

THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT: THE POWER OF A LOCAL – NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

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Achieving and then defending the rights we have fought for over decades of struggle is inarguably the core function of this great Union. Our National representatives expend tremendous effort and resource fighting for every contractual advantage we can gain, with the unwavering goal of always advancing the interests of all bargaining unit mail handlers. This generally goes underappreciated in my view as does the committed effort made by Local Unions in defending those nationally achieved improvements in the collective bargaining agreement. An agreement, I would argue, that for as far back as I can recall, always makes strides in wages, benefits, and working conditions. As many of you already know, the tremendous challenge of achieving and defending is a never-ending, twenty-four hour, seven-day a week battle with front line supervision and others in management. The employer's representatives never grow weary of inventing new and often absurd ways of violating the National Agreement and our bargained rights. Violations that often include ignoring what most would say is the clear and unambiguous language of our binding

contract. The mental gymnastics and contortions of logic concocted by those management misanthropes are sometimes truly beyond belief but always extremely frustrating to mail handlers and representatives alike. This challenge we have discussed previously, and one that is fully embraced by the overwhelming majority of dedicated NPMHU representatives from the alternate shop steward all the way to the National President and from sea to shining sea.

Our primary protection against these assaults on our contract and common decency are the committed shop stewards and other representatives of the NPMHU who never tire when faced with the multitude of repeat violations perpetrated by a steady stream of the ambitiously stupid in operations management. Those shamelessly willing to violate the terms of the collective bargaining agreement with utter wanton disregard like mindless lemmings over a cliff. Under the barrage of this relentless bad behavior however, we must recognize the stress the employer's objective malevolence places on those actually moving the nation's mail and those defending their rights. Under

these circumstances it should not shock us that there are the occasional cracks in this Union's armor when the frustration of management's actions may raise doubts of our righteous mission and ultimately creep into the minds of the mail handler craft employees and our certified representatives. These moments of uncertainty, these malignancies of purpose, must be exorcised Brothers and Sisters and we are obligated to recognize this rare but very real weakness of spirit, identify its root cause, and vanquish those demons.

First, we must come to terms with the contractual rules of engagement, which can be frustrating, but not all that complicated. We must accept the fact that the employer will violate the contract. They will do this over and over again and it is unlikely they will ever stop violating the contract. Be not dismayed however, as it is also a certainty that this Union will always stand up in defiance of their actions and strive to make those harmed whole. This conflict is timeless. Whether they violate the terms of the National Agreement, the Local Memorandum of Understanding, or the scores of postal handbooks and manuals that govern



the mail processing environment, as sure as the sun will rise, the employer will violate the contract. There is no magic bullet to stop the repeat offenders. A single settlement for a violation of Article 1.6 of the National Agreement for example, pronouncing the employer's promise to "cease and desist the violation as described and make the harmed whole at the overtime rate of pay" is never the last word on the subject. At their very next opportunity they'll be at it again. This is the unfortunate reality of the work floor. If your rights have been violated you have been harmed in some way or another, financial or otherwise. The only contractual path to making one whole is through the filing of a grievance per Article 15 of our National Agreement. *(On the subject of our National Agreement, please know that the most recent version of the "rules of engagement" is available to members in both hard copy through your Local Union office and/or electronically at the National's website (npmhu.org). I wholeheartedly recommend picking up a copy or viewing it on your favorite device.)* Filing a grievance at the source of the violation, at the Step 1 level of the grievance-arbitration

process, is the most appropriate and the most effective first step method to address these matters. This is the exclusive and very powerful function of the Local Union. The "rules" demand this course of action and time, Brothers and Sisters, is of the essence. Challenging the employer within fourteen days of knowledge of the violation is the contractual requirement.

All mail handlers and representatives whose frustration threatens to get the better of them, who may, momentarily, grow weary of the day-to-day struggle, must find solace in the fact that you are never alone in your defense of our contractual rights. There is great comfort and strength in the fact that this Union always has your back, both locally and nationally and any management misconduct we might face, we face together and can be no match for our collective purpose. There is great power in our National and Local Union partnership and that power is readily accessible through the filing of a grievance at the source of the infraction. Sisters and Brothers, each and every time we file a grievance or raise an objection to the conduct of management, we strengthen this Union. We strengthen our position

in the workplace when we demand compliance with the rules and insist on a make whole remedy for each transgression. This is how we exorcise those demons of doubt or frustration by meeting the challenge we fortify the cause. Equally, every time we do not seize the opportunity to question management on a violation of the collective bargaining agreement, we weaken our position. For me, it is that simple. Let them get away with it, they win. Challenge the violation every time, we win. When we miss the chance, we only embolden the bad guys. This, my friends, cannot stand as we are fully armed for the task at hand and letting them off the hook is not an option.

This strength lies with what we know as a collective. We are a hell of a lot stronger together than we are as individuals. Our clear and overwhelming advantage lies with the local and national resources at our disposal. We have all the contractual resources at our disposal, and perhaps most importantly, top-notch human resources at the national and local levels always available and willing to assist. This is the partnership; this is the promise of this great Union.