

Under Pressure

Given that recent CDRAAP route adjustments have not exactly fit into management's plans, to say the least, and that we're in the low volume time of the year, many carriers are facing undue pressure to meet "projected" performance standards. I've observed an increasing number of altercations over DOIS projections and pivoting. Some carriers may be uncertain about how to deal with this onslaught of pressure. New employees might be experiencing such pressure for the first time in their career (or perhaps *their life*) and veteran carriers might need a refresher.

Having a huffing and puffing supervisor threatening to "blow your house down" can be stressful for some people. (Others might actually enjoy the "sporting" aspect of these encounters, but we . . , err they, might be crazy. And just because some might actually enjoy such absurdity, doesn't necessarily mean that they get the best results.) Supervisors can be quite daunting, with all their computer printouts, scientific projections, "demonstrated performance" numbers, stellar carrying abilities (ask them), and ominous looking clipboards. Yeah, all the paraphernalia can be overwhelming and awe inspiring to the uninitiated. But let me ask you this: If some stranger on the street walked up to with a bunch of computer printouts and an overbearing clipboard and told you that they had done an incredible amount of research and all the evidence and data said that you could fly, would you trust their projections enough to jump off a building? I hope that your answer is no. If a supervisor told you they would sell you the Golden Gate Bridge for \$1000, would you give them the money? I recommend that you view all of management's projections with similar skepticism and caution. After all, their data recently showed that a carrier took *zero minutes* to load his vehicle.

Supervisors will often pressure carriers to commit to making their routes in less than appropriate time. It's amazing how fast they think we are (and we should thank them often for their confidence in us). They just want us to be the best we can be. Carriers will often succumb to this flattery only to find themselves skipping breaks and otherwise rushing to conserve or recover time. This is neither contractual nor required and there is a proper and methodical way to prevent this from happening. As with most postal procedures, common sense is not required in the process. (I can generally tell how confident they are about my abilities simply by asking how much they will wager on their data. If they really trust the data, a \$1000 wager should be like taking candy from a baby, but so far, no takers.)

Carriers *are obligated* to negotiate a fair day's work with their managers; it's part of our job. Supervisors are pressured to save time; it's part of their job. Nobody loves the process, but it's ours to deal with nonetheless. Own it! If this (despite my noble efforts at consolation) disturbs you, then you might want to investigate other jobs, . . . but before you begin your job hunt, keep in mind that the word "fast" isn't in the M-41 and the M-41 is the Letter Carrier "Bible". In fact, the word "speedy" is only referenced in the M-41 in reference to office time. "The accurate and speedy routing of mail is one of the most important duties of a carrier; you must be proficient at this task." Even then, 18 and 8 is hardly a blinding pace. So despite your manager's obsession with speed, the "people who wrote the book" about mail delivery didn't consider it a priority.

Disagreements might seem an inherent and inevitable part of the negotiating process, but frustration, anger, and stress needn't be. Both, in fact, are actually counterproductive to a letter carrier's interests, at every level. Only you can make yourself angry or stressed and there's little to be gained by doing so. Even if you "win" an argument, you still will have to deal with the aftereffects (i.e. the rapid heartrate, constricted blood vessels, headaches, sleepless nights, shortened lifespan, and whatever else results from being unnecessarily "aroused" too often). More often than not, a relaxed, respectful, and reasonable negotiation will yield better results than some theatrical altercation.

Unnecessary anger often leads to unnecessary discipline (which then leads to unnecessary work for your union steward). Don't get caught in this trap. While management often presents a "Catch 22" scenario, where the carrier risks discipline for either unapproved overtime or improperly returning mail, there is a proper and graceful way to deal with this conundrum, and anger isn't part of it. Keeping your cool is the first rule. (Send me a dime and I'll give you a rhyme?)

Predicting how long it will take to complete a route is often difficult, and I fully sympathize, but keep in mind that "tricking" or trapping carriers is not ethical or contractual. A route, relay, or pivot takes whatever time it takes. I know that this sounds like some ancient or biblical wisdom, and that I probably seem like some mail-carrying guru in saying as much (my teachers did say that I was above average), but it's actually fairly simple. While you might not know for certain how long a route or relay will take, neither will a manager. Try to appreciate the carnival-like game you're playing, while you simultaneously uncouple your ego and emotions. It's like guessing someone's weight, or how many beans are in a jar. Trying to condense time would seem even more of a fool's game. (See note below.) Don't play!

While carriers are obligated to estimate and negotiate, managers are likewise obligated to provide clear instructions. If you know that you cannot make a route in 8 hours, then inform your supervisor ASAP, request and fill out a 3996, and get clear instructions. Don't "suck it up" simply to avoid confrontation, because the pressure to do more and more and more never subsides. Trust a 29 year veteran on this. Avoiding unpaid work, stress, discipline, or an accident is the objective, not making your supervisor happy. (Their manager will probably prevent that from ever happening anyway, regardless of what you do.) The proper process is not exactly rocket science, but you still might want to study a bit.

More (and better) information about the negotiating process can be found in the first chapter of the *Letter Carrier's Resource Guide*, which can be found here: <http://www.nalc.org/workplace-issues/city-delivery/workroom-floor-issues> and in the 2015 Winter issue of the *NALC Activist*, which can be found here: <http://www.nalc.org/workplace-issues/resources/nalc-publications>. I strongly recommend that all Branch 361 carriers take a look at these. The information contained therein can save you many headaches. If you still have questions after reading these, ask a steward or your branch president for clarification. If you are a letter carrier and haven't experienced the pressure I'm talking about, please notify me so that I can transfer to your office.

Note: In the name of accuracy, I must add that *time actually does slow down the faster you go*. Time would stop when you reached the speed of light. Management would love to see that happen. However, moving at the speed of light is hardly a logical objective for a Letter Carrier, because, sadly and

mysteriously, despite being able to carry all the routes in the U.S. in a mere half second or so, and despite being mentioned henceforth in all science books and Guinness World Records, *you would ultimately go broke delivering mail that fast!* Much like 360 degree dunks, one armed pushups, or even a spellbinding knowledge of physics, speed is just one of the myriad attributes that ***you will not be rewarded for*** as a Letter Carrier. Deal with it.

Jerrell Goodpaster