



Keeping an eye on each other

It is frequently said by one who has been mistreated that everyone in the office heard what took place. Grievance handlers reach out to investigate the allegations raised by the employee and discover that many letter carriers either did not hear what took place or they chose to ignore what took place. Why does this happen? We hear that they are afraid to speak up because they fear reprisal.

Those who do not speak up often are among the first to later demand assistance from those who suffered before. They demand that we, the union, seek statements of others in the office. This is the same person who turned his back on a fellow carrier.

How many of us can really remember what takes place at work from the moment that we appear for duty? Who is supervising? Who is at work and who isn't? What happened to that probationary employee who was being mistreated during their first 60 days? Was he or she fired? Do you know? Do you care?

Do you remember your probationary employment period? During that period, did any of the veteran letter carriers approach you and introduce themselves? If they did, it was a comforting feeling, wasn't it? It felt good for someone to take the time to say "hello" and make you feel that they cared. If no one approached you and took the time to say "hello," you knew that you were on your own. You knew that nobody cared about you. You also knew that you had to do your best by yourself, because no one else cared.

With all of the other carriers in the office susceptible to the same woes, it becomes important for all of us to care about each and every letter carrier in the office. We all know what we do for a living. We all know how hard it is to perform all of the duties of a letter carrier, giving the public the high degree of professionalism that they expect from the Postal Service, and yet balance it against the budgetary needs of our front-line supervisors.

How often do we hear stern feedback from front-line supervisors over a request for overtime that a letter carrier feels honestly represents his or her needs for the day? With the supervisor's stern feedback, we hear one mes-

sage loud and clear: "You don't trust me."

When this happens, it is our integrity that is questioned as it happens every day. Combine these feelings with those of the ambitious front-line supervisor, and you get a sticky situation that could be low-key or that could get explosive. If the supervisor and the letter carrier can manage to exchange information without upsetting each other, then a mutually agreeable amount of time might be approved. If the supervisor becomes forceful and refuses to take your needs into consideration, then the situation could get explosive.

You hear the supervisor begin to yell at that carrier who is not able to do his route in the time approved. Do you bury your head in the sand, or do you listen carefully while continuing to case mail? In some cases, it might be appropriate to turn around and see what is going on, in the event that something serious could happen. In most instances, simply listening to everything that is said, and recalling the tone of voice used by both the employee and the supervisor, is sufficient if needed for any forum later.

Don't withhold information when the union asks you what you heard or saw. It is not unusual for the truth to be somewhere between the employee's side of the story and the supervisor's side of the story and often as a result of perception. Whatever the case may be, it is important to provide the truth.

If you decide not to come forward as a witness, you might deny the employee who is in the "barrel" of his or her only opportunity to have justice prevail.

When do you sit down to prepare a statement about a wrong that you might have seen? You might immediately be asked to prepare a statement by your shop steward conducting an investigation, and if so, great. On the other hand, if you are not promptly approached by the union, we ask you to take some time after work to write down what you saw and heard, before your memory fades.

Whatever the case may be, please take some time out for a fellow carrier who is in trouble, if he or she was fortunate enough to have the situation observed by you. If we cannot watch out for each other, who will? ☒