

My supervisor distracted me!



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In the last two months, my columns have addressed employer behaviors that discourage injury reporting (October) and the importance of accident investigations that dive into “root cause analysis” (November).

If those in management truly want to know what led to an accident/injury, then they will learn to ask the right questions. They will then need to listen.

The art of listening is essentially nonexistent in our workplace. In most situations, a carrier asks a question because he or she wants to know what we are supposed to do in a given situation, why we do what we do, what problems we are facing and how we can improve

what we do. Carriers are asking because they want to do the best they can. Management’s reaction to the question can encourage and cultivate a positive work environment, or create a conflict and create the opposite.

The Handbook M-39—Management of Delivery Services identifies many duties and responsibilities of your supervisors in your delivery unit. Some of those responsibilities result in interactions with you directly, while others do not. I have added emphasis (bold) to a few items.

Section 115 is titled “Discipline,” and its first paragraph closes with “...The delivery manager **must** make every effort to correct a situation before resorting to disciplinary measures.” (115.1)

Section 115.2 is titled “Using People Effectively”:

Managers can accomplish their mission only through the effective use of people. How successful a manager is in working with people will, to a great measure, determine whether or not the goals of the Postal Service are attained. Getting the job done through people is not an easy task, and certain basic things are required, such as:

- Let the employee know what is expected of him or her.
- Know fully if the employee is not attaining expectations; don’t guess—make certain with documented evidence.
- Let the employee explain his or her problem; **listen!** If given a chance, the employee will tell you the problem. Draw it out from the employee if needed, but get the whole story.

115.3 is titled “Obligation to Employees”:

When problems arise, managers must recognize that they have an obligation to their employees and to the Postal Service to look to themselves, as well as to the employee, to:

- Find out who, what, when, where, and why.
- Make absolutely sure you have all the facts.
- The manager has the responsibility to resolve as many problems as possible before they become grievances.
- If the employee’s stand has merit, admit it and correct the situation. You are the manager; you must make decisions; don’t pass this responsibility on to someone else.

The last paragraph of the “Discipline” section is titled “115.4 Maintain Mutual Respect Atmosphere”:

The National Agreement sets out the basic rules and rights governing management and employees in their dealings with each other, but it is the front line manager who controls management’s attempt to maintain an atmosphere between employer and employee which assures mutual respect for each other’s rights and responsibilities.

Why am I talking about accident reporting, accident investigation, root cause analysis and now listening?

Right now, in many workplaces throughout the country, your supervisors are barking orders, demanding you deliver on the goals that they were mandated to achieve.

If you dare ask a question, they tune you out because your question interrupts them in carrying out their mission.

When you and/or your co-workers are the victim of that barking, you may not be able to focus your full attention on your assigned duties, and in some cases, this becomes the root cause of an accident. Yes! Sometimes the injuries we suffer and the accidents that happen are caused by a distraction brought about by the way we are treated at work.

In an arbitration decision dated April 1996, Kenneth M. McCaffree wrote:

Authoritarian power centered management is passé, and can no longer be justified in the industrial setting. Nor can its exercise be longer tolerated, no matter how “right” the behavioral decisions may be. Grievance procedures, arbitration and dispute resolution methods, among current personnel practices, have recognized that how something is done is as important as what is done. The Joint Statement of the parties, as well as the citations from the Handbook and Manuals on mutual respect and the code of conduct indicate that the Postal Service and its Unions have recognized this as well. Supervisors, who fail to change with the times, will contribute to work force unrest and even to violence in the workplace.

Don’t let your supervisor be the hazard that no one wants to abate.

Keep an eye on each other. Have a merry Christmas and happy holidays.

