated every year: 10%. Source: Vital Statistics, by Paul Grobman, 2005, p. 42.

The supervisor shrugged his shoulders and walked off. Chuck stood about six feet two and weighed in the high 200's. He was menacing. The supervisor should have told Chuck that he wanted to see him in private right then. In private, he should have told Chuck what behavior was

expected. The seriousness of Chuck's action deserved discipline.

Unfortunately, the supervisor did nothing and it resulted in empowering him even more. He never did anything he didn't want to do. Management desperately needed to establish boundaries, appropriate behavior expectations, and work requirements. Not only did Chuck maintain his bad attitude, but he also negatively affected all the workers around him who witnessed the event and saw nothing come of it.

Unfortunately, these kinds of acts occurred in different degrees at that time. The work environment was very tense with out-of-control employees, nasty supervisors, and union/management angst. The jobs were strictly one craft or another and within specified bid positions.

Each Christmas we hired temporary employees to help with the additional influx of mail. Based on their performance, we hired some of them for work after Christmas. My boss's stepdaughter was hired and turned out to be awful.

She was consistently late or absent and had a bad attitude when she did work. During the post evaluations, I knew I did not want her back and could not recommend her for future career opportunities. Wondering how my boss would feel about it, I approached him and told him that I could not report anything positive about his stepdaughter. I told him he could have another supervisor do it if he wanted, but if left to me, I would not recommend her as a rehire. He paused for a moment then said, “Do what you have to do.” I did.

Christmas was a time when many managers and employees got friends, acquaintances, and family members temporary jobs. If they made the cut after December, they stayed on another six months as a casual (temporary employee). Casuals received six-month appointments and then had to be laid off. This didn't include the Christmas season. We will replace them with new casuals for the next six months. The complement of non-career to career employees never changed during the contract period. We would train them, invest in them, bring them up to speed, then lay them off as the contract mandated. While this group collected unemployment, we would hire the next group to replace them and start the process again.

One Christmas, the Tour II (day shift) supervisor hired all the casuals for Tour III (afternoon). Many were from the Salvation Army where his wife held a higher position.

Within a couple of days, it was obvious that these were not the brightest bulbs and moreover, lacked real ambition. I tried for about half an hour to explain to one what he was to distribute to two separate containers. Two, that was it. If it wasn't for A, it was for B. After he failed to get it, I told the other supervisors I was firing him. One of them said, "I'll show him." He worked with him about an hour and then came back, "fire him."

This was the first time I sat down with anyone and told him I was sorry, but we had to let him go. "You want me to leave right now?" he offered eagerly. I said, "You can finish out the shift if you want," feeling bad. "I can leave right now if you want." "Sure," I responded realizing this is exactly what he wanted. I don't know why he took the job if he wanted to get fired but it seemed apparent that is what he wanted. He left in good spirits and had nothing ill to say.

In one batch of casual hiring, we got a younger, twentysomething girl with a sassy attitude and long nails. I told her she needed to get rid of her nails after observing how they prevented her from doing her job. On top of that she had a rotten attitude. She got mouthy and I terminated her immediately. I walked her to the timeclock, punched her out (the timecard, I know what you were thinking), and walked her out of the building. This was protocol to avoid any later claim of injury.

The next day, I found an email from my boss telling me that I didn't have the authority to fire anyone. I responded, "if I don't have the authority, then I can't run the floor because who will listen?" She had gone to him earlier that day, played him, and he authorized her return. I found her gloating and smiling ear to ear on the workroom floor. I walked over to her, said "you're fired." "Your boss says you don't have the authority," she blasted. "We'll see." I again had her punch out and walked her out. I emailed him and said either I run the floor, or he does. The next day, she went in to see him again and he told her she was fired. That was one of the first times the plant manager took a

damaging position against floor supervisors, but it wouldn't be the last.

One male casual really took the prize for lazy and zany. He was disappearing for long stretches of work and couldn't be found. It turned out that he was returning from lunch and break to take a long dump. Yep, just as it sounds, a number 2. Naturally, it couldn't be done during break because that was his time and he wanted to get paid for it. It was an odd conversation, but I told him he couldn't return from break or lunch and then spend an hour in the bathroom he picked across the building. His work ethic was weak when he was working, and it wasn't long before he had to be let go. Hell, he couldn't afford to work with all the time he enjoyed squatting over a porcelain bowl.

The unfortunate truth was that we also had a regular employee that did the same. Every day he would go to lunch, clock back in, then proceed to take a long dump. You can't make this stuff up.

Jake was a temperamental and confrontational regular mail handler. If a clerk worked any operation he felt he was a mail handler job, he threatened him or her. Additionally, he constantly slammed stuff around, played on the Intercom (that customers could hear), and went AWOL whenever he got the urge. His regular supervisor continually ignored his behavior and pretended it was not going on. This supervisor allowed Jake to go as far as threatening to cut the “fuc###ng ti#s” off one of the women when he discovered her in violation of the contract. She was simply following the supervisors’ orders and Jake should have taken it up with one of them. The supervisor in question just disregarded the complaint and Jake received no discipline or warning of any kind.

One-night Jake got into an argument with a contract driver on the dock. He was very agitated and angry when I asked him what happened. He ranted “that blank, blank, blank...” I interrupted to tell him to settle down, refrain from his ranting/swearing, and tell me what happened. Then, he began to verbally attack me and continued his outburst. I warned him to calm down and he eventually did. The next day I issued him a letter of warning for his disruptive behavior.

Unfortunately, Jake was emboldened by the lazy, manual supervisor on Tour I (midnights). Jake was throwing a fit another night and I warned him to stop it. He wouldn't so I interrupted him, "Jake, I want you to punch out and go home. We'll talk about this more when you return tomorrow." He replied, "Fine," clocked out, and headed for his truck.

The other supervisor heard what was going on and stopped Jake before he left and told him to come back in. When I confronted the other supervisor, he said, "We don't have enough people, so don't be sending any one home." I maintained my position that it shouldn't matter whether we had enough people or not. Essentially, he was telling me and everyone else anything went that if we were short-handed. This was a horrible message, but I had to live with for the night.

The next day, I spoke to my boss about what had been happening. He intervened and spoke to the other supervisor about his handling of the matter. It got better for a time, then I went back to the afternoon shift, and things returned to the way they were.

Jake was a little guy, about five feet six, and lean. He liked to wear tank tops and frequently was seen doing pushups on the floor. He strutted around most nights looking for an argument or confrontation.

Eventually, Jake attempted to run over a couple of supervisors with a large piece of equipment. In fact, if someone had not pushed them out of the way, Jake may have killed them. Jake was finally fired, but not before a serious situation arose first.

I have seen many supervisors avoid certain people because of the way they reacted a previous time. This disparity in treatment is the worst thing a manager can do because it creates a situation where a good worker feels punished for working hard while seeing bad workers rewarded for being insubordinate. It was hard to confront these people, but it was necessary. After a while, it got much easier, especially when taken in the proper context. I had to ask myself, should I allow someone's negative response stop me from taking the right action. What would you do if your child threw his plate of food on the floor every time you asked

him to eat his vegetables? Would you stop asking him to eat and/or pick up his plate for him without consequence? Not if you wanted this behavior to change.

I understood that every action helps or hurts the work environment. Avoidance and neglect lead to more problems than order and structure. Everyone benefits in an environment with clear rules of conduct. Imagine how the world would be without laws and the fear of consequence. There would be anarchy! Even some of the best-intentioned people fall victim to the effects of an uncontrolled workplace. Remember what happened in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina struck. Chaos, blame, hopelessness, frustration, etc. ran rampant.

Appearance over Productivity

I managed an operation where two employees manually sorted parcels that came across a conveyor belt. They worked hard and managed to throw around 550 parcels an hour, on average. The accuracy was perfect, and it always got done timely. This operation was discontinued and instead ran on a mechanized parcel sorter, the Linear

Integrated Parcel Sorts (LIPS), that required a keyboarder and a sweeper. Although the operation still got done on time, productivity fell to 300 pieces per hour and accuracy suffered. Despite this information, the manager refused to return it to the way it was. The reason, the District wanted to see mechanized numbers not manual.

In Incoming (local mail operations), I tracked productivity in manual letters secondary (sorted to carrier by zip code) units and compared it to that of the Multi-Position Letter Sorting Machine (MPLSM). Few holdouts were needed because of the limited number of carriers, so it wasn't surprising that the manual units outperformed the machine. Even the slowest, laziest workers could outperform the best keyboarder on the MPLSM. The largest secondary manual case was for zip code 55811, zone 11. It had 24 total carriers, 22 city routes and two rural. This meant 24 case holdouts, a relatively small number. The MPLSM ran at 50 pieces per minute and led to far more errors. There were also the machine breakdowns that idled the whole crew. Everything was stacked against the mechanization of

incoming secondary letters and there was no conceivable way it could rival the manual sortation.

I went to my boss and showed him the results. I asked him if we could do the volumes manually, which was also far more accurate, but he said no. His reason again – district wanted to see volumes in mechanization. When the choice came between efficiency and playing numbers, we played numbers.

The volume in each operation was causally related to the productivity. If there was a lot of volume, productivity always did better. It helped if people could stay at one job for a while without having to be shifted somewhere else when their work ran out. The fact was that many individuals took their sweet time to sort mail if they knew they would be moved to another area.

The USPS FY2018 Annual Report to Congress boasts of improved Total Factor Productivity and Labor Productivity (TFP), particularly since 2009. The truth is that total factor

productivity has flat lined since 2013 despite increases in labor productivity. Labor productivity has made gains since 2007, except for 2009, but some of that is attributed to reductions in clerks and mail handlers in mail processing operations. Productivity generally increases through increased volumes or less employees. We know it wasn't increased volumes, so the reduction in employees, relative to declining volumes, was enough to sustain labor productivity. The issue that is missed is that while total factor productivity has flattened, the delivery scores have not improved.

For all the talk about creating “Excellent Customer Experiences” the USPS fails to see their best opportunities for improvement. If they wanted to boost on-time delivery scores, they would return canceling equipment to many of the plants they removed during the POSTPlan debacle. For example, Duluth, MN is two hours from the Eagan, MN facility. Since removing the canceling equipment from Duluth, everything is transported to Eagan for processing. Once Eagan processed the local mail, they send it back to Duluth for final processing.

If they canceled it in Duluth, they could separate the local mail, keep it local, and ship the rest to Eagan for further processing. The backflow is minimized, delivery scores are enhanced, and customers have overnight service again. Yes, there won't be the same machine utilization rates, but the mail is handled and done. With the inbound trucks all making it in by 4 p.m. Duluth could cancel it all efficiently and send out mail ready for final sortation in the cities. Customers would be incredibly happy to have local overnight service again. This contributed to the quick fall of First-Class Mail and the displeasure of customers.

The Postal Service cites the saving in maintenance cost as justification for the removal of each machine. Nowhere do they address the loss of revenue from discontinuing overnight (O/N) deliveries, lower delivery standards, and customer dissatisfaction. Even the savings from reduced maintenance is questionable. Time after time they miscalculate their savings, projecting them when losses were actually incurred. They cited the average cost of maintaining a machine, but not the utilization rate of an average machine. Presumably, a machine with lower utilization rates would require less maintenance. Also, what about the staffing of electronic technicians (ETs)? If

staffing provided for downtime, there was no extra cost to basic maintenance, such as cleaning when done during regular hours. Yes, the maintenance figures included the labor costs, but the labor costs remained in many cases even when the machines were gone.

The fact is that First-Class Mail and Marketing Mail provided 58.7 percent of our operating revenue in FY2018. Everything should have been done to slow its decline, so revenues were protected until new streams were developed.

When I proposed this solution to the Northland District Plant Manager, he responded, “Sorry but that is not an option. The mail volume in Duluth does not justify the equipment there. That is why we have consolidated all the outgoing operations for the whole District into the MPLS and St. Paul plants.” The same plants the district manager acknowledged could not get it done. Instead, he headed to the field where the work was getting done to attempt to squeeze one more drop of blood from their veins. As a leader, he should have been addressing the area where they are performing worst and getting them up to speed, not asking others to carry the load for them. The fact was with the consolidation, only MPLS/STP could improve the

situation, because the field had no control over the canceling. Furthermore, any small improvement in the twin cities far outweighed the benefits that could be achieved in the field. They simply had the hours, the budgets, and means to get it done, just couldn't.

Safety Hypocrisy

The Post Office continually stresses safety through endless posters, mandatory service talks, certifications, observations, Telecons, scanner messages, etc. Everyday managers are bombarded with messaging on safety, so much so that it is overwhelming to the receiver. Messages are taken more seriously when apportioned in a more deliberate, reasonable flow. Anytime you mass blast your audience, you lose the message to redundancy. People get bored and feel their time is wasted hearing the same thing repeatedly. Safety must be addressed at the local level and personalized to what's important to him or her.

I personally hated reading service talks because I felt like I was reading to a kindergarten class. Common sense, everyday knowledge sounds condescending when you are addressing adults. Addressing actual safety hazards in the

workplace made sense, as did the core reasons for accidents, but within reason. The messaging went well beyond the absurd.

When it comes to posting safety posters and postings, the sheer volume of wall papering becomes a mere background.

In comparison to road signage where things are symbolized and stated in few words, the USPS drowns individuals with endless volume. Simple and to the point has never been the modus operandi for the P.O. If the Post Office ran the Department of Transportation you would have to stop every few seconds to read a full page of road instructions. It wouldn't work to help you get anywhere in an efficient manner, nor does it work in the workplace.

The hypocrisy lies in the unwillingness of the USPS to address the issues it's responsible for, while demanding perfection from its employees. In my position as Postmaster, we had several issues the district simply ignored when presented. This office has a ramp where mail was staged for pickup by the HCR. The problem was that the small hampers we had to use often wouldn't stay sideways, turned, and followed you down the ramp. If you

weren't careful, it would run into your back. If it missed you, it rolled near the furnace that had a low natural gas line running into it. It had already been hit in the past as witnessed by the kink in it.

The first rule was to call the Facilities Services Service Provider (FSSP), a contracted provider, to report the hazard. FSSP was then tasked with assigning the lessor or other contractor, dependent on the lease, to fix the issue. I reported it as an emergency to be fixed right away, yet the FSSP contact, listed it as urgent and it literally took several weeks before anyone was assigned to fix the natural gas line. When I called again to ask why it hadn't been fixed yet, the person said they didn't consider it an emergency. I told them that if it accidentally got hit, it would leak at the minimum and could blow up. It sounded serious to me.

FSSP categorized problems by level of seriousness. There was "emergency" for things that required immediate attention, "urgent" for the next level, and "non-serious." Their idea of "urgent" and mine didn't have the same meaning. Things labeled as "urgent" often took several months to resolve, if even then. I concluded they were paid

for the number of tasks they kept in the process, because resolving them took so long.

A logical solution to the problem was to build a vestibule (mail holding area) on the flat surface at the top of the ramp where the driver unloaded/loaded mail each day. The district, being made aware of the inherent safety risks, was responsible for approving/disapproving the funds. The district manager made the decision to disapprove the funds. To this day, the risks remain.

Ultimately, I had steel post installed to prevent further damage to the door and wall where the hampers would roll and strike. Another was installed by the furnace to prevent the natural gas line and furnace from being struck. Eventually locking wheels were found and placed on the hampers to prevent rolling. This came at an expense to the office with no guarantee we would ever see the hampers back again once they left. Up to that time, there was the risk the hampers would turn, roll, and possibly strike an employee in the back or pin them. We were aware of the problem and did our best to keep an eye on them.

A Remotely Managed Post Office (RMPO) in Cromwell had ongoing issues for years that never would be resolved. The DOT rebuilt Highway 210 in front of the Post Office, making the road higher than the entrance. It was designed so water would settle between the Post Office and the municipal bar across the street. The ice buildup that resulted caused water to flow into the front of the Post Office. Making things worse was the building was built downhill from the alley in the back. Every time it rained heavily the water would crest the threshold of the back door and flood the workroom floor. This office was repeatedly flooding from both the front and the back. And when the floor flooded, the floor tiles with asbestos in them loosened and/or broke.

I tried everything to get the issue permanently resolved to no avail. FSSP would assign the landlord the responsibility of fixing the tiles and drainage system from the back, but that took weeks at the minimum each time. The system in the back was created by the contractor, son of the landlord. It was simply a drain, stupidly placed above the grade of the cement slab and door threshold. There was nothing

directing the water coming downhill to the drain, which if properly lowered would have helped. The drain led to a holding tank with a sump pump. The sump pump would pump the water down a system of drainage pipes to the front street. If the water was similarly high in the front, this did nothing to get rid of the water but only made it worse in front.

The result of the flooding was a combination of efflorescence and mold on the walls and ceiling. Before FSSP would do anything, the Safety Office had to do a mold assessment, then it was given to FSSP and died there. The Safety Office told me to keep hard copies of all correspondence and attempts to correct the issue to protect myself. They obviously didn't feel like it would be resolved and true to their worries, it never was. The DOT needed to rebuild the road, and the landlord sculpt the land for better drainage.

I tried to order sand berms to block the water, but the orders were never filled. I bought mold removal sprays for removing the mold, and printed instructions for the clerk to remove the efflorescence (white hair growth on the cement). Luckily, I did manage to purchase a dehumidifier

to remove some of the moisture and a fan to help dry things. We moved everything off the floor, including cords, to avoid further disruptions.

Adding further insult to injury is that the additional hours needed to clean up after each flooding weren't in the budget. We ate those extra hours because no outside help would solve the issue.

Finally, four years later the existing mold issues were remediated. The road and landscaping still were the same, but hey, a little movement. Yeah, safety was of the utmost concern.

This is the same FSSP that downgraded an emergency call for a furnace for an office in the dead of winter with temperatures falling below zero. After not getting a response the same day, I called FSSP to see what occurred. The agent had downgraded it because she didn't feel it was an emergency. "This is Minnesota in the middle of winter," I argued, "and temperatures get unbearable without heat. We need the furnace." She wasn't having it, so I asked for her supervisor, who couldn't believe his ears and got it fixed right away. Luckily, he originated from

Minnesota and understood it's a little hard to operate in freezing cold, particularly inside.

I'll never forget the ignorance and lack of empathy from this agent, always wondering how someone so awful was handling calls. It would have been fitting to put her in a freezer for five hours while she took calls, then hearing from her boss that she didn't need heat, it wasn't critical.

My calls through the years to the FSSP made me question whether the foot dragging was intentional and served their agency financially. Things sat in the system for years, bouncing back and forth, between the originator (USPS) and them (FSSP). You can bet they were billing for every correspondence. Why else would there be a lacking impetus to fix the issue? Sometimes they would ask you to allow them to close it out and resubmit it. Why, so they could make it look new? I saw several calls turn into four or more years of waiting.

Bon Voyage Plant, Hello Customer Service

In the fall of 2002, after having my chain jerked by the

MPOO, I was allowed a downgrade to a level 16 Postmaster position in Barnum, MN. There was an opening and if my pay were within the same range, I could be paid the same. However, the MPOO, knowing I was getting a divorce and needed a day job to see my girls, made me take a significant pay cut (7%). I didn't appreciate the big pay cut after 14 years of hard work, mostly in the afternoons, and my child support was set at my higher wage. Then again, what could I do?

Barnum was a little office with a PTF clerk and three rural routes. The clerk was a bit snarky, didn't like many hours, and demanded time off in the fall when it was canning season. The few hours she worked should've hardly limited her canning opportunities.

The office had two full-time and one auxiliary route. All three did an excellent job. Each regular carrier had a sub that would cover days off and Saturdays. One sub was excellent, and the other was terrible. At the outset I consistently reminded Joe that he had to make evaluation time. Evaluation time was the total number of hours a route was determined to take per day based on number of

deliveries, type (residential, business, central box unit, etc.), stops, volume, and miscellaneous duties.

Joe was slow and rarely made the evaluation, but fortunately the other carriers in the office saved enough hours to cover the difference. Joe's office time was the big killer, but he generally only worked Saturdays and couldn't cause significant harm. Nonetheless, his poor performance couldn't be left unchecked.

The USPS conducted two mail counts a year, one in September and another in February. September used to be heavier whereas February was slow. Route times and pay were based on the number of deliveries, stops, delivery types, volume (flats, parcels, letters), number of accountables (items requiring a signature), mail collected, dismounts (leaving vehicle to make deliveries to schools, apartment complexes, hardships, and neighborhood collection box units), safety talks, edit book (delivery addresses, type, names, etc.), stamp orders, case labeling, managing Change of Addresses (COAs), and other duties, such as closing the office on Saturdays.

My first count cost the route one carrier about \$5,000 a year and route two a considerable amount. I always told them, I just count, and it comes out as it will. There was no ill intent and in fact the office lost when they lost. The office lost work hours and it would be harder for carriers to make the office-to-standard goal (actual route time used vs. evaluated time).

Route one carrier did a phenomenal job and said later she had considered quitting when she took a huge pay decrease. Thankfully, she didn't because she was a great person and carrier. When she had a complaint, albeit rare, she would drive up to the house and speak face-to-face with the person. She did it at the first opportunity and resolved the issue. The person-to-person interaction proved far more successful than simple phone contact. There were never complaints from the same source again.

When she received a thank you card or gift from a customer, she immediately grabbed the card she carried and wrote a nice thank you. Her customers appreciated her more than any other carrier I've known. She demonstrated that great customer service came via personal interaction and fast response.

Kayla was the regular on route two and that girl could throw and deliver mail like nobody's business. Where others would've sacrificed some accuracy in being so fast, she didn't. We would tease her about her brakes always being in new condition from lack of use. While city carriers had a minimum standard of 18/8, 18 letters or eight flats a minute, she destroyed that. She was sweet and great working with others. She saved the office enough hours a week to cover the less efficient people.

Rick held down the auxiliary route and for the most part did an excellent job. He could easily deliver his route under evaluated time. Unfortunately, he brought other issues that offset his valued abilities. When Manney's delivery person hung papers across the front of the mailboxes, he would toss them into the ditch. I told him his job was to report it so I could contact them to correct the situation. The inside and front of the mailbox are the domain of the USPS, and when they were used by other organizations it interfered with mail delivery. Nonetheless, it didn't leave a favorable impression for the USPS when its carrier is seen throwing them in the ditch.

When he received a note from a customer he didn't like, he left a nasty one in return. I instructed him to pass these along to me and I would form the proper response. He seemed compelled to retaliate when he felt slighted.

His biggest issue was his obsession with Kayla. It was obvious he was attracted to her, but she wasn't interested. She had a boyfriend and Rick was married. Kayla found Rick building her a deck when she returned from work one day. She didn't ask him to do it and rebuked his interest in her. Afterwards, he tried charging her for his work. He would claim she was a teaser, but she was just a nice, sweet, and sometimes naïve lady.

A lot that transpired between Kayla and Rick, as well as other office gossip, occurred before I took the position of Postmaster. I kept my focus on what happened in the workplace. Outgoing managers usually inform incoming ones of the office dynamics, but ultimately each manager must base his or her decisions on what they find to be true without prejudging. There have been plenty of bad managers I wouldn't have trusted. Judge on actions, not conjecture.

Throwing newspapers and nasty notes to customers were early indicators of the problems Rick presented. He also had a rude temperament at times when interacting with the other workers. I monitored it and intervened as necessary to maintain a pleasant working environment.

Problems propagated on Saturdays when Joe and Rick worked in the office. Luckily, Kayla had weekends off, but the sub, Julie, took some of the crap. After a customer complained that she saw Joe throwing beer cans out of his car on the mail route, I decided to check in on him. Joe's time in the office was unacceptable as was his extended time on the route. What was he doing?

I surprised him one Saturday on the route under the guise of a regular checkup. I stopped him and talked to him for a few minutes. His eyes seemed okay, he talked fine, and glancing around his car I didn't see anything of concern. I wasn't aware of the full line of travel the route took so I stopped in the office first to get a map and PS 4003 (line of travel). I was told by another employee the following Monday that Rick had tipped Joe off that I was going to be looking for him. Why would he do that if nothing were wrong?

The following Saturday I skipped stopping in the office and set out to find Joe directly. I brought a letter of warning (LOW) for 'Failure to Properly Perform the Duties of his Position' to serve him. When I found him, he was well behind schedule, driving slowly and swaying back and forth more than expected. I followed him at a distance until he started up a dead-end road. I pulled my car into the drive, got out, and waited for him.

He pulled up and rolled down his window. His speech was slurred, and he looked scared. I asked him if he had been drinking after opening his cooler in the back seat. The cooler was still holding about four beers. "I've had about four," he said. At that point I asked him to get out of the car. When he was out, I asked him to walk a straight line. He wobbled and stumbled for the few steps he took. He was clearly more drunk than he suggested. He was a larger guy who was known to drink a lot. I suggested he call for a ride, but he insisted he was fine.

I kept the LOW in my pocket because this was far worse and illegal. I gave him the opportunity to explain himself before I considered what action I should take. He said, "If

you look the other way, I will be your best carrier.” With that I took the remaining mail and began delivering.

Despite my objection he drove off in his car. I attempted to call the police but couldn't get any cell service in the area.

It was already late afternoon, and I was having to stop at each mailbox and get out (jump stop) to make the delivery. I was driving a Pontiac Sunfire that had a console between the seats, and it was impossible to deliver mail from the opposite side of the vehicle. I jump stopped about 150 boxes and barely made it to the office in time with the collection mail to make the outbound truck at 6:00 p.m. Believe me, I knew right then and there, what action I would take.

I completed the removal paperwork and served it to Joe. Joe suggested grieving it, but I told him he broke the law and it wouldn't do him much good. In the end, he didn't grieve the action. Rick said that Joe didn't tell his family he had been fired and pretended to go to work each Saturday. He was a nice enough guy, but he needed to get ahold of his drinking. I hoped his termination would be the wakeup call he needed to enter treatment or clean up.

Unfortunately, his drinking didn't stop, and he died a couple of years later in a rollover on a back road in Barnum, allegedly drinking related.

Rick would push the envelope next. I began discovering standard mail for good deliveries in his waste bucket. The waste is reviewed daily by the PM or clerk to make sure good mail isn't accidentally discarded. Having cased and delivered the route myself I recognized an unusual number of discarded pieces for valid deliveries. When I confronted Rick he responded, "they don't want them anyway." I told him mailers paid for their delivery and the customer decided whether to discard them. The fact is that customers could instruct the Direct Mailers Association (DMA) to remove their names from their list and it would've accomplished the task. I hoped our conversation would be the end of it.

Again, I checked the discarded mail and found good mail being discarded. I called the recycling/garbage company and asked if I could browse through our recycling, they had picked up that week. I recovered several more pieces.

Throwing away mail was equivalent to theft, so I opted to terminate him. I bypassed the usual path of progressive discipline and understood the risk of reinstatement. Even so, I felt the egregious act warranted the action. Sure enough, about six months later he was reinstated with full back pay. However, in the six months he was off the dynamics of the office had changed and the individuals he once bullied had unified and strengthened. What he managed to do before he couldn't pull off anymore. After a short stay, he resigned.

Rural Carriers Micromanaged

The best pay for performance plan is currently held by the rural carriers. They get evaluated on time based on mail counts, number of deliveries, miles, number of boxes served, etc. The standard time is derived from the mail counts and route inspection data. The beauty of their pay is that they get this 'evaluated' time, regardless of the time it takes them to do the job. If they are evaluated at eight hours a day and get done in six and a half, they get paid for eight. If it takes them nine hours, they get paid for eight. It incentivizes them to work hard and efficiently.

Rural carriers were left to manage their routes without much oversight until a lot of mail processing facilities closed or downsized greatly during POSTPlan. At that time, they became the second biggest segment of costs behind city carriers. As the post office was losing money hand over fist, they now became the prime target. Even though I had just one rural route, the reporting requirements expanded greatly. Every day, the start, leave for route, return to office, and leave times had to be reported. The previous days times had to be reviewed in one program and then tracked via an excel worksheet. Then, you had to

review the times again in another program and review route details such as excessive backing, acceleration, and deceleration. There were also U-turns and left turns to review and eliminate if possible. Then there were the driver observations, yearly ride along, and monthly observation of work practices. Additionally, there was a rural day file and tracking for route anomalies. If you were lucky, you also covered it again in your weekly Telecon. Well, life used to be good for them.

One of the stupid items District constantly harped on was early start times. No one could start a minute early or they came up on a list requiring an explanation. Early starts used to be allowed at the discretion of the postmaster, but no more. They started at their scheduled start time, which ironically, is set by the postmaster. Unfortunately, with the reduction of hours in remotely managed post offices, they wanted the carriers to start later, and times pushed back. Primarily, this was to avoid grievances because the rural carrier started before the clerk and did some of his or her work.

POStPlan cut the clerk hours, not the carrier hours.

The rural carrier associate, the backup to the regular carrier, is the hardest of all postal positions to fill. Why? First, they must be available to be called at a minute's notice to fill in. They might only get ten days of work a year, but they had to be available at any time. It meant that if they had another job, they had to be able to get out of it to work as the regulars sub. Second, they had to own a vehicle that they could drive from the passenger side. There aren't many vehicles without a console between the front seats, so it isn't easy to find. In many cases it was a cash outlay that would take them a while to pay off. Third, they were expected to complete the route within the evaluated time, a task that is difficult when he or she gets so little time. Fourth, there is little time budgeted for on-hands training so many postmasters rush a new carrier into working the route. Many are overwhelmed and quit. At this point the USPS has already invested a few thousand dollars and has lost it all. Finally, many find out that the job is much harder than they thought. Very few have the dexterity skills to distribute mail efficiently, nor the character to rough it through a long day of delivering, especially when it comes to rain, cold, and snow.

Often, subs quit after just a few months or were encouraged to resign because they couldn't do the job. Once I had two candidates, I thought would be good and had to pick the one that impressed me the most during the interview. My choice was the wrong one, because she was the worst I ever hired. Hours after she left the office she would call, and I would find out that she was about an hour into the route. The regular carrier had to be called in to bail her out. She had no explanation as to where she went or what she was doing for that time. It was bizarre how much time she took to do so little. I had to tell her to resign or be fired as I had run out of options in getting her up to speed. It was obvious that she wasn't cut out for the job. She went from looking like she could be a star to a dazed stoner.

The gentleman I had passed, on the other hand, was hired and was immediately a star. He was a bigger guy who worked as a volunteer firefighter and knew the area well. Most importantly, he had great dexterity skills, quickly saw the route in his head, and easily made evaluated times. It didn't matter what route he did, in what office, he just got it. Great guy and great carrier.

Interviews clearly didn't guarantee the right person for hiring. A good performance at the interview didn't make up for the poor performance you sometimes got from a worker.

On the other hand, the USPS has now gone to hiring the person getting the top score. The top score didn't guarantee they were any better, simply better at taking tests. We now took the top scorer without requiring a simple interview. I was glad it changed now rather than a few years ago, when the only candidate I had for a position came in for an interview. She didn't bother to clean up for the interview and was incredibly foul smelling. After she left the office, the stench held in the air for the day. This was what I got at the interview, so what could I possibly expect when she came in to work? I didn't hire her. Under the new process, this doesn't matter.

Higher-ups Share Some Crazy Wisdom

In 2017, I was at a training conference in Minneapolis that strongly encouraged training employees, so they were ready to take over when managers in the district retired.

The fact was that 50% of managers were expected to retire within the next five years. There were roughly 30 of us in the room and by a show of hands all but two were planning to retire within five years. No one had the intention of staying a day beyond that time. They were worn out and wanted out.

The speakers generated as much enthusiasm as they could for managers to go yet another extra mile, before we were treated to a most interesting speech by the District Manager. He said he saw the district as an upside-down triangle. He depicted it by putting his two thumbs and two index fingers together. He saw all of us at the top of it and him at the bottom, answering our calls and being our support. It was a totally absurd analogy that drew great praise from his fans in the room. The rest of us interpreted this as an egomaniac telling us he was carrying the entire load. The truth was that every manager in the field felt like they were at the focal point of that triangle, being crushed by the unending addition of responsibilities.

I was demonstrating my version of the ‘upside down triangle’ when the course instructor came up behind me and asked me what I was doing. I said I didn’t understand his

analogy and it was easily interpreted another way. She agreed and could only shake her head at his message. Mars was calling for their king back. I don't think we will be seeing that taught in a college course on managing. -----
The 'upside down triangle' originated from the same District Manager that publicly ridiculed a Manager of Post Office Operations (MPOO) in Duluth for his stuttering disability. The postmasters were infuriated from his insensitivity and letters were sent to Headquarters. When HQ said an apology was needed, the District Manager had the offended MPOO email everyone. Yes, he apologized for the District Manager offending him. Classless.

This District Manager was also instructed by HQ to tone down the yelling and general nastiness of the telecons he hosted each day with Plant Managers. Every day, Plant Managers attended a Telecon hosted by the District Manager and Lead Plant Manager. The field called it the 'Daily Beatdown.' It was Districts' opportunity to grill them about everything that went wrong, from the remarkably simple to the worst. It often deteriorated to yelling, threats, and belittlement of Plant Managers in a form of public shaming. Dread is too soft of a word for

attendees. You left thinking everything you did was wrong because that was the only focus. As always, District knew better than their managers in their plants. Under this District Manager, everything was top down. They decided you lived with it.

The district toned it down briefly then returned to their belittling tantrums. I wondered how they thought they really worked in their favor. Hell, Stalin was less controlling.

The meat of Telecons was baseless conformity. You simply provided ‘acceptable and conformed’ responses on what you planned on doing, your targets, etc. God help you if you left the script. I did, because I hadn’t been coached on the proper wording and it prompted a public scolding and follow up phone call for a private scolding. “Maybe you aren’t ready for managing, etc.” They weren’t looking for a manager, but a puppet. No hands were going up my backside to work my mouth.

The problem with this approach is that no one stretched to take chances or try something new. They knew they got their hands slapped and ears blown up by doing anything

more than they were told. The dumb thing was that District had all the figures in front of them but needed someone to read it to them. Heck, they were all canned responses and meaningless.

The acting Plant Manager in Eau Claire, chosen by the Lead Plant Manager of St. Paul, handled it yet another way. Once the Operations Support Specialist (OSS) input the delayed and on-hand volumes she simply went in after him and changed them to something more acceptable. When the expediter recorded trucks leaving late, she just changed them to say otherwise. The District was pleased with her 'results.' They weren't real, but no one cared if it reflected positively. If nothing changes but the manager and the results change dramatically and immediately, Houston, you may have a problem. Even the best manager takes some time to start showing results, particularly when you're powerless to bring in additional equipment and/or personnel. Neither happened here, nor would it, because the district didn't feel it was necessary. Yes, OT was over 16% for a long period of time, mail was being delayed daily, and some equipment was lacking needed upgrades, but they knew best.

On January 31, 2019, the District Manager released a video on workplace civility/uniform policy issue to all employees. This was laughable coming from him as he was the problem. He was the last person who should speak to civility. He was famous for being the originator of incivility via Telecons, phone, and at meetings. He thrived on yelling and bullying from his mighty podium.

This video shared some great lines the District Manager should have taken to heart. “Don’t engage destructive criticism.” “Take responsibility for things we can control.” “We can all contribute to an environment characterized by helpfulness, kindness, and cooperation.” “Acting in a civil fashion goes a long way towards ensuring a pleasant appropriate workplace.” After several years of breeding incivility, he wasn’t exactly the beacon of encouragement he thought he was. No one bought any of it!

Under his administration, everyone was counting their time to retirement. On their first eligible day they were retiring. In 2017, they announced that up to 50% of the managers in the district were eligible to leave within five years and the consensus was that anyone that could go were. I was one of them.

The job beats you up 24/7. When you weren't at work, the work literally piled up, emails overloaded your inbox, and you were getting phone calls. After a day off, you had two days of work. Unfortunately, they put unrealistic time frames for completion on things, forcing you to get them done immediately, no matter how long you had to work to get it done. In fact, some programs were rolled out after they were already due, so we were all late before we even saw it. The sad thing was that most of it was bureaucratic make-work. In many cases, they would uncheck boxes in programs you did the previous year to have you verify and check them again. Unless you did it wrong the first time, it was generally the same. Still, you had to read each item to make sure and re-enter what you already had annually.

We were encouraged to train our employees to smooth the transition as masses retired. Few clerks had the interest after witnessing our treatment and responsibilities. Moreover, how could you train them effectively when their access to needed programs was restrained.

The reports required each day, weekly, month, quarterly, semi-annually, and annually steadily increased. In the early 1990's there were forms to complete, but that number had grown exponentially. At one time, you could remember what you had to do, now you needed pages of lists. Heck, we kept lists just for the daily reporting requirements. Some managers used alarm clocks to remind them to do certain tasks on time. We were trained robots, having specified duties due at exact times, to fill our every moment.

The Paper Reduction Act meant nothing to the USPS, and with the ushering in of the Internet and its many applications, we simply did it both ways — online verification with a paper copy. We kept the same amount of paperwork, and no cost savings were made. In the decades I served as Postmaster, no one ever checked to see if I had retained these required hard copies proving they were never needed. If they were needed, one could or should be able to retrieve it from the server or backup. At the minimum, it would have saved time and costs. The computer application should keep the forms for the mandatory retention period before automatically deleting

them. This beats a person having to manually purge forms after their retention period.

The USPS has an endless, self-defeating cycle of creating needless work that doesn't benefit customer service or its' bottom line. Attention should have been given to employees, customers, and future directions instead of senseless, time-wasting exercises. Online programs were fed by mid and high-level managers who now could micromanage every office. We found out how many people really cherished the power of knowing every little detail. These details were used to beat up managers for things they could do better, not just as information or guidance, but by demands and extra reporting requirements.

Simple words can have devastating effects, depending on the receiver. For example, when I was in the seventh grade my music teacher told me, "You have the worst voice I've ever heard." My self-esteem was low, and I vowed never to sing again and never have.

Constant criticism slowly chips away at a persons' confidence and can break down the strongest of people. I

played basketball from the fourth through the tenth grades and became a good player. After ninth grade, my coach changed and instead of praise, I was relentlessly belittled. I began freezing up and couldn't play to my ability anymore.

This coach would say, "You can get straight A's in school, but you can't even run a simple play!" in front of junior varsity and varsity players. He would order me to the bench, replacing me with a far less skilled player. This was as insulting and demeaning as the words he used to put me down. I stuck it out practice after practice, game after game, for 16 weeks into the season.

We were on a road game, when he lit me up after the game, and I had had enough. I simply could not take it anymore. I told him I quit. "What did you say?" he responded. "I said I quit." He just smirked, pleased with finally breaking me, and walked away. Strangely, this same man nicknamed me "Miracle Marv" and "Marvelous Marv" while I played basketball at an earlier age.

This coach didn't take the time or effort to really learn about me. He didn't know I lacked a support system, had to struggle to find rides to and from practice, and had little

to eat. If you are going to manage a person, learn something about them. In sports, it's about confidence and if you rip that from a player, you have harmed the team. A lot of the other players loved the coach and honored him at pep rallies. To me, he will always be the coach that derailed by basketball dreams in high school for no apparent reason.

Words carry a lot of weight. Once you have spit them out, even in anger or frustration, you cannot take them back. In a fleeting moment, you can undo a lifetime of work. Even if you apologize, some people will still believe you really meant it. If you are on the receiving end, you must be careful not to accept criticism and let yourself feel inadequate in some way. When you internalize things and hold onto them it has the tendency to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. If the criticism is justified, accept responsibility but don't repeatedly beat yourself up over it. Once something is done with there is no value in revisiting it endlessly. That is the surest way of eroding your self-esteem and becoming those things you don't want to be. Unfortunately, in the USPS you don't get enough time to get over anything before getting beat up again.

While working as a manager in delivery, we had 17 open routes that had to be split up (pivoted) among the overtime desired list (OTDL). Later that afternoon, as the carrier was returning after a long day, I received a call that a collection box was left open, and the mail was blowing down the sidewalk.

I asked the first carrier in to retrieve this mail and lock up the box. He told me he was already at 12 hours when the Postmaster stepped into the conversation. “You can’t have him go out and get the mail when he already has 12 hours,” he said. I responded, “Everyone is at 12 hours, and we can’t have mail blowing in the street.” The carrier kept shifting his eyes from the Postmaster to me. “But he has 12 hours,” he repeated. I was already tired and now irritated with this conversation. I looked squarely at the carrier and said, “go get it,” then turned and went back to work. I was thinking that while I am worried about mail blowing around the street the Postmaster was fixated on OT.

When the carrier returned, he told me he was surprised how I had spoken in front of the Postmaster. The Postmaster

was a known hothead, notorious for his tirades. The two managers of customer service normally kept as much information about daily operations from him because of his inability to deal with the situation.

It was true, no one is supposed to work beyond 12 hours, but who would have gotten the mail then. I couldn't just let the mail be unsecured for a minute longer than it already was.

Until then, the only thing I knew about the PM were the stories and jokes he would occasionally share. He would laugh at himself, and others would join, not knowing what he was talking about. I found his stories and jokes incoherent and when I asked other managers, they agreed but played along anyway.

This PM was married to the MPOO, and between them ran everything north of Sandstone, MN, east of Bemidji, as well as a good part of Wisconsin, north of Spooner. They decided a lot of appointments and kissing their asses paid off. The PM was also a reservist and he and his wife chose individuals with military experience above all others,

regardless of ability or skills. Some were valid hires, but others were absurd.

Trust is Hard to Earn, Easy to Lose

Once, my boss jumped all over me because he said I lied about what time I completed an operation. I told him the report must be wrong because I knew when I was done. When maintenance checked the computer, they found the clock on it was wrong. To undermine our relationship even more, my boss never apologized for his error. Instead, he yelled at maintenance for the error.

Infuriated by his error, he again accused me of lying about something else, only to again find out I hadn't. Still no apology.

After several years as a floor supervisor and learning everything I could my boss made me a promise to help me get the plant manager job if I held on. I worked on every tour, managed many different programs, acted as Operations Support and the Plant Manager. Rounding out

my knowledge base, I also acted as a level 18 postmaster twice and delivery supervisor for ten months and a year, respectively. There were little to plant operations that I didn't have firsthand knowledge. I worked 10-12-hour days five days a week, and routinely brought work home. I lived in preparation for a future return that rested on his word.

I could have jumped ship and taken a day job elsewhere, but I passed with the hope of becoming Plant Manager. After all, I had put in the work and showed what I could do. Even if my boss sold me out, I felt I would still be the most qualified person for the job. Stupid me, I still thought that qualifications and ability helped you get the job.

Sadly, the level of complacency, incompetence, and political gamesmanship was breathtaking. These same people got promoted well beyond their capabilities and were inclined to hire the same types to fill lower-level managerial positions. We could see in the early 1990's we were headed to incompetence throughout the ranks. We are there now in 2020 and rational ideas/plans appear even more rarely than before. Higher ups became far more

controlling and anything that happened had to originate from their brilliant think tank.

My timeframe to days hinged on my eldest daughter starting kindergarten. At that point I needed to be working a day job, so I could see her after school. The afternoon shift, from 2 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. wouldn't allow that. I didn't become a dad to be absent. I had two daughters, born in 1995 and 1996, that needed a dad.

The plant was in disarray when I returned from a four month detail assignment as Postmaster of Ely, MN. The lack of discipline and proper supervision brought some of the divisions and problems back that we had worked hard to get rid of. This summer (1998) would be much different than my other returns. My wife had turned cold and was directing me to talk to another supervisor at work about anything personal. "Talk to Darla about that."

Darla was a supervisor from the Remote Encoding Center (REC Site) who detailed to the plant to broaden her work experience. She was the consummate professional, interacted well with everyone, and quickly learned the operations. People especially liked her for her listening

abilities. She was beautiful, charming, and boomed a gorgeous smile. For me, she took her job seriously and was a trusted confidant. As my wife pushed me away and encouraged me to talk to Darla, I did, and we became close. When her detail was over, I was sad to see her go.

In early 1998, something changed at home and my wife pushed me away until she asked for a divorce in 1999. It started after she visited me once in Ely and a cleaning lady told her that when guys start working out of town, it will never change, suggesting divorce was the only way. I took the details to get a day job, so I could be with my wife and daughters at night. She refused to move to either Grand Marais or Ely where I had the possibility of getting the Postmaster position. We could have moved closer to the Duluth area when an opening arose. She knew the circumstances going in, agreed, and then reneged. When I didn't apply for either position, I hurt my chances of additional details and opportunities. The demands of work and home had no happy middle ground.

The MPOO made it clear she wasn't happy that I didn't apply for one of the positions. It made no difference to her

what my life circumstances entailed or why I had to walk away from them. I loved the Ely office and would have loved to stay. The Grand Marais office was okay, and I would have been happy to go for that one as well. My marriage would have been a casualty earlier.

My detail as Postmaster in Grand Marais in 1997 came after a lengthy plea. I believe it was February of that year and I stayed for six months. My only experience to that date was in the plant and my introduction to customer service was brutal. With just two hours training I was left to my own devices.

I started at the window running the IRT (Integrated Retail Terminal - cash machine) and every wrong key led to a ding. Ding, ding, ding was all anyone heard for hours. I was frustrated and the workers had little sympathy for a guy coming in that didn't know very much about the job. The worst thing was the distrust in the office. The former postmaster and clerks had a contentious relationship. They claimed she had stolen money and was shady. One clerk was specifically difficult to deal with as she had distrust for any manager at this point. She would not offer help unless it was requested of her.

I was a person that dug in and did the work. I worked 12hour days and then brought materials back to my hotel room to study until bedtime. The contacts I was given for assistance told me they didn't help level 18 offices and soon I felt completely isolated and alone. I felt the MPOO had sent me there to fall on my face and serve as an example to anyone else trying to escape the plant. On a few occasions I cried on the drive home, planning to tell the MPOO I couldn't do it anymore. Along the way, I talked myself out of it and vowed to stick it out.

Level 18 postmasters are restricted to three hours of clerk work a day and it wasn't long before the clerks brought that to my attention. When I worked longer than that I was cutting their hours, and it was hurting their pay. Working was the best way to learn the job, but we couldn't have that.

I learned the previous acting postmaster measured trays of mail without opening them. In effect, he was taking 24 inches for each sleeved letter tray, whereas I opened them, pushed it together and measured. Often, I was getting three to four inches to his 24. As productivity was determined by hours and volume, my performance looked horrible. The

volume showed a decrease of more than 20 percent by merely measuring correctly.

Second, he was taking the volume, dividing it by the productivity ratio (Pieces Per Hour) the MPOO desired, to come up with the hours he would put in distribution. I took the actual hours and pieces to determine the ratio and it looked much worse. He took the remaining hours and dumped them into Other (parcels, markups, etc.) that drew no attention from the MPOO. She was too focused on the fictional productivity numbers for manual distribution the previous guy reported. She didn't care that I was reporting honestly and accurately or had cut a significant number of hours. It always came back to what looked best to district, not what was best for the USPS. Fictional measurements, fancy math, and deliberate movement of hours to specific areas trumped factual, verifiable measurements.

Nonetheless, the previous PM was a star in the eyes of the MPOO because he made her look good.

Moreover, as I got my feet under me, I addressed many of the outstanding issues that no postmaster had. One HCR driver was repeatedly returning deliverable mail and wasn't following his change of address orders. He was also

tapping a collection box before its scheduled time and making many mis-deliveries. The clerks and I worked with him in the office, and he simply wouldn't do it. I began writing him up for each contractual irregularity. He ignored them. When it progressed to more severe discipline, he finally got worried. Ultimately, his wife met with me one night to discuss what he needed to do, and things improved a little.

This same driver would get off one delivery and go 10 miles misdelivering. To correct this, I had him go back out and redeliver this whole stretch, which began a distance up the Gunflint Trail. After doing this on two separate occasions he learned to pay closer attention to what he was doing.

When it came to the route inspection and counting his miles, stops, and deliveries I found a huge problem. This was a seasonal route, meaning it ran up roads in the summer and fall that it didn't in the winter and spring. When we pulled up to a long string of boxes during the winter season, only a few of them were being served even though he was getting paid for serving every box and a stop for each. Likewise, the mileage was way off. In the end, I

cut over 100 boxes and 10 miles from his route each day. He was being paid a huge premium for work he never performed.

When I left the office to return to Duluth, he was on the brink of being terminated, but the next PM let it slide away. When the PM position was filled again, discipline was picked up again and went to termination.

Another carrier in the Grand Marais office was also getting a sweeter deal than he deserved and according to the clerks, intimidated every manager before me. He was allowed a deviation to serve his own mailbox in town, the only person in town to get one. He got paid for it too via more mileage, a stop, and a delivery. After his ride along, I removed it, about 20 boxes and stops, and some miles.

The last big route change I made was to have any in-town deliveries made before the carrier left for more remote areas. This pleased a lot of residents, particularly seniors, who had to wait until the end of the day to get mail although they were just blocks from the post office.

Did the MPOO notice any of this? Nope, it didn't benefit her.

Instead, she hired a PM that would go from having three part-time flexibles, working around 50 hours a week to two full-time window clerks and a PTF. The full-time clerks received a guaranteed 40 hours of hours a week and the PTF got about 15 on average. Yep, almost double the hours. The fact was they needed a full-time clerk, but two?

The Deception Called a Performance Reward System

In 2016, I took up the failed National Performance Achievement (NPA) the managers association acquiesced too. My arguments, in part, are listed herein in quotes.

“As you head into negotiations this year, please understand the implications and consequences to those being represented by this reprehensible pay for performance plan. It is designed to ensure that only those with blessed conditions (strong economy, full work force, proper budget, and other conditions are present). It does not truly measure or reward the true accomplishments of all managers.

While I had addressed it as disparate impact it couldn't be pinpointed to the discrimination of a specific, protected class.

Yes, it met the prima facie case for disparate impact, that includes:

1. The existence of a disparity;
2. That the disparity was caused by a specific employment device, policy, or practice;

3. That the challenged policy was not justified by business necessity; and
4. That less discriminatory measures were available to the employer and would have served its needs equally well.*

* *Wards Cove Packing Co. v. Atonio*, 490 U.S. 642 (1989).

All it was missing was the protected class. Perhaps the greatest genius of the NPA is that it could discriminate against a percentage of participants without presenting grounds for EEOC action. As it was fine-tuned from year-to-year, it ultimately discriminated against everyone and eliminated any chance of an excellent rating.

“2015 NPA

“...As the Government Accountability Office wrote, “Participants rely on the PFP program for their annual salary increase since they do not receive cost-of-living adjustments, step increases, or other automatic increases to their salaries.” [Source: GAO-08-996 USPS Pay for Performance Program, Page 1] The GAO said it

“...obtained USPS documentation for the PFP program and interviewed officials responsible for the PFP program.” [Ibid., p. 2] It did not review the actual results at year end, interview participants, or consider the many items that result in a discriminatory pay program, such as the local economy. Furthermore, the GAO did not consider the applicability of the Equal Pay Act. The Equal Pay Act makes pay disparity illegal when the jobs require equal skill, effort, and responsibility in performance when working under similar working conditions.

The NPA is not a merit system and would fall under the Equal Pay Act if a protected class could be clearly identified.

“The Equal Pay Act applies to men, and the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 states the statute of limitations for filing an equal-pay lawsuit regarding pay discrimination resets with each new discriminatory paycheck. This is interpreted as having no limited statute of limitations.

Prior to the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 was the best-known "equal pay law". The Equal Pay Act prohibits employers from discriminating

based on gender, by paying unequal wages to men and women who perform essentially the same jobs. The jobs don't have to be the same but must be substantially equal.

Congress passed the EPA primarily to prohibit employers from cheating women out of equal pay for equal work, but it protects men as well.

Ever since the Act became law, employers have been prohibited from paying unequal wages to men and women working essentially the same jobs, except when based on a factor other than gender; examples are seniority and merit.

When deciding under the applicable equal pay law, among other factors, the EEOC and the courts consider the skills, effort and responsibility required to do the job. They also consider the working conditions in which the job is performed. In other words, it's equal work under similar conditions that determines equal pay by law, not job titles.”

The NPA was cleverly crafted to ensure no one got above an average two to three percent increase. No one could claim it discriminated against them personally, as it discriminated against everyone. Sure, in the first couple of

years some managers got great increases based on their local situation, while some of us didn't. Once the USPS fine-tuned it, no one would get them again. It wasn't a merit-based program, it was a merit limiting one.

The pay schedule of the clerks, mail handlers, and city carriers considers that their duties are virtually identical in nature, by position. The only pay variance was based on experience (seniority). If their duties are deemed nearly similar it stands that the supervision of each would be equally similar. The pay for every craft employee, given the same seniority, is equal. The same cannot be said for managers. Their work is nearly the same, but you wouldn't know it from their pay.

“The NPA Discriminates against Postmasters working in weaker Economies

The NPA discriminates against managers who work in economically depressed areas where revenue is difficult to hold and even harder to grow. Numerous cities and towns are shrinking in population, number of businesses, and opportunities. As people leave an area, businesses suffer. If you're outside of a larger metropolitan area, there are

unlikely to be other customers and businesses to replace those lost and the local market shrinks. Ultimately, businesses close and the community continues its economic decline.

Many post offices lose revenue annually and always have. Should Postmasters within those facilities be held individually accountable for the decline they had no control over? The NPA punishes them financially for this exact situation. On the other hand, Postmasters that work in more prosperous areas are rewarded for conditions they had no part in creating.

Depressed communities generally experience a steady decline, but in cases where a school or major employer closes, the collapse comes quick. The local post office generally experiences the same decline and witnesses lower and lower revenues. Nonetheless, those offices continue to serve a valuable function to the overall revenue of the postal service. Their continued service allows the USPS to sell its products without limiting delivery to certain areas.

If you closed every office that operated at a loss, people might go to another office to buy stamps, open a PO Box,

or conduct other business. Others will convert to a different provider like UPS, FedEx, or Speedee. Anytime you make things more expensive or difficult, it affects consumer behavior. Shorter hours, less places to conduct business, higher prices, inexperienced workers, and consolidations have negative effects. After many, and some necessary changes, there has been a serious disruption in service, particularly to delivery standards. The remaining offices are more critical than ever, as are the experienced managers that remain.

POSTPlan damaged local overnight service, a highly prized service that customers sorely miss. Overall service scores are down eight percent and more, negatively affecting the trust customers have in the USPS. This negatively affected revenue as customers sought alternative means.

The April 10, 2016, drop in stamp prices further hindered revenue goals as the USPS earned less on each sale. This scenario was known by those setting NPA goals, yet unrealistic revenue goals were set.

Grocery stores commonly take losses on a couple of products to draw customers. Likewise, the USPS benefits

from offices that have a negative income because universal service offers the most powerful marketing reach possible. Moreover, there is the legal requirement of universal service. Universal services lead to increased revenues everywhere, evidenced by the greater volumes of incoming mail compared to outgoing in many offices.

Revenue is not a critical factor pursuant to a true merit system as the individual has no influence to affect it. All prices are set by the” Postal Rate Commission while marketing promotions are determined by Headquarters.

Furthermore, revenue is directly correlated to the economy. The USPS is not immune from the same factors affecting regular businesses. The biggest difference as their inability to change directions or pricing as quickly.

“Revenue is nearly immovable by individuals and more dependent on national growth (GNP), wage growth, small business growth, etc. Local, regional, and national economies are all unique, having varying correlations to one another. In 2016, the rate decrease ensured the USPS got far less on each transaction. The Northland District had a year-to-date (YTD) of total retail revenue that was -2.6%

to plan and -3.5% to SPLY (Same Period Last Year) through April 15, 2016, and the price of postage went down on April 10th. The GAO reported "...targets can be adjusted by various levels of management throughout the fiscal year, depending on numerous factors, such as changes in USPS's overall financial condition, increases in fuel prices, changes in local mailing volumes, and unexpected local expenses, among other things." [Source: GAO-08-996 USPS Pay for Performance Program].” This being the case, I am not aware of a time the USPS has done this at any level, despite floods, fire, price decrease (4/10/16), large fuel fluctuations, etc....”

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The Retail Revenue % Plan only accounts for walk-in revenue (WIR). Although Postmasters are encouraged to move customers to click-n-ship (online postage), when they do, the PM is punished by lower WIR and a lower NPA.

“The goals for this indicator are highly unrealistic for FY 16. To move a single block, you must increase WIR by 9.5%. For a 15 block you would have to increase WIR by 50%. Through April 5, 2016, the Retail Revenue for the USPS nationally is -4.09% to Plan and -2.34% to SPLY (Same Period Last Year). This shows the impossibility of

reaching an NPA cell score of 15. If not possible, one would interpret that as intentionally designed to cut incentive payments.

On July 7, 2016, the following results were found for Retail Revenue in the Northland District.

Cell	Offices (EAS – 18 below)	% of total	EAS 22-18	% of total
3	0		2	0.5%
4	5	3.5%	25	6.7%
5	110	76.4%	231	61.6%
6	25	17.4%	111	29.6%
7	4	2.8%	4	1.1%
8	0		2	0.5%
Totals	144		375	

Note: rounded to nearest 1/10th

Goals determining the salaries of managers should be set that are attainable and understandably a reasonable stretch, not impossible.” Not one individual eclipsed an 8, whereas 15 is supposed to be possible.

Table summary

No EAS employee in EAS 22 and below eclipsed a block score of 8 in the Northland District. In fact, only 2.8% and 1.6% are at a cell score of 7 or better for EAS below 18 and EAS 22-18, respectively. The April 10, 2016 rate decrease suggests that revenue will continue to decline. The USPS considers all cells in the 4-9 range as average performers. This would include every EAS employee in the Northland District except two, who are categorized as low performers. This suggests that there are no above average or exceptional contributors in the entire district. A legitimate PFP program would have high performers in such a large group. The results suggest that the USPS is recognizing that the jobs require equal skill, effort, and responsibility in performance. There wouldn't be such a tight grouping if the goals were achievable and/or the ability of the individuals to influence revenue is absent.

The revenue plan for my office was raised 3.6% over the previous year, easily outpacing inflation and wage growth nationally. Additionally, stagnant wage growth in the U.S. is reducing the discretionary incomes of many households. Businesses, particularly smaller ones, are being pummeled by higher taxes and stricter, more extensive regulations.

The 3.6% is a daunting goal alone, with little prospects of deviating far from there. With the decrease in stamp prices, the difficulty increased.

For a factor to be considered merit based, you must have the ability to influence it. Comprising retail revenue are box fees, money order fees, retail products, and stamp sales. The only significant items here are stamps. Stamp sales are primarily a function of a strong economy, local wages, and numbers of established, financially sound businesses that market by mail.

The USPS acknowledges revenue challenges in it FY2018 Annual Report, page 23. “Although revenue and volume are closely linked to the strength of the U.S. economy and changes in how our customers used the mail...we also recognize that revenue growth is constrained by laws and regulations restricting the types of products, services and pricing we may offer to our customers, and the speed with which we can bring new products to market.”

In *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*, 401 U.S. 424 (1971), the Court adopted the rule of business necessity, holding that an employment practice that has a discriminatory effect must be related to job performance. [There is no existing or reasonable explanation for the unacceptable variances in pay that are determined by the NPA.]”

The formulas leave little doubt there was ever an intention to pay a bonus that exceeded two to three percent. The practice of the USPS has been to lump virtually every manager into a two to three percent raise, at best...” The fact that the top rating of superior performance is impossible is a testament to its fraud.

“The NPA does not constitute a merit system

Whereas the positions require equal skill and equal effort in performance, the NPA is derived via chance and circumstance. Levels have long been determined by Workload Service Credits (WSCs) which measure the same criteria for each office. “

Prior to any merit program, such as Economic Value Added (EVA) or NPA, the USPS historically had EAS pay

schedules by level for all managers. These schedules were based on the determination of the USPS itself that the jobs were best categorized by level of responsibility and workload. Furthermore, the USPS substantiated the identical duties of each position by EAS level in its job postings. The scheduled pay structure recognized the only variance in positions by EAS level was experience and knowledge.

The NPA fails to measure individual performance and if a protected class were identified, must fall under the requirements of the Equal Pay Act (EPA). The EPA defines equal skill (§ 1620.15) and equal performance (§ 1620.16). The job duties and expected performance are virtually identical by level and position.

The NPA is structured so individuals can at best move the bar a minimum if at all. Most factors are broad measurements. There are generally about three items the actual unit was measured by...greatly flawed and out of the unit's control. I would share the individual items, but the USPS considers the program "proprietary." I suppose it is, because no other plan was used so effectively to make sure no one could excel and nearly everyone got the same

increase, if any, year after year. They didn't want another corporation to steal their idea for screwing their managers – how novel.

Even though the NPA gives 40% to the unit, 30% of that 40% rested at the area of your Manager of Post Office Operations (MPOO). In all, the unit is responsible for just 70% of the 40% attributed to the unit or 28% (70% x 40%). An individual's NPA is determined by only 28% of what their unit achieves. Out of 17 variables, the unit is only responsible for three and they, like the others, are largely out of their control.”

Work Hours

Work hours are effectively impossible to obtain as the NPA has been nearly perfectly calibrated to prevent significant hour reductions. Level 18 Postmasters are limited to 15 hours of clerk work a week. All open window hours count as full clerk hours if the Postmaster is working alone, even if he has no customers. This was a landmark arbitration award won by the APWU. It didn't matter if you spent the whole hour doing Postmaster duties, you had to report working an hour as a clerk. At the end of the week, if you

eclipsed 15 hours, the union would grieve for the hours over 15 and get paid.

Another bad arbitration decision awarded clerks cleaning hours done outside of other working hours. This meant that even when the window was quiet, the cleaning hours could not be done at the same time. Even if you had nothing else for them to do during the open window time when there were no customers, you couldn't have them clean simultaneously.”

The addition of the Employee Availability Rate Performance Indicator now penalized the manager for any scheduled Leave Without Pay (LWOP). When the opportunity existed, LWOP allowed a person to take time off without using their earned leave. They might take LWOP when they wouldn't take their earned annual leave, especially if they're saving it for a planned vacation. This is beneficial when you can cut hours. Moreover, employee availability depended on morale, ability to take time off, proper staffing, and the slow, time-consuming hiring process.

In a desperate attempt to earn a raise under the NPA some unscrupulous managers used their new cleaning hours to save hours. They simply had the clerks clean while they worked the window, then charged the hours to cleaning. Their budgeted hours went up, but their actual work hours didn't. Those of us who followed the new rule and used the cleaning hours outside of window hours gained nothing.

When I was promoted to the APO PM in Floodwood in the fall of 2012, it was just me and a PTF clerk who got about 13 hours a week. Now, it's me and two PTF's who are guaranteed a minimum of 35 hours a week between them. Window hours were 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. a day, Monday through Friday. It calculates to 35 open window hours a week, plus there's a half hour on the end of the day for closeout. The closeout amounts to 2.5 hours a week, and because of its timing, generally is assigned with the window hours.

The best and most logical thing is for the PM to start when the office opened. This meant doing PM work after the manual distribution in the morning but before the window opened. The distribution of mail was considered clerk work and counted towards your 15 hours for the week. The

good thing was that if you were fast at distribution, you could save on your clerk hours and use them somewhere else. Also, with many late trucks from the plant, you weren't wasting a clerk's time while they waited. Instead, you could use that time to do more of your PM work and not miss a beat.

Almost every level 18 Administrative Post Office (APO) manages Remotely Managed Post Offices (RMPO's). POSTPlan eliminated non-career Postmaster Reliefs (PMRs) and two, four, and six-hour offices were covered by non-career Postal Service Employees (PSEs). Any time a PSE had off was covered by the part-time flexible (PTF) clerk from the APO. Each year each PSE that ran the 4hour RMPO had to take a five-day break from service that had to be covered by the PTF. This five-day break was stupid and only made scheduling more challenging.

Postmasters had many other duties that required them to be out of the office and were unaccounted for in their workhours. This included training, mandatory annual ride along with carriers, RMPO stock counts, driver, and clerk observations. The workhour budget received by managers accounted for none of them.

Hours are challenged by the hiring of new employees who take a lot of training before they are up to speed. If they are being trained for a rural route, they often require more hours than that allowed for a budget adjustment.

The budgeted hours for each office are set by District Finance. Unfortunately, finance made errors and if you didn't do your own math, they could make your workhour budget impossible to meet. Errors, rarely if ever, work to your advantage. If Finance made an error in your budget that you didn't get corrected, you suffered the pay consequences. In my experience, I found Finance made many errors when computing workhour budgets. As a PM, you are responsible for verifying that every budgeted number was accurate. On the one hand you are told to rely on the information from these departments, but on the other, accountable for their errors.

If your performance rating is harmed, you have a short mitigation period to request an adjustment. Even when you show your evidence, you will likely be denied. If you miss this short window, the MPOO just says, "sorry, we can't do anything." If you have met the performance goals, you

should get the reward promised. You should not suffer the consequence of another's errors. It shouldn't matter when the error was discovered, just that it was proven.

“The greater point is that, although hours can be managed in large part, circumstances, service needs, and budget dictate a sizable portion. Hours, to be effectively managed and held to individual accountability, must be tied in part to individual circumstances such as weather, injuries, etc. However, as these variables are not accounted for, the merit system fails.

The Intended Purpose of a Pay-for-performance Plan

While Pay-for-performance plans may work for private industries where individual contributions can be accurately assessed, the NPA does not offer USPS employees the same opportunity...politics, luck, and circumstances trump work accomplishments. The NPA is mere smoke and mirrors...”

“As such, the NPA should be abolished, managers returned to a structure pay schedule, and awards given by reviewers where deserved (over and above the structured pay increases).”

In the FY2018 Annual Report to Congress, the USPS claims, “targets are aligned with the FY2019 Integrated Financial Plan (IFP), which includes our planned revenue and expenses for FY2019. Every fiscal year, we develop a budget and plan that we intend to be sufficient for our field offices to meet their non-financial performance outcomes. We design all of our corporate-wide targets to be achievable given the planned finances in the IFP.”

The data, year after year, shows their budget and plans are not achievable. Because of their poorly calculated plans, the managers see little they can do to get a higher pay for performance award. They know they will get the same regardless of effort and talent. In fact, the FY18 Annual Report showed that of 20 targets for corporate-wide performance outcomes, only one was met. Yeah, great goal setting and *prima facie* evidence that goals were not achievable.. Even better, some executives got hefty bonuses when the goals they set themselves weren’t met. In fact, many weren’t even close to the target. Nonetheless, they stuck with these same unachievable goals for FY2019, except for slight variations in seven targets.

Determining Wage Discrimination

NPA factors should be “based on fair, objective, predictable and measurable criteria...” Workhour budgets are subjectively adjusted by Finance and revenue goals are set by the previous year, unadjusted for any anomalies. While targets may be predictable, they are not set to be achieved. Either way, they are received by participants four months into the measurement period.

“At the end of the fiscal year, when extra hours are distributed, they are determined subjectively by the MPOO and District. In effect, these are used to bump the NPA scores of select individuals.”

The EEO Policy prohibits discrimination in compensation and a practice of ensuring equal pay based on their position and skill. Yet again, because the NPA doesn't specifically discriminate blatantly against a protected class, it isn't covered by EEOC rules. Instead, the NPA cleverly discriminates against large percentages of workers, not by race, gender, etc. Its design and intent have been exposed by the year-to-year disappointments experienced by managers.

The NPA Fails the Required Time Standards of a Merit System

“A true performance system would set forth the objectives prior to the measurement period, not months into the new fiscal year as has always been the case with the NPA. The USPS, on its web page for Performance Evaluation System (PES), includes “...Objectives and goals are established at the beginning of the evaluation period...[False] At the beginning of the evaluation period, an evaluator holds an interactive discussion with an employee about the employee’s goals for the year [False]. This meeting ensures that the employee is aware of the performance objectives that he or she will be evaluated against for the upcoming year.” This is the most essential part of the program as it lays the foundation for the evaluation period. Introducing the evaluation variables after Christmas and nearly four months into the measured period invalidates a true performance program.” Managers are left to wonder if the targets themselves were set sometime after the beginning of the new period. If not, why weren’t they disseminated before the new fiscal year (in September), rather than four months into it (January).

“In fiscal year 2016, the first notice of objective setting was by email on January 15, 2016, three and a half months into the year. The email said everyone would be given two weeks to complete this process. At that point, it was a full four months into the new fiscal year, along with the most important season, Christmas, already gone. The basis of a merit system is already lost this far into the evaluated year.

A regulatory requirement of a Performance Appraisal System is “Providing performance plans to employees at the beginning of the rating period (normally within 30 days).” [5 CFR 430.206(b)(2)] This federal requirement has never been met.

The Pay for Performance Program—Glossary of Terms, defines “Performance Indicator: Established measurement at the corporate, unit, or core requirements level. Targets are defined for each level and are communicated to all employees at the **beginning** of the year. [False] Tracked via NPA.” [Emphasis added] Since the inception of the NPA, the targets have never been defined at the beginning of year. In fact, it has always been almost four months into the new year.

In fact, the GAO reported that “At the beginning of the fiscal year, the rater is required to discuss PFP indicators and targets with the participant, including goals for corporate and unit indicators and individual performance elements.” [Source: GAO-08-996 USPS Pay for Performance Program, p. 9] As this has never occurred, the NPA program, being defunct, is wrongly used in determining salaries.

NPA Scorecards are received well after the evaluated period, as shown for 2016:

<u>NPA Month</u>	<u>Date Posted</u>	<u>Days after End of Month</u>
October:	February 6	98
November:	February 11	73
December:	February 17	48
January:	February 26	26
February:	March 30	30
March:	May 12	42
April:	June 23	44
June:	August 12	43
July:	August 26	26
August:	September 22	22
September:	October 28	28

There were no NPA scorecards until 129 (31 days in October + 98 days until report) days into the evaluated year.

OPM's regulations require that each employee's performance plan include at least one critical element, which, by definition, measures individual performance and establishes individual accountability. [Even if the NPA included a critical factor, its late introduction into the new year negates its significance.]

The OPM states “a critical element is a work assignment or responsibility of such importance that unacceptable performance on that element would result in a determination the employee's overall performance is unacceptable. Governmentwide regulations require employees have at least one critical element in their performance plans. Critical elements must address performance at the individual level only.” [This definition of a critical element is wholly missing from the NPA for individuals. Can you call something critical that you give such little weight too? If you can consider that an employee’s overall performance is unacceptable by failing to meet this critical element, shouldn’t the opposite be true?

If you not only meet this critical elements' performance measurement, but instead far outperform it, shouldn't that merit a higher rating? In any plan that truly intended to reward performance it would.]

Via its own words, the USPS confirms the time issue in the FY18 Annual Report. It includes, "Our annual service performance metrics are cumulative, and volume weighted. Thus, performance during the first half of the year (when volume is highest) sets the pace for the remainder of the year" [p. 18]. Yet, it doesn't share any goals until mid-tolate January, the fourth month into the new fiscal year." If the USPS repeatedly violates the most fundamental elements of the pay-for-performance program (NPA), one must question its purpose. Participants feels it is intended to keep any increase to the bare minimum, whereas HQ dangles its "rewards" as expected motivation. After years of being duped, no managers feel motivated by the impossible targets.

The GAO acknowledged the challenge the USPS faced in raising revenue in its September 2008 Report to Congressional Requesters, U.S. Postal Services, New Delivery Performance Measures Could Enhance Managers'

Pay for Performance Program. “The projected decline of First-Class Mail impacts the Postal Service’s ability to continue to finance the growing universal service network. This is the single greatest challenge facing the Postal Service.” [USPS, Strategic Transformation Plan 2006-2010, p. 7] “...Standard Mail volume has recently declined in the wake of postal rate increases and the economic downturn, and its future prospects are unclear as advertising expenditures continue to shift to the Internet.” [Ibid., p. 5] Even though the economy was struggling, median incomes literally froze, and the shift to the Internet was rapidly occurring, the USPS chose to set unrealistic revenue growth rates for offices.

Source: OPM regulations: Chapter 8, Section 7:
Alternative Personnel Practices, Title 5 of the U.S. Code,
Performance Management.

Other NPA deficiencies include:

- Variables that often change in type (TWH [Total Workhours], Revenue % to Plan, TOE [Total Operating Expenses], etc.) as well as scope (national, area, district, MPOO, Cluster,

Finance Number, Lead Finance Number, Unit, etc.)

- Variables that damage the long-term success of the USPS, such as TOE
- Mitigating factors must be argued in a four-day span following the final NPA report of the year, but the plan itself isn't rolled out until after the most critical period of the fiscal year has passed (with no set date). For FY 2016, the mitigation period started the afternoon of a Friday and many didn't see it until the following Monday, killing most of the period for filing. [This short window is intentionally dropped at a time to minimize mitigation requests]
- USPS is not committed to the NPA as witnessed by its dropping in 2012 and no payments in 2013. [This alone is an abandonment of the pay for performance plan and testament to the unfair agreement the USPS embodies]

“Not receiving a reward, is indistinguishable from being punished. Whether the incentive is withheld or withdrawn deliberately, or simply not received by someone who had hoped to get it, the effect is identical. And the more

desirable the reward, the more demoralizing it is to miss out. Herzberg, “One More Time: How Do You Motivate Employees?” January–February 1968.”

The Equal Pay Act would apply if this involved a protected class, but instead it is what I call “Percentage Discrimination.” This discrimination is imposed by limiting an exceedingly small or no percentage of individuals from earning more than an established base increase. Because the national variables were unattainable, no one could reach the top payout theoretically possible. If it’s not possible, it’s not an honest, pay for performance program.

As the discrimination follows the EPA guidelines closely, even if not involving a protected class, we will include it our discussion that follows. First, its applicability.

§ 1620.1 Basic applicability of the Equal Pay Act. (a) Since the Equal Pay Act, 29 U.S.C. 206(d) (hereinafter referred to as the EPA), is a part of the Fair Labor Standards Act, 29 U.S.C. 201, *et seq.* (hereinafter referred to as the FLSA), it has the same basic coverage as the FLSA with two principal exceptions:(1) The EPA applies to

executive, administrative, and professional employees who are normally exempted from the FLSA for most purposes by section 13(a)(1) of that statute, and(2) The EPA covers all State and local government employees unless they are specifically exempted under section 3(e)(2)(C) of the FLSA...c) Men are protected under the Act equally with women. While the EPA was motivated by concern for the weaker bargaining position of women, the Act by its express terms applies to both sexes. (d) Most employees of the United States Government, as described in section 3(e)(2) (A) and (B) of the FLSA, are covered by the EPA. Accordingly, these interpretations and principles may generally be applied to Federal sector employment.

Most managers are FLSA exempt and therefore protected under the Equal Pay Act.

Second, the parts of the EPA that define the underlying arguments that discrimination is evident follow. These would apply if a protected class were identified.

§ 1620.15 Jobs requiring equal skill in performance. (a)

In general. The jobs to which the equal pay standard is applicable are jobs requiring equal skill in their

performance. Where the amount or degree of skill required to perform one job is substantially greater than that required to perform another job, the equal pay standard cannot apply even though the jobs may be equal in all other respects.

Skill includes consideration of such factors as experience, training, education, and ability. It must be measured in terms of the performance requirements of the job. If an

employee must have essentially the same skill in order to perform either of two jobs, the jobs will qualify under the EPA as jobs the performance of which requires equal skill, even though the employee in one of the jobs may not exercise the required skill as frequently or during as much of his or her working time as the employee in the other job.

Possession of a skill not needed to meet the requirements of the job cannot be considered in making a determination regarding equality of skill. The efficiency of the employee's

performance in the job is not in itself an appropriate factor to consider in evaluating skill. (b) Comparing skill

requirements of jobs. As a simple illustration of the principle of equal skill, suppose that a man and a woman have jobs classified as administrative assistants. Both jobs require them to spend two-thirds of their working time facilitating and supervising support-staff duties, and the remaining one-third of their time in diversified tasks, not

necessarily the same. Since there is no difference in the skills required for the vast majority of their work, whether or not these jobs require equal skill in performance will depend upon the nature of the work performed during the latter period to meet the requirements of the jobs.

§ 1620.16 Jobs requiring equal effort in performance.

(a) *In general.* The jobs to which the equal pay standard is applicable are jobs that require equal effort to perform.

Where substantial differences exist in the amount or degree of effort required to be expended in the performance of jobs, the equal pay standard cannot apply even though the jobs may be equal in all other respects. Effort is concerned with the measurement of the physical or mental exertion needed for the performance of a job. Job factors which cause mental fatigue and stress, as well as those which alleviate fatigue, are to be considered in determining the effort required by the job. "Effort" encompasses the total requirements of a job. Where jobs are otherwise equal under the EPA, and there is no substantial difference in the amount or degree of effort which must be expended in performing the jobs under comparison, the jobs may require equal effort in their performance even though the effort may be exerted in different ways on the two jobs.

Differences only in the kind of effort required to be expended in such a situation will not justify wage differentials. [Every EAS-20 position is virtually identical to one another, as are EAS-18 positions]

§ 1620.17 Jobs requiring equal responsibility in performance. (a) *In general.* The equal pay standard applies to jobs the performance of which requires equal responsibility. Responsibility is concerned with the degree of accountability required in the performance of the job, with emphasis on the importance of the job obligation. Differences in the degree of responsibility required in the performance of otherwise equal jobs cover a wide variety of situations. The following illustrations in subsection (b), while by no means exhaustive, may suggest the nature or degree of differences in responsibility which will constitute unequal work.

[Every EAS-20 position is virtually identical to one another, as are EAS-18 positions, in relation to levels of responsibility.]

§ 1620.18 Jobs performed under similar working conditions. (a) *In general.* In order for the equal pay

standard to apply, the jobs are required to be performed under similar working conditions. It should be noted that the EPA adopts the flexible standard of similarity as a basis for testing this requirement. In determining whether the requirement is met, a practical judgment is required considering whether the differences in working conditions of the kind are customarily taken into consideration in setting wage levels. The mere fact that jobs are in different departments of an establishment will not necessarily mean that the jobs are performed under dissimilar working conditions. This may or may not be the case. The term “similar working conditions” encompasses two subfactors: “surroundings” and “hazards.” “Surroundings” measure the elements, such as toxic chemicals or fumes, regularly encountered by a worker, their intensity and their frequency. “Hazards” take into account the physical hazards regularly encountered, their frequency and the severity of injury they can cause.

The phrase “working conditions” does not encompass shift differentials. (b) *Determining similarity of working conditions.* Generally, employees performing jobs requiring equal skill, effort, and responsibility are likely to be performing them under similar working conditions. However, in situations where some employees performing

work meeting these standards have working conditions substantially different from those required for the performance of other jobs, the equal pay principle would not apply. On the other hand, slight or inconsequential differences in working conditions which are not usually taken into consideration by employers or in collective bargaining in setting wage rates would not justify a differential in pay.

The USPS acknowledges the functional grouping of EAS employees in Handbook EL-380, 542 Pay-for-Performance Program, when it states, "...Individual performance against predetermined objectives is rated relative to the performance of functional peers and averaged to functional rating..."

"...EAS levels are assigned to postmasters based on a combination of their responsibilities, the number of their employees, the size of the post office facility, and various operations performed by the post office." [Source: GAO-08-996 USPS Pay for Performance Program, p. 19]
Section 440 of the Fair Labor Standards Act
Administration, specifically 442.1 (Sex Discrimination

Policy) includes, "...Employees, regardless of their sex, must receive equal wages for equal work on jobs which require equal skill, effort, and responsibility and are performed under similar working conditions." Source: ELM 40, p. 214.

For the reasons mentioned, there should be a return to the Executive and Administrative Schedule, Chronological Listing of Pay Increases, October 7, 1978 (PP 22-78) to January 15, 2011, Grades 15 - 18) historically used by the USPS. The Employee and Labor Relations Manual (ELM), 665, Standards of Conduct, 665.23 prohibits "Discrimination (forbids discrimination on any non-merit factor...). Under the NPA, non-merit factors are currently responsible for pay discrimination.

Postal Manager Can Pursue Discrimination Lawsuit Under Equal Pay Act

A Native American woman can amend her discrimination complaint against the United States Postal Service over claims that the company paid a higher salary to a man with similar job duties, the U.S. Court of Federal Claims ruled. Beverly Martin started working for USPS in 1981, and over

the years worked her way up the ranks to become program manager. From 2004 until 2008 Martin headed the office's National Performance Assessment program in the Field Operations Requirements and Planning division. In March of 2008 USPS promoted a co-worker named Thomas Henry to division manager, a position for which Martin had also applied. She filed a discrimination complaint with the Equal Opportunity Commission because she believes that Henry was hired based on his gender. Martin says that although she practically shared the same job responsibilities as Henry, he was paid more by USPS." Plaintiff alleges that, because of Mr. Henry's gender, he received greater compensation for performing job duties substantially similar to those that Plaintiff performed," the ruling, filed Jan. 26 states.

[Side note: Protecting itself from a blatant violation of the EPA, the USPS utilizes the NPA to discriminate against all managers, employing a percentage scheme to block all workers together.]

Legal information on the case:

On January 26, 2011 Judge Mary Ellen Coster Williams of the U.S. Court of Federal Claims rejected USPS’ motion to dismiss postal manager Beverly Martin’s pay discrimination claim. Judge Williams’ decision rejected USPS’s argument that the recent Supreme Court “Iqbal and Twombly” decisions effectively required Ms. Martin to prove her Equal Pay Act case outright in order to survive a motion to dismiss. Judge Williams held that Ms. Martin properly alleged that the actual job duties she and the male comparator performed in their respective positions, and not their formal job titles, controlled whether or not they could be compared for pay discrimination analysis. Judge Williams also ruled that the fact that the male comparator did the job after Ms. Martin was no bar to Ms. Martin’s Equal Pay Act claims.

At a Postmaster meeting in 2019, the Northland District representative acknowledged that the objectives were impossible. Why did they set the objectives at HQ so far out of reach? He explained they didn’t want customers to see they couldn’t deliver up to their promises and rewarded managers for the same. So, we have a district

acknowledgment that the goals they set for its managers was impossible. Isn't the purpose of goals to be a stretch, not impossible?

Since its inception, HQ continually manipulated the numbers so no one could escape the dismal rating he or she ultimately received. The 'Pay-for-Performance' program purposely made it impossible for anything other than average. It was a disingenuous program that destroyed any remaining morale or incentive for exceptional work.

Mitigating Factors Process is Biased & Prejudiced

“A mitigating factor is a significant occurrence beyond a unit’s control that triggers a measurable impact not only on the NPA composite summary, but on the Pay for Performance overall performance rating as well. In order to qualify for consideration, there must be so significant a change in a unit indicator(s) that it will cause a downward change in the NPA composite summary resulting in the PFP Overall Performance Rating to be lowered by at least one whole point.” Source: Mitigating Factors, Version FY15, October 2015. As examples, it cites, “a retail unit consumed by fire, an AMF destroyed by flood, or an act of terrorism that shuts down a transportation network or plant.”

The examples the USPS provide are catastrophic events and their effects obvious and longstanding. It leaves every other example, including the failure of finance to properly budget hours seem miniscule. Essentially, the mitigating factors process is a waste of time outside of terrorism and Acts of God.

But what about the Acts of God, are they accounted for?

Apparently not. Under the subtitle FY2018 Performance Report of the FY2018 Annual Report, page 18, the USPS stated, “During the first half of FY2018, when we process our highest mail and package volumes, we experienced considerable service disruption because of extreme weather and natural disasters across the nation including three major hurricanes, wildfires, mudslides, heavy rainfall, ice and snow. These natural disasters significantly affected three of seven USPS Areas and disrupted operations across our network.” Nonetheless, were any adjustments made? Not that I’m aware of.

What about Covid-19 in 2020? No mention yet as I write this with less than a month left in the fiscal year.

I asked the United Postmasters and Managers of America (UPMA) organization to pursue the end of the NPA and return to a pay schedule that’s fair and representative of work requiring equal skill, equal effort, and equal responsibility under similar working conditions. Of course, lacking any power or willingness to confront HQ, they would do nothing, try nothing, and accomplish nothing.

In summary, "...nearly one-third of the evaluated year is over by the time the objectives first become known and goals are set. Worse yet, Christmas season, the heaviest volume period, as well as its hours and revenue, is behind. Now, after it's gone, managers see the goals that may already be lost.

The jobs in question are nearly clones of one another with no true freedom to affect any variable significantly." Even if an individual could perform perfectly, his or her NPA would likely be the same as other persons scoring lower. Why? The NPA is staked by larger, unachievable MPOO, District, Area, and National goals. "If everyone is treated as clones, a merit system fails, and a scheduled payment system is warranted. Awards are more appropriate for special efforts and accomplishments, rather than a flawed NPA system that discourages high performers. This flaw, over years, leads to a great disparity in incomes among top performers. The result is they feel cheated by the very system that was supposed to recognize their achievements.

The NPA, in its flawed design, ensures that for each person who wins, there are many others just as deserving that lose.

When their hard work and performance comes with a loss year after year, they feel marginalized and unvalued. The NPA is responsible for demotivating and devaluing the most valued asset to any industry, its employees, by its unfair, discriminatory practices. Most lower-level managers enter the supervisory ranks to make a difference and willingly took on the added workload, hours, and stress. For their efforts, they hoped to earn enough to justify their sacrifice and be recognized for their contributions. The hope that the NPA would motivate employees by incentivizing performance hasn't and won't happen if the goals remain unattainable.

After 27 years as a manager I just eclipsed \$70,000 in salary. As a city carrier I would be guaranteed almost \$64,000 a year plus COLA's. By working some OT, I could make more than I am now without nearly the responsibility. If everyone, given the same experience and job I have, made approximately the same, I wouldn't have an issue with it. The fact is that others have maxed in pay at this position many years ago, with far less or similar time. The max has ranged from \$81,000 to \$86,000 and doesn't include the payout they get at the end of the year because they are maxed. There is no reasonable explanation for this

huge disparity except for lucky circumstances that benefitted their NPA. [There is also the discretionary power of hiring officials to give some employees hefty increases on promotions, and others, the minimum.]

Every recognition system should have a process that fairly and reasonably reconciles performance gaps. The NPAs mitigation process is corrupted and deepens the injustice. When you appeal the mitigation decision, it goes back to the person who rejected it. Is that maintaining objectivity? Sometimes, employees fall short of their marks for exceptional reasons. The proper correction ensures the supervisor doesn't lose faith in the program and their manager.

I have been a participant of many USPS incentive programs that seemed designed to deceive people into being motivated. The deck seemed stacked in our favor early in the year only to slip away as we neared the end of the fiscal year. It turned out that headquarters designed systems that were easier to meet initially, but incredibly difficult at the end of the year. In the end, we felt deceived and betrayed. One program after another did the same thing. In the

several instances where individuals have tried to motivate the field by stating it will affect their NPA, a collective eye roll and hiss filled the room. To any manager with any time, the NPA was simply “Never Paying Anything.”

A large problem is that a person can easily see where their bonus is going months in advance. If he or she were going to fail, why not fail larger and make it easier the following year. This system could fail you year after year, even when you tried earnestly to do your best. Potentially, you could be raising your bar of expectation year after year without ever getting a decent raise. In fact, this is where many managers fall every year, despite their level of effort. Ideally, all superior achievers could reach the top. This system leaves little in your control and most to luck or circumstance.

Workhours depend in part on environmental factors (weather and road conditions), retention, and training. Unfortunately, training hours count against your performance. If someone quits or is fired, you must juggle your already short staff to cover the gap. When you finally get someone hired, a lot of training time was needed to him or her up to speed. Unfortunately, your workhour budget is

designed with the perfect scenario in mind (experienced, full staff all year long). Most budget adjustment requests were denied. New employees required at least forty plus hours of training before they could begin productive work. In a small office, this single-handedly blows the work hour goal apart. There are supposed to budget adjustments for such items, but there is no guarantee that you will get it. In fact, one year after promises of an adjustment, I received none at the end of the year. I tried mitigation to correct the error only to be denied again.

Package scan rates always accounts for some portion of the NPA. The problem was that there were no adjustments for pieces that would not scan, or scans made in error by other offices that affected yours. You simply took the error against your scanning percentage. When you are measured to the tenths and hundredth of a point, all scans matter. On days, when the Plant sent a full sack of your parcels to another office in error, when they scanned them incorrectly, they significantly damaged your scanning scores. For their mistake you will be punished. Another ingenious disincentive dropped into the mix.

A well-designed incentive-pay plan can bind people and objectives together, offering a significant advantage in the competitive marketplace. On the other hand, a poorly designed plan can de-motivate. If there is a flaw in the plan, it will be found and exploited. Likewise, if the plan contains variables out of the manager's control, it will discourage participation. For example, the USPS incentive plan is based largely on achieving certain revenue goals. A poor local, regional, or national economy will negatively affect your revenue, regardless of size. Similarly, rate increases may either help or hurt.

Incentive plans should have goals that are simply stated, have no hidden agenda, and be easy to track. There must be a way to adjust for errors that are beyond the unit's control. You must be able to affect the outcome for it to be a variable in the incentive plan.

In 2019, the NPA had 11 performance indicators for its corporate component and six for the unit. Only three of the six-unit indicators were from the lead finance number (the Administrative Post Office). The corporate summary accounted for 60% of the NPA score and the unit 40%. The fact is that you had only limited control of 55% of the unit

or 22% (40% x 55%). This wasn't a performance plan at all, it was just a 'gotcha again' scam.

They call the aspects of the NPA "proprietary information." I'm sure, because they didn't want any other company to copy the plan that cheats real performers. Then again, no other business would want to introduce these deceptive disincentives into their workplace. Anyone that could retire does and the rest are waiting on their minimum retirement age. A lottery ticket had a better chance of paying off than the NPA.

The NPA since 2009

Only 11% of the 263 Performance Indicators from 2009 to 2019 have been assigned to the lead finance number. The other 89% was MPOO (6%), District (41%), Area (1%), and National (41%). The Corporate Indicators constitute 60% of the weight of the NPA. There were 196 corporate measurements versus 68 for the unit. Only 11% or roughly seven of the 68 Unit Indicators were for the lead finance number. The overall unit score comprises 40% of the NPA, of which 4.4% (11% x 44%) was for the lead finance

number. This hardly established a critical element of any kind.

By carefully choosing scores for unit and corporate indicators that are unreachable, then adding breaks from one rating to the next that are lofty, a superior rating is unachievable. Since 2013, the corporate score averaged 2.3 out of a possible 9 (60% x 15). The range during that time was 1.7 to 2.6, a far cry from 9 [a perfect rating]. Even if you were blessed with a perfect unit score, you could only get a possible overall score of 8.3 [2.3 + (40% x 15 rating)]. An 8.3 gets you an average rating (4-9), showing that no one in the nation in a Post Office 18 or below got a rating from 9-15. None. This demonstrates the discriminatory effect the NPA has imposed upon its participants, and the reason no one believes in it anymore. The absolute best you could earn was 4.5%, not the 9.0% promised by NPA.

The endless changing of performance indicators from year-to-year for both corporate and unit categories, as well as their weights, leaves everyone guessing year-after-year. Any indicators, same or different, aren't shared until mid-to-late January, nearly four months into the new fiscal year and measurement period.

Only 4% of the 263 Performance Indicators resulted in a rating of superior (13-15), while 6% had an above average rating (10-12). These superior and above average ratings came earlier in the program and couldn't be achieved again once the NPA was changed again to eliminate them. These are individual performance indicators and insignificant when weighted with the number other indicators that year that routinely rate extremely low.

The Eau Claire Debacle

In 2006, I was denied the Plant Manager job in Duluth, MN, a second time, by an even less qualified person than the first. The first time they passed me I was offered a level 22 detail in Finance in St. Paul. Under different conditions I would have accepted it, but after preparing and being promised the Plant Manager position in Duluth for a good part of a decade, I couldn't bring myself to take the offer. This time, the previous Plant Manager of Duluth and the District Head wanted me to get the Plant Manager detail in Eau Claire and the District Plant Manager wanted Ann, a supervisor in Eau Claire. In effect, there were two direct reports. They compromised by saying we would each get our chance, dropping this surprise a week before I was to start. I would start as a supervisor for 60 days, working for Ann, and then we would switch positions. It would take only four days for me to see which of those parties held the true power.

They agreed to give me weekends off, so I could see my kids and new wife. I started on afternoons, working from about 1:30 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. Then my shift changed to 6:00 p.m. to 2:30 a.m., and yet again to 10:00 p.m. to 7:00

a.m. Despite the schedule I received, my average shift ran about 13 hours a day. I experienced several 16 to 18-hour days, and one that ran 26 hours straight. My next surprise came after I had been there for almost a month – I was exempt from higher-level pay, OT, and extra straight time hours. Even when I became the plant manager, a level 21 position, they planned to pay me level 16 pay. Nothing about this job was rewarding. To top it off, I was away from home (160 miles away) and so exhausted on weekends that I slept away.

When I first got to Eau Claire, Wisconsin, there were 24 All Purpose Containers (APCs) of delayed machinable letters to process. Additionally, there were anywhere from five to 10 trays of delayed manual mail carried over from day to day. This was usual. Meanwhile, management was keeping only those people who signed up on the Overtime Desired List (OTDL). This wasn't many people and far less than needed to clear the committed mail. Everyone else worked eight hours and left. The idea of keeping everyone to get committed mail processed was a foreign idea. My mere suggestion was met with outrage. Some verbally protested while others threatened to walk out when it happened.

In Duluth, it was common for mandatory overtime (OT) to be called for everyone until committed mail was thrown. The OTDL usually didn't offer enough manpower to get it done by the critical dispatch time. Many didn't like it, but there was a service to maintain.

I immediately recognized the lack of canceling ability and sought to learn the long-range plan. Since the anthrax scare, the Postal Service went to a Bio-Detection System and eliminated its older canceling equipment.

Unfortunately, these machines were needed to make dispatches, especially on heavy volume days. The only contact person I could find was located at headquarters. Well, you would have thought the world ended when I sent them an email. One of my two bosses called me and chewed my ass.

“I am very upset. You never go to headquarters with anything. If you need to know something, you will contact Mike, Larry, or me. You got that! What questions do you have?”

“I wanted to know what the plans were for canceling mail now on heavy days.”

“Well, what do you do now?” she asked.

“We cancel later into the night, but what about heavier days?” I returned.

“What do you do on Saturdays?”

“We send everything out to the cities.”

“Yeah.”

“You wouldn’t have us send this mail out to the cities on a weekday, would you” I inquired, “because this would delay this mail.”

“What’s more important Marv, service or the safety of your employees?”

“The safety of the employees.” [We could easily have both. Suddenly out of the blue and unlike other processing

facilities, it was now unsafe to use OT or better yet, the proper canceling abilities. Sending unprocessed mail to the cities, we guaranteed a one-day delay in service.]

“So, what is the plan for canceling at Christmas time,” I asked knowing that we generally had two-to-three times the normal volume then.

“We’ll let you know when you need to know. Don’t be looking ahead. Worry about what’s going on day-to-day and nothing more.”

“I like to plan ahead while still managing day-to-day operations.”

“Don’t look ahead! Just deal with what you have to day-to-day,” she said pointedly. “Do not bother headquarters with anything! Understand?”

“Yes.”

“They’ve got better things to do than answer your questions. You are not to go outside of the district for anything. Follow protocol.”

“Okay,” I conceded.

“Anyway, how is everything else going?” she asked.

After her derogatory talk, the last thing I wanted to do was make idle chitchat with her, so I simply said, “fine.” Her condescending and belittling speech made me question my reasons for being there.

I submitted her name for the worst boss contest. I would surely have won if they had taken a recording of her snarky, condescending talk. I didn’t win so the devil himself must be running a business somewhere.

When trucks were late and service failed, she tore into me even though I didn't make any of the questionable calls that weekend. I was simply filling in on the telecom for the responsible party. Again, when I tried to explain that I didn't make the decisions leading to the problem, she said, "maybe you're not ready for leadership." I guess I was

supposed to take full responsibility for my in-house boss, even if I wasn't included in the decision-making process.

After surviving the first telecom of the three I had to take daily, I hoped that she was finally going to give me a chance. That all changed in the second telecom when we got around to a quality report made by another office. They claimed that my office sent a large volume of parcels a day late, but my employee claimed it was just two parcels that had arrived late. She immediately went on the offensive, "Your answer is lacking leadership. What should you have put?" ...Then it was silent for a moment while all 28 managers listened in. Then she piped up, "Well, we're waiting!" I responded, "I guess I'm to assume that the report made by the other office is correct and my employee here is wrong. Then I should address it as an error made in this office." "That's right!" she responded before moving on. That was my final cue to return to my regular job and say adios to this control and conformity-demanding boss."

My first thought was that if this was the way it was going to be, screw it, I might as well pull the plug and go home.

After just three days, she was already on my case, for what, for asking a simple question. When did it become wrong to

ask questions of anyone in the organization? What was with all this sudden “protocol” stuff? I never received anything from anyone stating the protocol that I was expected to follow during the first 18 years of my career.

The next day I got an email from the local Postmaster telling me that I was to follow a certain protocol in all future matters. Who would have known a simple question could turn the postal world upside down? I wondered about the purpose of such a message. Were they testing my will to stay the course? Were they insecure about HQ involvement or was HQ too important for minion conversation? Maybe she was a feminist interested in only furthering women and couldn't have me upstage the acting Plant Manager she personally backed.

I decided to think about it over the weekend before deciding. After all, I had just rented an apartment and furniture for the month. I decided to stick it out despite her efforts to deny me a legitimate opportunity. However, the workers there were suffering and looking for someone to help them. I felt I could be that person...

Meanwhile, day-to-day, there were consistently late trucks, plan failures (service failures), and delayed mail. As my first 60 days began winding down, the full assault on my abilities began...

The acting Plant Manager began to place blame on supervisors, including me, for her scheduling blunders. She refused to force anyone to work his or her day off, come in early, or stay late. This led to a shortage of employees to run machines, a lot of employee movement, and inefficient machine throughput. Machines need a full complement of employees to run productively. She also blamed one of the operations support staff for failing to do things when she never asked.

The inadequate staffing led to a huge volume of delayed mail and on-hand mail after Memorial Day. Trucks were extremely late getting out and the field was crying foul. The next morning, I had to do the Telecon while the acting Plant Manager was off. My boss came around to me in the conversation and lit me up when I tried to explain what happened. I was telling her the same information as the other 28 people on the call, but she wanted it in a specific format that I was not made aware of. Apparently, no one

felt it was his or her responsibility to tell me what she wanted to hear. She was upset with me and said I was to call her personally after the Telecon finished. I did, and she told me exactly what she wanted to hear. She wanted to hear about planned and achieved thresholds. It was an indistinguishable difference in words. When I said that I had not made any of the decisions that caused the failure the night before she snapped, “Maybe you’re not ready for leadership yet!” If leadership meant taking the blame for someone else’s blunders, maybe not.

After the Telecon, I asked another manager if the thresholds I heard quoted and accepted were arbitrary. He responded, “Yes.” He went on to say, “don’t worry about the Telecon, she’s just letting you know she’s your boss.” So, this was an accepted practice. Worse yet, the district manager sat right behind her during these Telecon’s and did nothing to reign in her nasty, unjustified behavior. The district consistently preached about directing and coaching our employees, yet I never received any direction of any kind when it came to the required format of Telecon answers.

Strike # 2.

The acting Plant Manager made many operational changes without any communication with supervisors or employees. Before anyone could adjust to the changes, they changed yet again. No one knew from one day to the next if things were going to be different or the same. Unfortunately, her plans caused more work than they saved. If she had just communicated these changes clearly, we could have done more to make them work. Bad plans can work, and good ones can fail if people want them to. I was told that when I took over, I was not to change anything the outgoing manager had put into place. I was supposed to work with her to make them work. So much for any latitude to make decisions.

Ann would come onto the workroom floor and move everyone without regard to the agreed schedule. She was running around the floor making decisions the supervisor was supposed to make. I finally had enough and approached her.

"By analyzing too minutely we often reduce our subject to atoms, of which the mind loses its hold."
--Thomas Jefferson to Edward Everett, 1823. ME 15:414

“Ann, I had everyone scheduled to run certain operations tonight, but I see that you’ve moved them.”

Ann interjected. “Where’s the delayed mail at! It’s not over there.”

The delayed mail was from the previous night, but because of the big drop-off in volume, it was not in jeopardy of missing standards again. “Everything was covered.”

“You only had three people over here.”

A recent workplace survey revealed that four out of five people—managers and workers alike—know firsthand the woes of being micromanaged. Micromanagers hurt productivity and morale—and often drive workers away. In fact, one out of three people has changed jobs because of a micromanager. Source: #611, Innovative Leader, Volume 14, Number 1, January-March 2005 - **Surviving the Micromanager: How to Succeed With a “My Way” Boss** by Harry E. Chambers).

“More are scheduled over here shortly,” I responded.

“Both of us can’t be giving different orders to the same people because we look like buffoons. Either you’re going to supervise or I am.”

“I guess I will then!” she said.

To avoid further confrontation, I retreated to the office and waited for her to leave. I had no choice but to confront her, because the employees were being bounced around and being used ineffectively. Management must be on the same page, and we clearly were not. She had come in late, based her decisions on the previous nights’ conditions, and made snap decisions without talking to me or assessing the current situation. Adding insult to injury, she chose to make a public scene showing management out of sync. She did not consider directing and coaching rather than taking over as the supervisor. She was not building an effective, efficient team as much as she was destroying what little existed. Clearly, she could not manage supervisors, as she was still thinking on a smaller scale.

My first Monday as the Plant Manager rolled around after a weekend in which I did the scheduling. Nearly everyone worked their day off to staff all areas, especially

automation. Everyone also worked late Monday morning to avoid delayed mail and trucks. Unfortunately, many employees elected to call in sick (intentionally) and some failed to call at all (AWOL). I planned on dealing with these employees appropriately. When I explained this as part of the reason for some service issues, one of the local managers said I should have foreseen this. I had but it was mere speculation until it happened. The biggest problem was that the supervisors did nothing to make sure people kept their schedule, nor did they submit requests for discipline. There is no reason a few sick calls must make or break the goal of clearing committed mail on time. Staffing should allow for such circumstances. In fact, the only time the mail cleared was when everyone showed up and the volume was extremely light. In other words, only when the stars aligned perfectly. What the District missed was that I had forced people in for the first time to move mail. Even in the worst-case scenario, this was a huge improvement in the way things had been run up to that time. Maybe some District Heads weren't ready to manage.

My boss and others at the district level didn't care what the circumstances were if things were done. I understood that,

but the means was not there. I had done this same job for many years and knew when things could or could not be done. I got people to work, made them work, improved the processes, and yet the mail could not be cleared. District was not responding to any requests for machine upgrades or additions, just insisted I stay within protocol.

Hypocritically, this Plant also had the highest productivity in the district, but also had the least number of employees.

Based on the circumstances, I felt it was best to return to my regular position and terminated my assignment immediately. I had nothing to prove any more. And for what, a position far from home. I didn't want the job permanently, so there was no end game for me. Leaving was the only solution to a detail I wish I hadn't taken.

I had mixed feelings about leaving Eau Claire. For one, I felt like I had betrayed the workers. There were things that could be done, even though my hands were largely tied. Then again, my boss she made it clear she wanted me to fail and was making sure I did. Similarly, Ann couldn't be trusted and would have undermined me at every opportunity. Ultimately, many of the problems were easily

broken down to a shortage of employees, and that was not in my control.

I was told numerous times to focus on day-to-day operations only. Stephen Covey suggests that short-term focus and crisis management were not important, whether urgent or not, and should be avoided by effective managers. If I focused on the day-to-day operations only, how could I be effective? I had witnessed far too many short-term focus managers that did what they could to look good and move on, leaving the place in disarray. Of course, most of the 'brilliant managers' blamed the following person for the failure. If you were truly a success, the place should carry on without you just fine.

Effective personal management, says Covey, is to deal with things that are not urgent, but important. It deals with things like building relationships, writing a personal mission statement, long-range planning, exercising preventative maintenance, and preparation.

To paraphrase Peter Drucker, effective people are not problem-minded; they are opportunity-minded. They feed opportunities and starve problems. The USPS, however,

fed problems and starved opportunities. Drucker continued; effective people think preventively. They have crises and emergencies that require their immediate attention, but they are comparatively small. Effective people focus on the important, but not urgent, high advantage capacity-building activities. These include vision and perspective, balance, discipline, control, and a few crises.

Crises and problems will shrink to manageable levels if you're thinking ahead, work on the root problems, and do the preventative work to keep situations from becoming problems. Not with the Post Office, instead hiring is slow, grievances flow, and higher ups make-work to keep every crisis alive. Called the Pareto Principle, 80% of the results flow out of 20% of the activities.

Rather than stand out, USPS managers do what they can to avoid attention. Attention is overwhelmingly negative and includes being on email lists showing you haven't completed something. Then, there are Telecons and Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs) to contend with.

Unfortunately, the biggest problem is that higher-level managers, far removed from operations, make too many decisions. They were discounting the efforts of those on site, doing the work, and accountable. Some of the critics had little to no knowledge of operations. They came through some fast-track program or previously supervised different or specialized operations. Small plants operated very differently from large ones. The primary difference was that in small plants, employees worked many different jobs, while in big plants they usually worked the same one. Similarly, supervisors in small plants (under 200 employees) supervised all operations on the floor, while in large plants they supervised one operation. Obviously, supervisors in small plants were required to know far more about operations to do their job effectively day in and day out. Even small plants varied according to location, population served, businesses, and make-up of mail.

Every day the plant manager or plant rep would have to sit through three Telecons and explain every problem, big or little, to District Managers and every other District Plant. The focus was problems. Nothing was about opportunities, long-term fixes, or strides. There was no encouragement,

constructive criticism, or positive coaching. It was just a daily beatdown.

Adding to my issues in Eau Claire was that the supervisor, who acted first as Plant Manager, allowed sick leave and overtime to explode out of control, while many workers did little or nothing. There was excessive tension, and many felt they received disparate treatment. Harassment and favoritism were rampant. Some felt that no one listened to anything they had to say. People did what they wanted, when they wanted, and how they wanted. If they were in the least bit upset, they would simply go home sick.

Compounding the problem was that there was not any consequence for doing so. As good workers watched the problem grow, they felt more helpless and insignificant.

Another problem was that Ann had a horrible attendance record. Not only did she miss many days of work, but she was also often tardy, and left without notice (AWOL). She was quick to blame her peers, undermine her superiors, and feed into gossip. Unfortunately, she was able to persuade others in the district to let her act as the manager of the building when the regular manager transferred. They gave her this opportunity because of her ideas to fix the

operational problems. When asked to share her plans by the previous manager, she said she forgot them at home or that they were out in her vehicle. When the manager asked her to get them from her vehicle, she made more excuses. She dodged him and shared these plans with the district. Although her plans were no more intricate than those shared and implemented by supervisors during regular duty, she received a temporary assignment.

You can promote someone, but you are unlikely to make a leader out of a non-leader. Sick leave consistently ran over 6% while she was a supervisor and the manager.

Productivity was stagnant, service remained poor, and morale worsened. Trust was at an all-time low and the supervisors and workers would not follow her.

Any fun or pride they took in their jobs eroded, grievances increased, productivity decreased, and EEO claims rose. Ann didn't know how to handle grievances, so the office had to bring in someone from outside to go through the pile she had. Certainly, many were deemed untimely and simply paid. None of this mattered to District, who was more concerned if I 'broke the chain of command,' asked

questions, or stepped outside of the path I was ordered to follow. A puppet had less strings working its limbs.

I listened to the many problems employees shared. They included:

- No goals were established or only vaguely known

- Supervisors failed to challenge lazy workers and deal with negative behaviors
- Supervisor burnout
- Inconsistent management (same circumstances would receive different decisions)
- Management turnover at top position
- Broken promises by District managers, continued rhetoric, and lack of a mission to end excessive overtime
- Good workers were working while others were continually calling in sick, many of them claiming FMLA they were not entitled too. Again, the managers were not challenging any abusers. In fact, some of them abusing their sick leave were the supervisors. Their boss too, did not challenge them.
- Poor work procedures

Absenteeism - - A manager's attitude can affect absenteeism, especially if there is an unpleasant environment or unpopular manager. In such cases, short of risking their jobs, workers will use all kinds of excuses to miss work. The introduction of the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and Sick Leave Dependent Care (SLDC) has only worsened the situation. Although sick calls are often phony, it is possible that unpleasant work environments can lead to more actual illnesses.

- Excessive outside interference in the ongoing problems (delayed mail, excessive on-hand volumes, high sick leave rates (6.5%), high overtime (17.5%), and late trucks.
- The lack of means to getting the job done (machines, staffing, budget, etc).

In my experience, employees that work overtime for an extended period grow accustomed to the extra money, and grow dependent on it. The problem occurs when the overtime is suddenly gone as is often the case when a new machine or new people are hired. Suddenly, the employee that is dependent on the extra money in their check is struggling to pay his bills. Some employees will drag their feet or do things to undermine operations in hopes of working overtime. A supervisor should keep employees aware of any future changes that are expected and how it may affect them.

On the other side, you have the employees that do not want to work any overtime. They prefer to work their required eight hours and go home. These people might have someone they have to take care of, children, or a spouse. Maybe they just want a better balance between work and

their personal life. When this type of person consistently faces overtime, they are more likely to call in sick when they really need a day off. After all, they know if they go to work, they are probably going to work forced overtime, regardless of their other obligations.

The best option is somewhere between too much overtime and too little. The absence of any overtime, where employees are not exempt, generally suggests overstaffing in production lines. Likewise, excessive overtime generally becomes costly in terms of additional pay premiums, morale, and accidents. Each company must determine the overtime percentage that triggers additional hiring or a cut in hours. This point is found by determining the point at which the cost of an additional employee is cheaper than overtime. For the USPS, we figured that at a consistent overtime rate of seven percent or more it was cheaper to hire another employee. If we were consistently under three percent, we did everything we could to cut hours, because we knew things were slower than normal and productivity dependent on the appropriate hours. In Duluth, we tried to operate between three and seven percent overtime, believing this was the ideal place to be financially.

As I dug into the sick leave issues in Eau Claire, WI, I found that no one had been keeping leave records for anyone. It took me about 30 days to create leave records for everyone on the afternoon shift. As I did, I would talk to the offending employees and issue corrective action where timely and warranted. Many were untimely and nothing more could be done except to talk to the employee. It was important that they knew their attendance was now being closely monitored. Disturbingly, I found names of people I didn't even know were employed there. They were completely unaccounted for, such as on sick leave or AWOL, and no one was pursuing them. In the end, it was all for nothing as the acting Plant Manager didn't have the knowledge to handle the impending grievances and someone else had to come in to handle them. And this was the Districts Plant Managers' pick!

I was told to maintain what the other plant manager did before me did. Really? Change reports, ignore discipline problems, ignore grievances, and lie about delayed volumes. The District Plant Manager already had that person in charge and should just keep her. When trucks left late, she went into the program and changed the times.

After operations support entered daily mail counts, processing delays, and late arriving mail into the Mail Condition Reporting System (MCRS), Ann would change them to look much better. She was looking productive by simply fixing the numbers, not moving the mail. The district had to have known but didn't care. I couldn't follow that process because it was wrong, and falsifying reports [for some] was a termination offense.

Her handling of problems was atrocious. There was a situation where two employees got into an intense argument and

"The only exact testimony of a man is his actions, leaving the reader to pronounce on them his own judgment." --Thomas Jefferson to L. H. Girardin, 1815. ME 14: 295

one threw coffee in the other's face. Both received emergency placement (immediate suspension) pending disciplinary action. The manager on duty requested removal of the person throwing the coffee and a 14-day suspension for the other. The one throwing the coffee was involved in an altercation just two years earlier and suspended. Just a few weeks after this altercation, the other man had another outburst, swearing and yelling at other employees. Again, he was placed on emergency placement

pending discipline. In poor judgment, the acting Plant Manager, dismissed any charges of removal and brought them back. Why? “We are too short handed.” Great message, we only fire for egregious behavior when we are adequately staffed, which ranges from rare to extremely rare.

There were various problems with this. First, this man was a serious threat to other employees and had proved it via two serious altercations and numerous verbal altercations. Second, the Plant Manager failed to support her supervisor who requested the termination. Third, she let everyone know that he was coming back because new hires were hard to get and took time. The message the employees received was “if we’re short-handed, it doesn’t matter what I do.” It also seriously hurts the discipline cases against the other person, and any other case that may arise. It would be difficult to terminate anyone else because the union could claim disparity.

The signs of an out-of-control workplace became obvious immediately. When I was short one clerk, I asked about a gentleman who was throwing manual letters. There was

nothing physically wrong with him or another reason he couldn't help. I approached him and said, "Jim, we need your help on the flat sorter."

"You want me to help on the flat sorter," he said standing up.

"Yes.

He walked to the timeclock with me in tow, clocked out, and left. I requested a suspension and issued it to him upon his return. He wasn't going to be a person I could rely on, but it was a strong message to send to everyone else.

On another day, I asked one of the two mail handlers on the canceling machine to help somewhere else. The machine worked best with two people on it, but one could do it well. In this case, the machine wasn't going to receive the proper flow of mail without a mail handler helping to dump and screen raw mail. We used one mail handler in Duluth most of the time, doubling up only when we had a lot of mail ready to run and it was crunch time. In Eau Claire, they were using two any time the machine was running. The two mail handlers immediately pitched a fit and didn't want to

comply, one of them being the mail handler union president.

I told him to come back to the office to talk and while he walked, he kept jawing and posturing. Once the door shut behind him though, he took on a completely different character. I gave him an official job discussion and impressed on him the need for cooperation. He knew as well as anyone that they didn't always need two people to run it, but this was the first time someone called him on it. This one conversation was all it took for him to start working with me.

In Eau Claire, sat the most qualified person for the Plant Manager job, the Operations Support Specialist. Jerry was the most intelligent, hard-working man I have come across in my many years of government service. Additionally, he had great human relations skills. He would have made a great Plant Manager, but he was not willing to sacrifice the family time it would entail. He remained in Operations Support and did a fantastic job until he felt his company betrayed him. Managers outside the building questioned the amount of work he was doing and made him write down what he was doing every 15 minutes.

Jerry was upset having witnessed the forced surrender of the former Plant Manager and was punished by the district for his loyalty. This office was doing very well in terms of productivity leaving no logical reason for the sudden lynching. In the end, Jerry's reward for his ability was ridicule and humiliation.

Direct Orders

If you are a manager with the USPS, you are likely to receive that phone call one day from your superior to give you a direct order. Lucky me, I have received several. In Eau Claire, it was from the lead plant manager from District to tell me not to bother headquarters with any questions, do what the previous plant manager did, and don't ask about equipment as District would tell me what we needed.

I got another call when I questioned the district about the budgeted hours for my offices. The district finance manager didn't like me questioning how my offices got so little in terms of cleaning time in comparison to others of similar size. The fact was that they didn't get them in my

budget in time for 2015 to offset the hours already used. The clerks were awarded cleaning hours that had to be worked outside of normal window operations, even if the window had nothing going on. This meant if you had six window hours each day, Monday through Friday, and you were given three cleaning hours for the week, you now had 33 hours total between window and cleaning hours for the week. Prior to this time, cleaning was done during open window hours.

The big deal was that I was using hours that hadn't been added to the budget. I was using them outside of window hours as the contract now demanded whereas some offices continued to have cleaning done within window hours. In effect, even if they had the same amount of cleaning time, they were saving all these hours with an adjusted budget. My fear was using them while the district slowly caught up making the necessary budgeted hours by the end of the fiscal year. My boss told me not to worry that they would be there before the fiscal year ended. Of course, they were not, and my budget didn't accurately reflect the hours required to be used in normal operations. As a result, my pay-for-performance was negatively affected, and enough so that I received nothing in terms of a pay increase.

I attempted the corrupt mitigation process to resolve the problem and restore a minimal raise but got nowhere. I personally talked to the District Manager, and he couldn't understand how my hours would have been negatively affected. Let's see, if I was forced to use hours to clean that I didn't have budgeted this inflated my work hours, a key variable of our pay-for-performance. He couldn't understand it regardless of how I explained it to him. I don't know, if you had 35 hours you needed for window operations and suddenly you had to do an additional three hours of cleaning, you would need a budget of 38 hours, right? I was given 35 hours, but not the other three, do you see how this doesn't work? Nope. What would be obvious to virtually anyone wasn't obvious to the District Manager making more than \$170,000 a year. Great pick USPS. This single individual cost the post office several millions in poor decisions, killed morale as a tyrant, showed ongoing disparity, and hired the worst people. Even when he finally retired, he assured a mess for years to come. Where was his proper oversight?

During my discussions with the finance manager my boss was instructed to give me a direct order not to contact them

anymore. “Save it,” I told him, “I will take a suspension before I hear this direct order speech again.” I was sick of it. They made the mistake, and I was getting frustrated trying to get them to do their job. For that, I was supposed to keep my mouth shut, receive no raise as result, and have the district manager give some nonsensical response to my mitigation request. Nope, wasn’t having it.

Again in 2018, I got another warning about not staying within the chain of command. As I heard my boss explain the proper procedure, I was composing an email that didn’t follow his command. Why could the chain of command be enforced from the bottom up, yet everyone higher up could contact us directly? We weren’t soldiers fighting a war that made the chain of command imperative, we were postal employees responsible for the delivery of mail. These direct orders oppressed the very people they needed to do their jobs effectively. Everyone soon learned to conform, avoid risks, and stay unnoticed to every extent possible. Without risks and the ability to expand your knowledge of operations, the USPS effectively damaged its ability to be effective, cost-efficient, and innovative.

In 2019, the whole concern was about the employee or so they claimed. They tracked how many days employees worked consecutively so they wouldn't be burned out, stressed the importance of treating them with civility and concern, and accommodate them as much as possible. How about us managers? Daily, we hear how we weren't being 'civil' when we forced people to work to meet service needs. Unless Houdini could suddenly appear and do some real magic, there was no other way.

There never was any concern other than to make and keep us exempt so they could pile on the endless stream of duties — and threaten to discipline if we didn't get done. Instead, we got on endless email 'lists' showing who hadn't done something. Everyone called them the 'bad list' and considered it the same as shaming. It was really about conformance. Everyone was summoned to attend Telecons, meetings, and phone calls to discuss deficiencies in their office. The scales tipped heavily towards what we did wrong and not what was done right.

When you got on the bad side of District, you were subject to personal attacks in person, phone, and email. Moreover, you were subject to Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs)

and additional reporting requirements. Now, you not only were overburdened with your regular work, but you had also even more on your plate. Their punitive programs rarely led to improvements.

The demands placed on managers started showing a breaking at the seams in 2018. Not only were people retiring on their first day of eligibility in droves, but many also took downgrades, many positions had few applicants, if any, and managers of several offices were taking frequent periods of stress leave. Naturally, these signs weren't picked up by District, Area, or HQ, or they simply didn't care. Most people believed the latter.

Stress overload was built into the job as you generally lacked the means available (employees, machinery, and time) to get the job done effectively and efficiently.

Why should you beat yourself up at the end of the day when you have done all that you could? If you

You must have the means available (employees, machinery, and time) to get the job done effectively and efficiently.

made mistakes, make note of it, and rectify the problem. If there is a problem you can fix, fix it as soon as you can.

If the circumstance or situation is outside of your control, notify your manager. If you have done everything possible, realize that's all you can do.

Your productivity is limited to the number of employees, machinery, and time you have. An experienced supervisor generally knows what is possible, and just as importantly what isn't. It doesn't mean you give up, just that you should not beat yourself up needlessly. You have higher ups ready and waiting to do that. Always try, but do not allow yourself to feel that you have failed. If your office is designed to fail (poor budget, understaffed, transportation issues, etc.) and out of your control, you must learn to let it go or it will eat you alive.

The reward for being a manager is long hours, calls outside of work, stress, and if you were lucky, a modest raise at the end of the year. A regular employee could make the same or more by working some holidays and overtime. More importantly, they got paid for any time they worked, and could leave work at work. Additionally, they had unions with real bargaining power, not a social club that merely echoed the messaging of the USPS. They were a waste to

contribute too unless you liked to drink, socialize, and do nothing for your members.

Failed Sick Leave Program

As far as sick leave went, a good goal was three percent or less, a harder thing to do with the additions of Sick Leave Dependent Card (SLDC) and the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). In Eau Claire, overtime was pushing 16% and sick leave near double digits. In the absence of attendance control, employees naturally trend towards greater abuse.

There was a built-in incentive for some people to take sick leave over others. The Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) credited employees with time towards retirement for unused SL, whereas the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) did not for many years. When the leave records (PS Form 3972s) were reviewed one could easily identify one from the other from the amount of red ink notating unscheduled leave. CSRS employees commonly had little or no red while FERS employees generally had plenty. Employees knew to “Use it or lose it.”

Corrupt Policies

In 2018, I had customer's request extensions to have their mail delivered to their home address or as close as possible. A request for an extension was needed if you were requesting delivery somewhere that wasn't already on the normal line of delivery. The rule we had always followed was that we would approve up to 1.0 miles for a new delivery, 0.5 miles one way and the return. Suddenly, District Customer Service Analysts were saying that if we put them on the regular line of travel it would count as a delivery option. Even if it was three or four miles to their box, they argued, that was enough. I argued that most individuals wouldn't feel their mail was secure so far away. It didn't matter, that was their argument.

On March 18, 2019, I again discussed an outstanding extension request with District. Once more he wanted to know if there was a place to put it on the existing line of travel. I reminded him that this was the individual who petitioned it to District last time when I said we could only do a total of one mile per regulations. "Okay, if he did that, then we have to give it to him," the District Rep said. I was

thinking, what? If they learned the rule, we honored it, otherwise we were to try to fool them into placing it somewhere on the line of travel. Not only was it dishonest but what about the person who was denied a similar request? What if they found out? By rule, if you had an existing delivery already, you couldn't move your box. It was bad practice by any measure.

This fit right in with the “best suited” policy for promotions. It cleared the way for “favorites” to get the job. Similarly, the NPA that is anything but a pay-for performance program. Then there's the discrimination that is acknowledged for members of a protected class but not for anyone else. Isn't discrimination the same no matter who it is? Finally, you can downgrade one manager and punish him financially, but another in the same circumstances, can retain the same pay. These are all tools used by the worst of managers to play God, but without the ethics and morals.

Stupid Things I Did

When the plant manager failed to help me out regarding a new detail, I wrote an email blasting him saying “As long as Jim gets what he wants, screw the rest of us.” Thinking I had forwarded this to another manager in the front office, imagine my surprise to learn I had hit reply to my boss. He wasn’t happy with me, but it was true.

Another time, I was sitting in the supervisor’s office with the other supervisors, the union president, and the plant manager discussing the settlement of a grievance. For some reason, I had taken a seat on my desk rather than on my chair. As the discussion continued a clerk came in to say everyone could hear the discussion on the intercom. Somehow, I had sat against the phone triggering the intercom. The plant manager and union president were in a panic. “Shut that off!” the boss yelled. Hitting the buttons didn’t do it, so he grabbed the phone and pulled the cord out. Oops. My boss and the union president were both red in the face, embarrassed, and mad. Hell, how did I know my ass could magically put the conversation on speaker.

A Manufactured Crisis

In 2006, Congress passed the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (PAEA) that created the financial crisis that now exists. PAEA requires the USPS to pre-fund employee post-retirement health benefits 75 years into the future. The USPS would have made money every year since 2013 without this pre-funding mandate. So, yes, the crisis is somewhat manufactured.

The Postal Service added to its own problems with its devastating POSTPlan. POSTPlan added to its woes by eliminating overnight delivery, damage to service standards, and reduced retail hours. Despite their calculations, the OIG found the USPS saved just 5% of the initial projections. I would venture to say it lost money when you added the greater loss of revenue for first class letters. Now that there was no true overnight service, many went online earlier rather than later. We'll discuss that in the next section.

What did Congress and America think would happen if your prices are fixed, costs remain unchanged or moving

with inflation, and you're suddenly presented with a bill to pay to prefund 75 years of retirement health benefits? Of course, it looks dire, but Congress made it appear that way. Nothing else changed.

Leave it to Congress to create bigger problems than needed. They could have amortized this amount over a long period, added an amount to the price of stamps to cover it over the amortized period and that would have been that. Done deal. Nope, it was pay all of it right now even though you can't change prices to cover it. Your break-even strategy needs to squeeze tens of billions of dollars from costs to cover it, now. It was impossible then and remains impossible.

Rather than Congress addressing it again, the issue has now gone on for 14 years and counting. The USPS did further damage to itself by POSTPlan, which cost them more than it saved. Their mathematical calculations failed to do anything but account for the "hours" saved by eliminating retail hours in smaller post offices and consolidating plant operations and plants. Repeatedly we see where their calculations fall far from the actual results as one OIG report after another shows.

POStPlan (Post Office Structure Plan)

To cut financial costs the USPS introduced POStPlan in May 2012. This dramatic plan was dropped on Postmasters without any advance warning. This plan made all level 11, 13, and 16 EAS offices into two, four, or six-hour offices run by clerks, except for a small number that were made into Administrative Post Offices (APO's). An APO might stand alone as a level 18 or 20, but more likely was assigned Remotely Managed Post Offices (RMPOs). The RMPO's were two, four, and six-hour offices.

I was the Postmaster of Barnum MN at the time and my office was assigned to be a six-hour office for Moose Lake. I had no intention of working for Dodge, the PM of Moose Lake, and sought to find another office. Dodge started the same date I did, and we became friends. As time progressed, we both started supervising and our differences soon became apparent. I believed a person's performance should speak for itself while he believed in catering to the vanities of his superior. In the USPS, his way proved to be the most lucrative and simpler route. Real performance didn't matter. If it did, higher level managers would have stopped the manager in delivery from inflating volumes, processed

mail in the most efficient manner, and disciplined the acting Plant Manager in Eau Claire who cheated on everything. They were aware of it, but they benefitted, so they didn't care.

Back to Dodge... While we supervised together, I would run operations while he hung out with our boss. Ironically, this boss told me that "when a higher-level manager came to the floor, I was to drop everything and follow him or her around." I told him, "I thought my job was to run the floor." Nope. What a D-Bag.

Not long after this Plant Manager left. Dodge transferred to the carrier side. After a couple years as a city carrier, he started to supervise part-time. Dodge always inquired about what jobs I was applying for, then apply secretly without saying a word. These deliberate omissions went further and further in time, and my trust for him waned.

On to the POSTPlan disaster... Before POSTPlan, the target for first-class overnight delivery-on-time ranged from 96.5 to 96.65% while we achieved from 96.19 to 96.5% for years 2009 to 2011. After POSTPlan went into effect the goal ranged from 96.00 to 96.70%. while nationally we

achieved 95.6 % to 96.5% from 2012 to 2015 when the measurement was discontinued. It was falling annually after PostPlan in 2012. While the target remained largely unchanged, what was achieved fell dramatically. Note: I took first-class, first-class composite, and first-class letters and flats (large manila envelopes and magazines) as the performance indicators. This drop in on-time delivery was expected...by everyone. When they consolidated mail processing facilities and reduced operations in many, the overnight score was guaranteed to drop...and disappear. Plants like Duluth, Rochester, Mankato, and St. Cloud that used to cancel and process their own mail now simply transferred it to semi-trailers and sent to Eagan for canceling and sortation. The local mail would then return for its final processing before going to its destination. This meant if you dropped a letter in a collection box in Duluth and it was destined for the house next door, it took two days.

The change in first class service is still disliked by customers who continue to complain about it. Before leaving the Duluth Plant in 2002 I had submitted my ideas of cutting costs and improving efficiency for the plant and district. This included maintaining local cancelation of all

mail, retaining local parcels, and shipping off outgoing parcels unworked for the automated parcel sorters in Eagan. This guaranteed overnight delivery standards would not be harmed, and the manual and inefficient handling of parcels was eliminated. As we would only handle parcels destined for local delivery, there would be only one setup a day, versus the multiple ones previously. We would have eliminated manual sortation of priority, standard, and first-class outgoing packages without any harm to delivery scores and saved an incredible amount of manual labor. Additionally, smaller plants always outperformed larger ones in canceling and automation productivities.

When the USPS secretly designed POSStPlan, they looked more at the utilization hours of each machine, rather than preserving delivery standards. First class mail was their main revenue source, and they seriously hurt themselves by dismissing its importance. We could have had cuts without the ensuing revenue drop. Yes, first-class mail was diminishing, but what there was could have been maximized year to year by maintaining delivery standards. As it was, collection boxes were being collected much earlier in the day, forcing customers to make the new times, or be prepared to have a local letter take three days.

Looking beyond utilization rates, the canceling machine can sort to different bins by zip codes after processing. This allowed mail to be canceled and then sorted to local or outgoing. The outgoing could have been trayed, containerized, and shipped out without further handling in the local plant. This would have preserved first-class service without any damage to other overnight, second day, and third-day service. Instead, many of these cancelers would find their way to storage. I have since recommended it via their IdeaSmart program but received no feedback. This program is also a total farce that I will discuss in another section.

As the USPS reported in its FY2018 Annual Report, page 23, “First-Class Mail and Marketing Mail continued to provide the majority of our operating revenue in FY2018. As a percentage of operating revenue, First-Class Mail and Marketing Mail combined represented 58.7 percent, 60.8 percent and 64.1 percent (before the 2016 change in accounting estimate) for the years ended Sept. 30, 2018, 2017, and 2016, respectively. Combined First-Class Mail and Marketing Mail volume represented 91.5 percent, 91.7 percent, and 92.1 percent in FY2018, FY2017, and

FY2016, respectively.”

How can they not see that bringing canceling operations back to some plants, such as Duluth, Mankato, and Eau Claire, WI, that are far away from Eagan, would boost all delivery scores. This would boost customer satisfaction, return overnight service, and improve second- and threeday delivery times. It would help slow the decrease in first-class revenue as well. As will be discussed in POSTPlan, no savings were realized and by regressing some, they could fix some of the issues. First-Class Mail is still contributing the most to overall revenue and improving service would retain it for a longer period. The overnight service that is sorely missed now, could be restored.

The postal service has never sold the real value of its mail delivery service. Sure, they tell everyone about its universal service to every residence and business in the United States, but with the era of hacking and vulnerable online programs, they should be stressing its security. A letter, in the hands of the USPS, remains the most secure way of getting a mail piece from one place to another without tampering. Theft is extremely rare within the post office and generally leads to charges and dismissal quickly.

Well it used to, but now, some cases have shown that even when there is blatant falsification, we keep them. With the increase in tracking abilities, the ability to catch the rare thief is even more likely. They also remain the cheapest with offices in nearly every community. You're never going to see Amazon, FedEx, or UPS put stations in the numerous little communities around the country. There's no money in it for them.

On May 3, 2016, the Government Accountability Office issued a report about the cost savings the Postal Service may have achieved with POSTPlan, the initiative that reduced hours at 13,000 small post offices and eliminated their postmaster positions. The report made it clear the plan did not save \$500 million a year the Postal Service projected. The GAO stated the primary issue was the accounting used by the USPS in computing POSTPlan savings.

The GAO report came per the request of the House committee and subcommittee overseeing the Postal Service. They wanted to know how the arbitration decision on the dispute with the APWU were affecting POSTPlan staffing and estimated cost savings.

The report was originally entitled “U.S. Postal Service: Improved Guidance, Data, and Analysis Are Needed to Inform Future Efforts to Achieve Savings.” It criticized the Postal Service for failing to do a more rigorous analysis of the cost savings, before and after implementation of the 13,000 downsizings. The draft of the report was answered by Edward F. Phelan, Jr., Vice President of Delivery Operations for the Postal Service. He stated the USPS “disagreed with the title, tenor, and tone of the document.”

The report remains extremely critical of how the Postal Service has dealt with the cost-savings issue. The GAO has historically been very favorable toward post office closings and other cost reduction efforts, but even they question the financial effects of POSTPlan. Additionally, it makes several recommendations about how the Postal Service should proceed if POSTPlan expands to more post offices.

The Postal Regulatory Commission also questioned the accuracy of the Postal Service’s cost-savings estimate in its August 2012 advisory opinion on POSTPlan. This was before implementation began. The GAO report shows that more than three years later into POSTPlan, the Postal

Service lacked a very rigorous cost-savings analysis.

The Postal Service explained that POSTPlan did not aim for a specific cost-savings goal, so a “quick and dirty” approach was good enough. This is *prima facie* evidence of the haste and little thought that went into this plan. In its estimate for the PRC, the Postal Service simply figured the pre-POSTPlan cost of labor (by multiplying the number of impacted offices by the average postmaster salary with benefits), and then subtracted the cost of labor after POSTPlan, when the 13,000 offices would be staffed by workers earning a relatively low hourly wage. The USPS claims that yielded a savings of \$516 million a year, but did it?

The PRC pointed out several flaws in the methodology used in USPS calculations. For one, the actual salaries were probably higher than the average, over 3,000 offices were already staffed by part-time workers, and so on. The GAO report made the same points, noting several other sources of “imprecision” in more recent calculations prepared by the Postal Service.

After the PRC advisory opinion was issued, a labor arbitration decision in 2014 determined that Level 4 and 6 POSTPlan post offices would need to be staffed by bargaining-unit employees, such as clerks, rather than the less costly part-time employees the Postal Service had planned to use. That decision had a serious impact on the cost savings. The Postal Service estimates that labor costs are now \$181 million more than originally estimated. That brings the total savings down from \$518 million a year to about \$337 million — roughly a third less than projected. The GAO also found many inaccuracies and errors in the Postal Service’s data on labor costs, which cast doubt on the reliability of the savings estimate. Then there are all the other costs associated with the plan that are not figured in to this estimate — like the cost of giving thousands of postmasters a retirement incentive (\$69 million), the cost for modifying lobbies so they can be open 24 hours a day (\$8 million for 2,200 offices, plus an unknown amount for another 2,200 offices), the cost for administering 13,000 community meetings and doing all the surveys (\$389,200), as well as various other largely unknown or hard-to-figure administrative costs.

In all the costs exceeded \$327,389,200 more than the rudimentary calculations of the USPS, before calculating in the ensuing loss of revenues.

The POSTPlan post offices brought in about \$565 million in FY 2011, before the changes began, compared to \$401 million in FY 2015 — a drop of nearly 30 percent. During that same period, revenues at all post offices declined by about 14.6 percent (about 4 percent a year). Assuming the affected POSTPlan lost 15.4% more than the general decline, that amounts to an added revenue loss of \$87.01 million, just for one year, 2015 vs. 2011. The projected savings of \$518 million was now calculated at just \$103.6 million or 20% of initial projections. The ongoing loss of revenue, within three years of POSTPlan, resulted in greater overall costs than savings.

The figures are missing the huge administrative costs of realigning the transportation network, change in collection times, new reporting procedures, and the loss of experienced managers. The most overlooked cost was the devastation to an already demoralized workforce. This plan was dropped on everyone without notice, completely changing their positions. Postmasters of now lower level

offices were left with the choice of retiring, taking huge pay cuts, loss of independence, and need to move.

POSTPlan led to thousands of experienced postmasters retiring, many before they would have chosen to, and thousands of others transferred to a new position, often far from home. In the end, about 450 postmasters were involuntarily separated by a Reduction-in-Force (RIF). The feckless Postmaster Organization merely sat on its hands while its members lives were cast into disarray. Where was the advance notice, planning, and decency?

Cutting hours caused POSTPlan offices to suffer a decline in revenues that was about twice as large as the average post office. It also makes it likely that more offices will be downgraded after further review, which will lead to yet further revenue declines. A temporary moratorium on closing delayed further office cuts for now.

The Postal Service told the GAO that the revenue was not lost. It had simply migrated to other sources, like the Administrative Post Office for each POSTPlan office, other alternative access points (like Village Post Offices), and online with USPS.com. The Postal Service also noted that

total revenues for all POSTPlan offices, including the APOs, remained the same — percentagewise in terms of total walk-in revenues — which provides some evidence that the revenues did migrate to other post offices.

Of course, the Postal Service would make a defense for their ill-advised POSTPlan disaster. The claim that total revenues remained the same, “percentage-wise in terms of total walk-in revenues” means absolutely nothing. Walk-in revenues are fees and monies collected at the window of the post office. It includes PO Box fees, money order fees, and stamp sales. The total revenue comprises walk-in revenue as well as click-n-ship (printing postage from your computer). If they move in parallel to one another, no change would be detected. Simply stated, it means if walk-in revenue dropped the same, percentagewise, as click-n-ship sales, the percentage wouldn’t change. Overall revenues had fallen considerably as previously mentioned so this “percentage-wise” claim is mere crap.

Furthermore, when you make your product harder to get, particularly by traveling further distances, especially in rural areas, alternatives are sought. It’s a basic economic principle. The USPS made it outlets more difficult to get

too, increased mileage to services, and cut its biggest contributor to income, first-class, by changing the processing areas. True overnight service to most areas was decimated overnight. In the PRC's advisory opinion on the 2011 plan to close 3,700 post offices, which was supposed to save \$200 million, one expert witness estimated it would cost 16 million customers \$232 million in additional fuel costs — more than the Postal Service would be saving. It was just passing the cost onto the consumer.

The GAO was not convinced by the Postal Service's responses, concluding that the Postal Service had embarked on POSTPlan with an "incomplete picture" of the impacts on revenue.

The GAO has recommended that the Postal Service be more rigorous in its analysis of costs and lost revenue if it is going to expand POSTPlan to more offices. I would say something more than 30 seconds of calculating one factor without considering the numerous other effects. Many of us thought they tried this plan to force Congress to act on legislation. Fatal mistake. Congress finalizing timely and meaningful legislation is exceptionally rare.

The USPS claims there are savings, but whatever they are, it represents less than a percentage of the Postal Service annual revenues of \$69 billion. The facts show the whole plan was insignificant for savings and did far more harm than good.

Like the NPA, POSTPlan should be considered proprietary as it is another plan that did nothing but damage the bottom line. The incompetence throughout the ranks, specifically at the highest levels was effectively crippling the Postal Service.

After POSTPlan

POSTPlan wasn't the only time the USPS projected savings that failed to materialize. The OIG audited the HCR Optimization program put in place in 2016. This plan was aimed at reducing surface transportation costs by identifying, adjusting, and eliminating unnecessary HCR trips.

The USPS set its annual goal on total HCRs. They reported savings of \$67 million, far exceeding its goal of \$44 million. The OIG, however, found the methodology used for calculating savings included errors, ultimately resulting in a

net overstatement of \$82 million. Not only were there no savings, the OIG computed a loss of \$25 million. <https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/ddfault/files/documentlibrary-files/2018/NL-AR-19-002.pdf>. Funny math exposed again.

The Coming Financial Cliff

In March of 2019, the USPS was looking at a financial cliff within two years unless it received a bailout. USPS' liabilities exceeded its assets by \$64 billion and its unfunded liabilities sat at \$140 billion.

In 2018 it lost almost \$6 billion and expects to lose \$7 billion in 2019. This USPS is \$13.2 billion in debt to the Treasury with a statutory borrowing limit of \$15 billion.

Part of the bottom line was harmed by the requirement the USPS pre-fund its pensions and retiree health benefits. The USPS claimed they were being mandated to pre-fund for a greater number of employees than it would be paying for. They said the amount was determined by the higher number of employees the USPS once had and not the smaller, current number.

While managers took a hit on their NPA, executives, many at the top of their Level 1 pay (\$207,800 in Calendar Year 2017) took home some hefty bonuses. In the FY2018 Annual Report to Congress they justify it by stating "...our governing law provides that executives should be compensated at a level comparable to the private sector, we do not have the resources to achieve this level of compensation. Compensation for our executive officers remains significantly below that of similarly-ranked senior executive in the private sector...Under certain programs, we can award bonuses or other awards, which raise the level of compensation beyond this limit..."

They provide these bonuses year after year, regardless of USPS performance. If managers are tied to the NPA, why aren't they? A total of eight executives got a calendar year bonus/other payment of more than \$50,000. Another three got between \$10,000 and \$17,000. Exactly, what performance did they deliver to get large bonuses? If someone is making the Level 1 maximum of \$207,800, a \$50,000 award is 24% of base pay.

Are the rest of the managers compensated comparable to the private sector? Does it really matter. If you can find a

better job in the private sector, believe me, you will go as fast as you can to get your jacket on. Hell, you might even leave it. The private sector and government are dramatically different in that the government weighs you down in bureaucracy. No private institution could survive under the rules the USPS subjects itself too, nor should they. How many private institutions would have multiple unions pitted against each other and undermining managerial effectiveness at every step? None, that expects to survive against competitors. How many private institutions would provide its executives large bonuses while the company continually performs poorly? Well, a lot, but eventually it catches up to them. While claiming to “not have the resources” to reach higher levels of compensation, they do have the resources to pay out big bonuses year after year. These bonuses are given despite the horrific performance of the USPS. Moreover, these executives are the ones setting the impossible goals for managers, making sure they never exceed more than three percent.

The truth is that more people know about the performance of private companies than they do about the USPS. A lot of what they do is kept secret or embedded in befuddling

messaging. Heck, most people within the USPS only know the basics about the inner workings, and less still about its finances. Most just go to work, do their job, and go home. They don't care what is going on if they earn enough to support themselves and/or their family.

The Current State

As I write this in 2020, it has become evident to myself and other managers nationwide that the enemy of the Postal Service lies within. The good ole boys club had now existed long enough that incompetence now ran through the higher ranks. The managers in the field were at the mercy of the endless reports, telcons, naughty lists, and endless demands. It was now impossible to perform every requested duty, even half-ass, working endless hours seven days a week. Rather than providing relevant physical supervision of employees, you were literally chained to your computers.

As an example, I will give you the rundown on a typical day for a postmaster in a level 20 office. The first thing you do is check to see who called in sick. That's legitimate, but with the number of vacancies you already have, the difficulty of finding assistance from local offices, and the horrendously inefficient hiring system, you need to pray each day that no one called in.

If someone did, then you go through the motions to see what help you can find, and if you can't find any, guess what, you're it. If it takes all day, your work will continue to build. All the reports still must be done, and no one cares that you didn't have time for it. As further fallout, you may have to attend a telcon as punishment, further putting you behind.

If God has answered your prayer, you get to move on to your next item of business, a morning housekeeping inspection checklist. You also must do a GEMBA walk around checking for additional safety check. You might ask, what the hell is Gemba? *Gemba*, spelled less commonly as *Gemba* is a Japanese term meaning "the real place." In business, however, *gemba* refers to the place where value is created. Gemba, as used by the USPS, refers to the workroom floor and its condition regarding safety.

These two lists, daily housekeeping checklist and Gemba, must be done daily. The stupid thing is that these aren't huge offices and you would naturally have done this during your normal walks on the workroom floor. By assuming a position as a manager, you already do everything you can

to prevent accidents. God knows that if you have an accident, you pay dearly in time. There are numerous reports, phone calls, and follow up programs that you have now been enlisted too. All accidents result in the person(s) being retrained and followed by a two-year program of closer oversight. If they have had a previous accident, it may demand the issuance of discipline. If there was an injury it might lead to workers compensation, restricted job assignments, and a vacancy. If outside property or people were involved, torts might also be an issue. You'll take a lot of accident pictures and report everything you found, and you will probably still witness the USPS settle claims they had little to nothing to do with. A simple accident can result in two years of extra work, regardless of fault.

Associated with the Gemba walk is the Kaizen board where ideas, to do's, and status of completion are listed. Kaizen is the Japanese word for "continual improvement" and a tool intended to improve quality, productivity, safety, and culture in the workplace.

This tool is intended to increase productivity, improve quality, lead to better safety practices, improved customer satisfaction, and lower costs. Kaizen is used to improve the

overall culture of the company and increase employee retention through improved communication and cooperation, improved morale and employee satisfaction, and greater personal investment in the company among employees and management.

Where I didn't first understand it's benefits when it was clumsily relayed to us via Telcon, I found that its large purpose was to engage employees and bring greater awareness to the everyday risks they encountered. It's easy to get bogged down in the endless bureaucratic requirements of your job and overwhelmed by the endless change of programs to see the value of new programs. Most new programs seemingly had no value or made something that was done easily before now much harder. The few decent programs that came out sometimes got buried with the pile of useless ones.

Then we got the *kamishibai* board, sometimes referred to as 'T-card systems', that consists of a board that displays selected tasks according to a certain logic (area, task, category, etc.) in relation to a time period (hour/day, week, etc.). Each task is displayed on a separate double-sided card

(red and green) with a wider portion at the top for the title, hence the term ‘T-card’

The board allows for easy visual control as the following things will be obvious to the attentive leader or anyone observing the shop floor and the board for that matter: whether the board is being used or not; whether the tasks are being carried out in the intended sequence; and whether any problems were encountered and logged.

Pretty soon, I figured we would be mandated to learn Japanese and adopt every program they had. I had a difficult time growing up speaking my own name because I couldn’t properly say my R’s. Now I was expected to speak some Japanese when I struggled enough with English. I understood the concepts of each but wondered where the new boards would go with all the wall papering we already had because of mandatory postings. And sometimes, I wondered if anything would work to reduce accidents. It seemed they were addressing some issues behind accidents, but others, such as proper staffing, rest, and equipment were lacking.

Some members of the public saw the USPS as a cash ticket when they had an accident with an employee. For example, I had a carrier who turned around a distance after a curve every day to service boxes going the opposite direction. He was struck by a personal vehicle as he was nearly completely turned in the other direction. The private party was inattentive and was driving mostly in the wrong lane when they struck him. If a car had been in the other lane going the right direction, they would have had a head-on collision. Luckily, the carrier was not just in the other lane, pointed in the right direction, but off to the edge of the road when struck. The private party filed a claim and was awarded vehicle damages by the USPS. They were proven to be completely at fault, but our torts department paid out anyway. Stupid.

Buckling to every external and internal claim had become the norm. As proof, I will share a case I had in my last years. A clerk took leave for back surgery, an injury that predated his employment with the USPS. Under the old rules, any injury not caused during employment with the USPS was considered light duty, and the USPS wasn't required to make work to offset their hours. If it was limited duty, or an on-the-job injury, the union contract

required us to make work for him or her within their medical restrictions.

I had begun by denying his original request to return to work under light duty as there was no viable, gainful work given the medical restrictions. At the behest of labor, I started the process of discipline for his absence.

Determined to make it back to work with extensive restrictions, the employee was coached by the union to make it work related. Even though the workers compensation case was ultimately denied, the employee was given full back pay for his missing time because I had supposedly erred in my initial denial. My alleged error, I didn't give a detailed response to his claims of duties he could perform. This was false as I had — and contractually didn't have too.

It turned out that the union had presented a simple SOP of duties I had provided them at step 2 with check marks next to the duties he could do. I had never seen this as it wasn't presented at the time of the request nor during step 1 proceedings. Yes, you could make clerical corrections at step 2, but nothing suggests the submission of new documents. Nonetheless, higher management awarded full

back pay that exceeded what he would have received if he had worked. The truth was that he didn't like working much and averaged just more than 12 hours a week. The award gave 20 hours a week, even for holiday weeks that would have provided less. Adding insult to injury, after the District Reasonable Accommodation Committee (DRAC) drug its feet to return him to work, he got another award for 20 hours a week. It was an infuriating incentive process for the most useless employees.

After full discussions with the heads of labor, medical unit, and injury compensation, I expected a just outcome. It turns out they didn't know shit, and merely shrugged it off when they were wrong. They did nothing to prevent it from happening repeatedly. They greenlighted the unscrupulous to file unwarranted claims. As my boss said, it was water under the bridge. Really? Those awards harmed the bottom line of my work hours and ultimately any raise I was to get, if any. Just another example of how doing your job had no effect on your performance rating and raise. Year after year things happened and outsiders ultimately determined your performance and cost you your raise. Oh well, water under the damn bridge!

Alright, moving on. If you survived the sick call dilemma and have enough staffing to survive the day without your help, you can get on with the normal bureaucracy. The area office requires you to report the number of hours you are committed to for each function area. In my case it was function 2b (city carrier hours) and rural delivery (2A). It approximated the hours you felt you would be using. It was basically the same every day, except for Mondays and days after holidays. The report was useless.

You recorded your daily volumes that weren't recorded by machines. This determined your workload and associated work hours. This was important. Note that it took at least 15 years after the machines were first being used for them to share any numbers with the field. It was standard for logical, available processes to take 10 years or more to be implemented.

The USPS, like any government organization, missed out on this key sharing for more than decade. It leveled the playing field because there were many different interpretations of what constituted flats, small parcels and rolls (SPRs), and packages. These different interpretations led to varying budgets for the same workloads because they

were recorded differently by different people. And yet, all these years later we still are having to input information derived from reports directly into another report. Why aren't they directly populated from one program to another, requiring only that which isn't available by automated means? It would remove human error and represent the most accurate number. Hell, it would save the USPS from unnecessary work.

There were also the reports for performance and clock rings from the previous day. They were generally needed in larger offices to support future decisions. However, in many cases we were forced to login to many different programs for redundant reporting, reports that offered nothing in benefits. Why would you waste managers time reporting the same thing repeatedly? Roll it all up in one program and things would get reported much faster with less errors.

District had you fill out a Dispatch Report even though you scanned collection boxes when pulled and ran a report for verification – a duplication. Carriers had to scan to say they made their last pull from the distribution case and yet, we had to have red and green placards to show when it was

cleared. After the mail was up and we had done a walk around to check cases for missed letters, we had to report it online. Then again, in the afternoon. These duties fell within your normal responsibilities and didn't warrant a special reporting. Likewise, regardless if you entered a bulk mailing/periodical, etc. you had to run reports saying there was nothing left. If someone entered a mailing you knew it and had to enter it in the program. Why not close it out only when you had a mailing, not when you didn't?

The Riots

In May of 2020, the death of George Floyd led to destructive rioting, burning, and looting in Minneapolis, MN. The district manager emailed a summary of the damage on May 30th, stating:

“Last night we lost Minnehaha Station in Minneapolis. 3 vehicles we (sic) taken and burned. The office is a total loss. 27 vehicles were burned beyond recognition. Powderhorn Station was broken into and trashed. Graffiti and windows were broken. Industrial Station in St Paul had 2 windows cracked. I cut delivery in the 3 Minneapolis

stations and Industrial in St Paul. No retail in these sites and no retail at Minnesota Transfer Station was open today. A total of 82,000 deliveries were not made today. That includes some carriers that were call back to ensure all carriers off the street by 700pm.

Tonight, Lake Street Station in on fire. Powderhorn was broken into again also.” Anthony C. Williams, Minneapolis, MN.

While the Minneapolis ordered the police to abandon their precinct and be destroyed, he allowed the city to be pillaged. Governor Tim Walz sat by four days before sending the National Guard. This is what Democratic leadership brought its faithful voters in 2020. Minneapolis became the focal point of further criminal activity in many cities across the country, including Chicago, New York, Portland, and Kenosha.

Killing its Managers

As I write this in 2020, I long for the end of my time at the USPS. Managers are being overwhelmed with endless work before them. The tipping point had come. It all

started with the reorganization of 1992 when they eliminated middle managers from the field and consolidated into HQ, areas, and districts. The elimination of positions and ongoing consolidation continues to this day. Well, what's wrong with that you might ask? With every position that was abolished, the remaining skeleton staff picked up more duties. When the timekeeping department was abolished, we picked it up. When local labor went, we picked it up. The same for transportation (logistics), mailing requirements, bulk mailing, injury compensation, accident reporting, budgeting/finance, etc.

Fast forward from the 1980's to 2020 and it has worsened. New programs and reporting piled upon itself as managers learned to prioritize the impossible. There wasn't a living soul now or ever that could do everything demanded of each manager every single day. Things simply had to be set aside so you could deal with the day's crises and mandatory reports.

I feel for new managers just starting. The strategy of transferring an office in a couple of hours and throwing them to the wolves in the stupid attempt at saving hours was absurd. I knew how that felt and how unimaginably

stressful and defeating it was. I couldn't do that to another person or merely ignore his or her situation. It wasn't an opportunity for development unless you did what you could to make it one. Bosses came and went, yet none seemed to understand the brokenness in the way they trained and trained people.

Ironically, as I volunteered my own time to help a new manager, my boss discouraged my help to her. Why? Did he want her to fail? Did he want to show me my place? Either way, with just three years left, I was keeping my course. I was a runaway train at this point and not turning back for anything. I can see the end and the freedom that it brings. I can sense the silence and see everything clearly. My mind is free and with it I am liberated.

The truth was that I finally saw the way and it was in those that were coming on board to now carry the load into the future. If we failed them, we didn't benefit the company or them. I knew that I was not above instruction and authority, but my first loyalty was to God and carrying forward his principles. I made mistakes, picked myself up and went on trying to do better. I don't allow myself to forget my errors and that allowed me to empathize with

others who fall. We fall together and help each other get up. Together we went forward...

It took me nearly 30 years to surrender my idealism, insecurities, and combativeness to unfairness to realize I wasn't going to change the system. All I could do is to influence the people I did manage. This was enough. If we all did that in our avenues of life, the world would change. And as those that are willing and able to witness, the world needs changing. The wonderful thing is that huge things can come from small acts. A small break in a dam can lead to its complete destruction. Likewise, a small act of kindness can change a person's life. In turn, that person may bring more to their family, and from there it grows. Helping others is truly more fulfilling than helping yourself.

Ridiculous Projections

The USPS commonly makes projections highly favorable to itself that never come close to reality.

Mail Processing Overtime

The United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General audited the Postal Service's management of mail processing overtime during fiscal year (FY) 2018. The Postal Service had a goal to reduce mail processing staffing costs by about \$130.5 million, reduce OT workhours by 1.3 million, and reduce penalty OT (double-time) workhours by 93,000 in FY 2018. Ultimately, mail processing OT costs increased by \$257 million (31%) from FY 2017. If this was darts, you wouldn't have come remotely close to the board.

https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/documentlibrary-files/2019/NO-AR-19-005_0.pdf

In FY 2018, processed mail volume declined by five billion pieces (1.65 percent). Total mail processing complements, however, decreased by about 5,000 career employees and workhours decreased by 4.3 million (about 2.1 percent). Accounting for all factors, overall mail processing staffing costs increased by \$37.4 million (or 0.44 percent), due in part to the increase in OT, as well as contractual general increases and cost of living adjustments.

The OIG found that the Postal Service did not effectively manage mail processing OT in FY 2018. It planned for

total OT costs of about \$732 million, but actually incurred \$1.09 billion, a difference of \$358 million, or 49%.

Moreover, the USPS planned for about 18.5 million OT workhours and 767,000 penalty OT workhours for FY 2018. The actual OT workhours used were 26.7 million (44% over plan) and actual penalty OT workhours were 1.7 million (126% over plan).

The OIG also found that in FY 2018, \$136.6 million of OT was not authorized. This was 3.4 million OT workhours and 13% of total overtime, as compared to 1.1 million OT workhours and seven percent of OT in FY 2017. In FY 2018, there were over 47,000 mail processing OT grievances filed, costing the Postal Service about \$8 million, compared to less than 43,000 in FY 2017, costing \$7.6 million. There was also an employee availability issue with over 13.6 million sick leave hours and 13 million leave without pay hours in FY 2018, with an average of 5,600 employees unavailable every day.

Machine Throughput Exaggerations

The United States Postal Service Office of Inspector

General evaluated the performance and functionality of the Postal Service's High Throughput Package Sorter (HTPS) at the Queens, NY, Processing and Distribution (P&DC). Part of the evaluation was to determine whether transportation savings were realized.

<https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/documentlibrary-files/2018/NO-AR-19-004.pdf>

The Postal Service projected the HTPS would save transportation costs of \$131.1 million for fiscal years (FY) 2018 through 2028 (\$8 million for FY 2018) by eliminating trips between the JFK ISC and other facilities.

The OIG found that the Postal Service only achieved \$269,000 of the projected \$8 million of transportation savings in FY 2018.

Highway Contract Route (HCR) Optimization

The USPS instituted a program called HCR Optimization intended to reduce surface transportation costs by identifying, adjusting, and eliminating unnecessary HCR trips. HCRs are the largest single group of contracts in the

USPS, with about \$3.5 billion spent in fiscal year (FY) 2018.

In FY 2017 (October 1, 2016 – September 30, 2017) the USPS reported savings of about \$67 million, exceeding its expectation of \$44.4 million. The OIG audit found the methodology used to calculate savings was inconsistently followed, inadequate, and not documented. The OIG found the calculated savings included errors, ultimately overstating reporting in some areas and understating them in others. The result was an overstatement of \$82 million. Not only did it not save money, it cost the USPS an addition \$14 million. Great projections!

<https://www.uspsoig.gov/sites/default/files/documentlibrary-files/2018/NL-AR-19-002.pdf>

Final Words

The USPS is not what it once was and never will be again. The letters, newspapers, and magazines are disappearing and leaving the only thing that the Internet cannot replace — parcels. The USPS cannot deliver parcels as cost effectively as its competitors because it is mandated to

provide universal service. Whereas the USPS must stop at or check every box for outgoing mail each day, other couriers only go where they have a package to deliver. Therein lies the issue before the country — should the USPS continue universal service or limit delivery where it's cost effective? Is the need for universal service now dead with the internet and television? If mail is not a key to news distribution and ensuring a democracy then why is there a need for universal service?

The discussions of the original Post Office Act show that many didn't appear to care about the Postal Service being profitable. The subsidized price for newspapers and magazines was “among the surest means of preventing the degeneracy of a free government,” said Jonathan Trumbull, the speaker of the House of Representatives in 1792. The resulting boom in newspapers bore with it, a boom in literacy. The Founders wanted to make sure that Americans could affordably send and receive mail from anywhere. Would they say that now? The answer is debatable.

Yes, they would want mail to be delivered to each box at a cost affordable to all residents. This allows election mail to be delivered by opposing and interested parties to present

their views to the American public. In the absence of fair and balanced media coverage on television and the Internet, there is no other alternative. Our democracy would be subject to such biased, censored platforms as CNN, Facebook, Google, and Twitter. Our republic would be doomed. On the other hand, if there was a delivery system online that could deliver news without any prejudicial position on it, would universal service by the USPS be necessary? If the Internet were provided free to every household, that could theoretically replace it. But it would also mean every household would need a computer and that's where the problem lies. If they couldn't afford one, or chose not to have one, they are not served. Of course, they could also choose not to have mail service.

Could the USPS become profitable again given the existing structure? Yes, but with significant changes. First, the prefunding mandate would need to be amortized over a much longer period or better yet, paid up by legislative action. After it is paid in full to meet current requirements, include its future amortization amount in the price of stamps. This puts the USPS back at break-even, stabilizes its position, and continues to offer cost savings to the American citizen.

Second, undo some of the consolidation instituted under PostPlan. This means returning canceling operations to many plants. This allows all local mail to stay local, returning overnight service, and slowing the pace of first-class mail declines. The consolidation of canceling operations has failed, putting the operation too far from its source, and in less efficient facilities. Local cancellations separate local mail from true outgoing (other destinations not served locally), significantly improving delivery standards. Likewise, it processes the mail for downstream facilities for immediate entry into automation. This means it bypasses its cancellation operations. Meanwhile, that facility would focus on its locally collected mail and ensuring its own overnight deliveries.

The current methodology, whereas the machine utilization rates determine locations is short-sighted and fails to take the customer into account. First-class mail, while in decline, still accounts for the lion's share of the revenue. If someone mails something out for a residence or business locally for delivery next day, that should be possible at a reasonable price. Demanding they upgrade a simple letter to a parcel or express mail piece for next day delivery is extortion. Something that usually costs \$0.55 now costs

\$3.80 as a first-class package, \$7.50 for priority, or \$26.35 for Express. That's a 690 to 4,790 % increase for the same service.

The former plants still have the same room they had when they had the canceling operations. They also have electronic electricians (ETs) needed to service the machines as they still have some automation in-house. To increase utilization, it would be a matter of redirecting uncanceled mail to them via existing routes.

Third, and most difficult, because of opposing unions, is to bring them together for joint talks. The long-term prospects of the USPS are dependent on the cooperation of each with each other and the organization. Ideally, they would merge to become one union with different crafts (city carrier, rural carrier, clerk, and mail handler), allowing cross-craft assignments as needed to provide consistent, reliable service. One union would unify their memberships, giving them greater negotiating power, while abolishing many opposing interests, such as work monopolies. A divided union presence is not nearly as strong as one that is unified in purpose.

If this were possible, there could be in-craft and cross-craft overtime lists. For example, if you were a city carrier and signed up for just the in-craft list, you would work overtime as needed within the city carrier craft. If you signed up for the cross-craft list, you agree to work overtime as needed either as a rural carrier, clerk, or mail handler. This provides additional opportunities for individuals wanting extra work, while providing needed options for the filling of short-term vacancies in other crafts. The current staffing dictates the full use of all available employees where they are needed without the cost of grievances on top of the hours already used to get the work done.

In acknowledgement of union consolidation, the USPS should grant greater consideration to wage and benefit concessions. These costs would be offset by the need to:

- Only negotiate one, instead of four, union contracts every four years, both nationally and locally
- Savings via increased flexibility of workhours (less OT and sick leave)
- Better retention rates (more hours for those needing/wanting them)

- Greater worker engagement educates employees on how operations work with one another. This is critical to reducing inefficiencies.
- Greater promotional opportunities for individuals wanting to switch crafts, transfer, or to supervise

I would argue that more career employees could be hired to replace transitional ones. This gives them a stake in operations from day one and a commitment to their career. One could reasonably argue that such a change in the union structure, and concessions by management, would lead to a transformative and positive internal structure — one that stresses the combined effort of everyone to one end.

There must be a non-grievable process where all employees can be utilized to achieve the goal of timely and accurate customer service. This means that any or all employees can be used to supplement needed areas to complete operations as scheduled. This must be facilitated first by straight time by individuals within the craft, then the use of craft individuals on the overtime desired list (OTDL), craft individuals on the cross-craft OTDL, non-volunteers in craft, then EAS (managers).

Fourth, dump the corrupt and demoralizing National Performance Achievement (NPA) program for managers. It does not accurately measure performance and its historical manipulation by HQ, ensures no above average or superior performance is possible. It's a gotcha scam that everyone is on too. Return to a pay schedule with set increases based by EAS level and time.

Increase the pay differential between the top craft level and the lowest EAS pay to 10%, instead of the current 5%. The premium accounts for some of the extra workload and accountability associated to managers. Abolish the exempt status for all field managers, paying them straight time for all additional hours. The current exempt status has led to the abuse of managers, demanding more and more in an already never-ending day. The hours should be indicative of the work that District, Area, and HQ offices are demanding of their managers — and every effort should be made to reduce the redundant and meaningless demands they are subject too.

Fifth, make current Highway Contract Route box delivery drivers regular craft employees with hourly wages, an evaluated time, and benefits. They would still provide their

own vehicle in most areas but receive an Equipment Maintenance Allowance (EMA) for mileage and depreciation of their vehicle. Allow them to cover rural routes as needed to supplement the usually understaffed rural carrier associates (RCAs) that are hired as substitutes. Likewise, let RCA's act as backups to the HCR's. The USPS is limiting itself to backups by limiting them to each currently.

Many of the problems with the USPS are internal and could be fixed in short order. The NPA could easily be abolished and returned to a regular pay schedule. Plants could be given back canceling operations. The pay differential between craft and EAS employees could be made immediately. The National Rural Letter Carriers' Association (NRLCA) would gladly accept HCR drivers.

The prefunding mandate is a politically charged issue, existing since 2006 because of ill thought voting. Fourteen years later and it remains a problem. Politics put the USPS in a bad place and only legislative action can bring it back to solid footing. If one agrees with the importance of universal service and a means of connecting all citizens

with the aim of preserving our democracy, then it must be preserved.

The break-even model ensures every citizen the most cost-effective way to mail an item from place to place. With no profit objective, these savings are passed on to the consumer. This public savings is critical to the new society being ushered in where brick and mortar stores become less relevant. More is being purchased online and shipped, bringing the importance of affordable, universal service back to the forefront. Many prescriptions and other critically important items are now being sent in parcel form, requiring cost-effective options for the end consumer. Any profit would add to the cost of the most vulnerable citizens, the elderly on fixed incomes, the poor, and the handicapped. Similarly, higher shipping costs harm startups and struggling businesses already straddled with expenses. This burden is carried mostly by small businesses that lack the resources of much larger firms. Small businesses are the backbone of this country, employing millions of citizens, and need the USPS option for mailing.

The most contentious item I put forward is the union consolidation. Yes, it's the most difficult of all suggestions to undertake, but would do the most to galvanize all employees going forward. Everything must be done to eliminate opposing forces and build a workforce that is flexible and sensitive to the needs of its employer. This can't be done with divided factions.

The difficulty rests at the top where each union has a president, one or more vice presidents, and an executive board. Who will concede their autonomy to become part of a larger and more representative and unified organization? Each should be represented on the executive board. Their collective bargaining power would far exceed their diluted interests. It would be in the best interests of the USPS to pursue this avenue, making necessary concessions to make it work (a higher percentage of careers, higher contribution to benefits). Added flexibility, worker retention, and stability call for it.

After more than three decades of working for the USPS I am discouraged by its descent, its engrained cronyism, discriminative practices, and overall mismanagement. I have witnessed too many self-serving behaviors and "as

long as get mine” attitudes. The problem is that it works. Politics, friendships, and brown-nosing wins out over performance and straightforwardness.

Too many bad employees are impossible to fire, and even though you might try, you end up sacrificing too much and get too little support.

Ideas and thoughts are disregarded that don't originate from the top. You are corralled and demanded to conform. The definition of right is whatever your boss says it is. The only good idea comes from him or her.

Performance is determined by the person in charge and their conformity, not by facts. Bad bosses are commonly presented as good, and good bosses as bad. It's all based on loyalty to the mob, not to the service of the employer. There was only a brief period that I felt mostly free to manage and the rest was challenged by managers from afar, sitting in their chairs, disengaged from operations. As time passed, so did my aspirations of changing things. I did what I could, but it never seemed enough. As a manager you get beat up by the employees, the union, and higher ups. The work grew out of control and could never be

finished. Unrest settled in and my health faltered. I had taken on more than one person could handle and paid the price. For what? My pay after nearly 30 years as a full-time manager was not even in the mid-range, my boss had no personal skills, the local union was corrupted, and most employees lacked any appreciation for my sacrifices. When they said the early option for retirement finally came, I jumped. It was time to get back to the family, life, and world I had been forced to give up long ago.

Back Cover

This book gives a firsthand account of the many internal workings and problems with the USPS.

In my more than three decades of working for the USPS it hasn't changed much. Its engrained cronyism, discriminative practices, and overall mismanagement still exist. Moreover, as it was when I started, politics, friendships, and brown-nosing win out over performance and honesty.

Conformity is encouraged and demanded. Direct orders, chain of command reminders, and threats of discipline always find their way to managers. Employees, on the other hand, are treated with kids gloves, endless retraining, and seemingly infinite opportunities to correct a problem or problems. The self-serving behaviors and "as long as get mine" attitudes have only worsened.

Whereas the world endlessly changes, the management style of the USPS has remained archaic and defunct. The only thing changing is increasing employee protections, seemingly endless, and further limits to managerial influence. You are told what to do, how to do it, and on what timeframe. They call you a manager, but you are really a puppet.

The real problems aren't addressed or for that matter, properly defined. This book goes right to the heart of the matter and outlines the path needed going forward.