

Just Don't do it the first time!

Personally sowing the seeds of our destruction

By John Amtsfeld, January 19, 2008

I carried mail for a very long time on rural routes in two states, most of the time that I carried mail I also served as a steward and officer for the Union, which meant that my time was at a premium.

I had the opportunity to carry mail in two very different situations, spanning the evolution of a very rural area in Pennsylvania that became a high growth area of sprouting sub divisions. Initially, the very rural area was oriented toward farming, but increasingly as developments went up, the character of the area changed and people with a higher standard of living and income gradually replaced the old rural farmers as the main customer base. It also meant an increase in the box factor. During this period I was being counted every year, adjusted every year and ending up overburdened every year. It required regular case label maintenance and constant additions as new developments came aboard.

I was a young and strong carrier and I adjusted as the routes grew. I had difficulty keeping substitutes since the route was always so big. It was not at all unusual for subs to take 16 or more hours to complete a days work.

In new Jersey, I had a more stable route, with a much higher box factor. Some areas of the route got an extraordinary amount of mail daily. And although I was delivering to half the number of boxes I averaged in Pennsylvania, the volume of mail I was handling was considerably more than I had handled regularly in Pennsylvania. In Pennsylvania, my route time was 5 hours, while in New Jersey my route time was 2.5 hours.

Through it all, I was sorely tempted on some days when I was exhausted, not feeling well, injured, the weather was bad, the mail was heavy and I was running late; to cut corners and take shortcuts. I've been around long enough to know what I could do to legitimately save time and what I could also do illegally to save time. I knew there were dozens of ways to circumvent the regulations in order to save time and there were days when I was sorely tempted.

In this instance being a long time steward was very helpful to me. Since I also knew what was right and what was wrong. I knew that if I succumbed to temptation because I was sick or really tired, that the same thing would happen again and it would likely keep happening. If I did something I knew to be wrong one time; it was that much easier to convince myself when my judgment was suspect due to tiredness, sickness or hurting, to do it again and again. The more I would do some of those things wrong and not get caught; the easier it would be for me to fall into sloppy, lazy and dangerous habits. It is the old slippery slope scenario. Once you start on the slope, you just keep sliding until you either sink into the mire or collide with reality and face the consequences.

What is the best thing that can happen when I do something I should not?

The best thing that can happen for any rural carrier who takes an illegal shortcut or circumvents proper policy and procedures; is that they are held accountable for what they did when it first happens and the misconduct can be corrected.

If the misconduct is not corrected, human nature being what it is; the misconduct will continue and likely worsen until something really bad happens. Even if management is aware that shortcuts are being taken; as long as there are no adverse consequences, they may just ignore it. But the minute something bad happens, management will fall all over that carrier like a skyscraper coming down and do everything possible to bury him/her.

The possibility of corrective discipline then becomes the certainty of punitive and vengeful retribution. Management will make a clear case that the carrier knew better, that the carrier was acting dishonestly, that the carrier was in effect stealing from his/her employer by not performing job responsibilities they were paid to do and that the carrier's inherent dishonesty discredits any defense he/she might make.

For all those carriers who are working their routes so far below evaluation; you are not kidding management, you are not kidding the union, you are not kidding the postal veterans. In order to work so far under evaluated time; you are doing things you should not be doing, many of which will lead to heartache and misery the first time something goes wrong.

I am pleading with carriers to do the job right: Report your correct work times accurately. Take all parcels and signature mail to the door and attempt proper delivery, wear your seatbelt and do not finger mail or any other multitasking while you are driving. Turn off your vehicle when you dismount, lock the mail if you are out of sight or a distance from the vehicle, make sure the vehicle is in park and the emergency brake is set. Properly handle all signature mail, mail requiring scans and special service mail. Properly handle box holders, mail addressed "or current resident" and all other mail; perform the functions of "a post office on wheels" including selling stamps.

In conclusion: doing it right every time is even more important at those times when you are the most tempted to take illegal shortcuts. I always remembered that if I did it just once, what would stop me from doing it again. The chances that USPS, management or someone else will catch you are probably pretty slim; but they increase each time you do it until it passes from risk of being caught to the certainty of being caught where the only thing in doubt is when it will happen.

When you are tired, when you are not feeling well, when you are hurting; remember, doing your job is what is expected of you. Are you willing to gamble your career, your standard of living, your livelihood on saving an hour or avoiding something you are supposed to do. When you are caught, you probably won't even remember why you did what you did; but you will remember for the rest of your life, the price you paid for not doing what you were supposed to do and exactly what you were supposed to do.

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