

Manager's Guide to Retaining Career Employees

A Handbook for Managers, Postmasters, and Supervisors

The material contained in this publication is intended to serve as a guide to assist managers, postmasters, and supervisors in working with employees. It does not amend, modify, or supersede any Postal Service regulations, handbooks, or manuals. No employee rights or causes of action are created by this publication.

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Purpose

The purpose of this publication is to introduce managers, supervisors, and postmasters — all those with supervisory responsibility — to a variety of management strategies and Postal Service resources that can be of significant value in identifying, nurturing, and retaining good career employees.

The guide examines ways the supervisor can:

- Effectively integrate the new employee into the workplace.
- Team with other Postal Service staff to encourage employee career growth and job satisfaction.
- Identify and use Postal Service programs that help employees meet personal and career goals.
- Access other available resources to help employees build successful Postal Service careers.

This handbook examines the critical relationship between employees and their supervisors and serves as a guide to the array of services and support available to supervisors as they work to help employees build Postal Service careers.

The Supervisor-Employee Relationship

As a supervisor, you play a critical role in the development of new employees and their retention in the Postal Service. Likewise, your guidance continues to be important as employees develop and build Postal Service careers.

When evaluating employees during the probationary period, you must establish a good working relationship with each of them. You must give them feedback from the very beginning, letting employees know what has gone well and what needs improvement. You are also the employee's focal point for information on topics ranging from job training courses to the services offered by the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

As a supervisor, you are often most effective when acting in the role of a coach. A good coach motivates team members, gives positive feedback when a task is done well, and applies rules consistently and fairly. The good coach also recognizes the strengths and weaknesses of team members and assigns tasks accordingly.

Likewise, the good coach recognizes and rewards achievement. If discipline becomes necessary, it must be dispensed fairly. Above all, the good coach — the good supervisor — treats all employees with respect and dignity, talks with them and listens in return. In short, the effective supervisor will recognize, develop, and use the strengths of the Postal Service's most valuable resource — its employees.

Yet, retaining career employees is not the responsibility of the supervisor alone. The Postal Service offers EAP services, and employs Human Resources and Labor Relations professionals, among others, who will work with you and the employee to establish a solid framework for excelling in the Postal Service. A wide range of programs, which are discussed later in this publication, offer specialized instruction and counseling to meet a wide range of needs.

Working With the New Employee

Orientation

Retention efforts start when employees initially report to begin their jobs. As the immediate supervisor, you should be aware that employees may need help in filling out required forms such as health and life insurance forms. Referral to Human Resources (HR) personnel may be appropriate. Bilingual skills and knowledge of different cultures can be of assistance in working with employees of diverse backgrounds.

1 Introduce new employees.

Introduce new employees to employees in the work unit just after basic orientation. Early contact of this kind goes a long way toward making sure that the employee is more comfortable in the workplace. Encourage the employee to take problems or questions to you or the on-the-job instructor. This practice provides sufficient time for attempts to rectify any misunderstanding before it develops into a more serious situation.

2 Stay in contact with Human Resources.

Establish a good working relationship with Human Resources personnel. They can be of great assistance and provide needed guidance in resolving retention problems.

Probationary Period

The crucial period for a new employee is the probationary period. It is during this period that the employee is given the opportunity to perform the job and show that he or she can meet the challenge. The immediate supervisor is responsible for providing training, evaluating the employee's performance, and focusing on appropriate additional training.

1 Know the policy.

Review the *Employee and Labor Relations Manual* (ELM) 370–379, sections that cover setting performance goals and procedures for probationary period evaluations. Outline performance expectations during formal discussions at each phase of the probationary period.

2 Establish rapport.

Establish open lines of communication with each new employee. Have regular informal feedback with the employee. Develop specific plans to enhance performance levels and/or correct deficiencies.

3 Pair with a buddy.

Select an experienced employee with good work habits, job knowledge, and good communication skills who is willing to acclimate a new employee to the Postal Service environment. This “buddy” should have the ability to mentor the new employee.

The buddy will help a new employee learn Postal Service terminology, policies, and procedures, including the time card system, schemes, service standards, and safe work habits. Without such practical information, a new employee may commit an error of judgment that adversely affects his or her probationary performance. Supervisors must keep an open line of communication with the buddy and new employee.

4 Monitor progress.

Meet with the new employee during convenient periods when full attention can be given to the employee and his or her concerns. Share with the employee any noted deficiencies and good or bad performance.

Develop a plan to enhance performance. Make clear to all employees that they are responsible for their actions, work habits, and general conduct.

5 Consult resources.

Seek guidance from internal resources such as Labor Relations, EAP, Diversity Development, the postal employee development center (PEDC), and the personnel services office to discuss possible approaches to specific situations. For example, contact the PEDC for additional training tools or methods. (See Organizational Resources section ahead for a complete list of resources.)

6 Take appropriate action.

At each phase of the probationary period, ensure that proper documentation is prepared and appropriate action is taken.

Continuing Employee Development

The Postal Service invests valuable time and resources in its new employees. It is the supervisor's responsibility to maintain an active and ongoing involvement in the employee's development.

1 Discuss career aspirations.

Talk with employees and discuss their career goals and/or interests. Share information with the employees about job and training opportunities.

2 Keep morale high.

Give employees fair and equitable treatment. Keep lines of communication open. Develop trust as their supervisor. Give positive feedback whenever possible.

3 Maintain accountability.

Make sure that the new employee receives the necessary training and instruction he or she needs to do the job. Hold employees responsible for job requirements. Take appropriate action on poor performance.

4 Give recognition and awards.

All employees appreciate recognition for a job well done. Recognition through verbal, written, and monetary rewards should be given to high achievers based on their job performance.

5 Provide support.

Employees need to feel that someone listens to them, and that their input counts. Supervisors should emphasize to employees that the job they do is important to the success of the organization. Let employees know that you care about them, and do listen to them.

Helping the Employee Build a Postal Service Career

Career has come to mean not just a job or occupation, but a succession of life roles. Employees are seeking meaning and purpose in their life-work roles. The makeup of the workforce is changing. Women, single-parent families, and younger workers with higher skill levels are all groups that are having a significant impact on the workforce. Studies show that employees want to know about different possible career opportunities. Some leave for better career opportunities elsewhere.

When assessing their careers, employees fall into three broad categories. Some employees are happy with the role work plays in their total life situation. Others feel a change is necessary and resolve to make that change. A third group of employees may be dissatisfied but perceive no opportunity for growth.

As an effective supervisor you must understand what your employees' life-work roles are and what their career goals may be. With this information, you can assist them with career planning, help them understand the wide range of career options available with the Postal Service, and introduce them to the various resources that are available to help them meet their career goals.

It is important to understand that career guidance is an early and ongoing process. It can begin as early as the probationary period and certainly no later than 6 months after the hire date.

1 Help the employee assess career goals.

Assist the employee in exploring, understanding, and moving his or her career plans into action by matching needs and skills with the mission and goals of the Postal Service. Have the employee identify interests, skills, and personal values as part of this career goal assessment. Also, help him or her become aware of individual opportunities, choices, constraints, and consequences that may impact career aspirations.

Encourage the employee to think in terms of possible alternatives. Subject to availability, would a change of tour, reassignment, or transfer to another unit or installation provide more job satisfaction? Similarly, would participation in available training provide an additional outlet and enhance career opportunities?

2 Suggest a life-work approach.

Challenge the employee not only to identify particular job or career preferences but also to engage in broader life-work exploration. Supervisors may encourage employees to participate on postal teams and committees to develop leadership skills. Supervisors may suggest employees attend local schools and colleges. These kinds of activities enable employees to learn new areas and to develop new skills. They are also evidence of self-motivation. Help the employee think about all types of career moves. Upward and lateral job shifts may be obvious. But even a downward shift in order to qualify for a job in a new field may be a very useful move.

Organizational Resources

Employee Benefits Package

Some Postal Service employees may overlook the exceptional value of employee benefits that are not immediately apparent in their biweekly pay checks. But the comprehensive package of benefits offered by the Postal Service is generally thought to be superior to most employee benefit packages found in the private sector. It is important, therefore, to make sure the employee periodically reviews and understands the valuable elements of his or her benefits, including:

- Pay package with automatic increases.
- Federal retirement plan.
- Thrift Savings Plan.
- Flexible Spending Account.
- Leave accrual programs.
- Pre-tax health insurance premiums.

Management and Craft Cooperation

Craft personnel are an important and often overlooked resource in a viable retention program. Supervisors should keep close contact with the experienced senior craft employees who are acting in the capacity of a buddy, for they can provide useful information in the retention effort.

Fellow employees are often the first to know when another employee is not happy or is having serious problems adapting to the work environment. In a similar fashion, group leaders, union representatives, and postal organizational representatives can also give invaluable assistance. Open lines of communication can save unnecessary delay in identifying an employee experiencing difficulties and could conceivably save the employee's job.

Programs and Services

A wide range of Postal Service resources have been developed to help supervisors and managers meet the changing needs of employees. Other resources have been developed to help employees help themselves — be it vocational, professional, or personal help — throughout their Postal Service careers.

Managers should make sure that employees under their supervision understand the kinds of opportunities offered by organizational resources and how to access these important programs and services.

1 Postal Employee Development Center

The PEDC identifies, coordinates, and provides for the training needs of craft employees. The PEDC staff is specifically trained to help probationary employees in developing good study habits. Most PEDC locations offer a quiet environment conducive to study. Correspondence courses are available for self-development. Information about off-site training is also available from the PEDC staff.

2 Employee Assistance Program

The Employee Assistance Program is designed to assist employees and their immediate families with problems that may adversely affect both an employee's job performance and his or her personal life. EAP can help with emotional, mental, marital, and family problems. It can even help with financial and legal problems by providing appropriate referrals. Assistance is provided through consultation, evaluation, crisis and/or short term counseling, and referral to community resources and treatment facilities. Employees recovering from alcoholism and drug abuse can be assisted by EAP. Although a counselor cannot be expected to solve every personal difficulty of the employee, having someone to talk to is

often enough to motivate an employee to address a problem that interferes with work.

You can reach EAP at 1-800-EAP-4YOU or 1-800-327-4968.

3 Personnel Services

New employees, in particular, have many questions about their employee benefits. The personnel services office can answer questions on issues such as health and life insurance, retirement benefits, and other personnel matters. Supervisors should encourage employees to seek out answers to personnel questions at the personnel services office.

4 Labor Relations

Supervisors should consult Labor Relations on performance-related issues before making a final determination whether or not to retain an employee. Labor Relations can give guidance on a variety of issues, such as attendance, failure to qualify on schemes, and other job-related issues.

5 Diversity Development

The Postal Service views development of diversity in its workforce as fundamental to its business success. To this end, it has established programs designed to promote affirmative employment practices and activities that encourage the full utilization of all employees. A variety of Diversity Development programs, including the special emphasis programs described next, are available to assist employees in developing careers within the Postal Service.

Special Emphasis Programs

The Postal Service has special emphasis programs for employees with disabilities, disabled veterans, Hispanics, and women.

Employees With Disabilities

General

People with disabilities are a growing part of the civilian labor force. Many of these individuals have the background, experience, and abilities necessary to do well in Postal Service jobs. Our own experience and the experience of industry in general show that individuals with disabilities are a valuable resource.

It is important to be sensitive to and understand employees' differences. It is imperative that we treat everyone, regardless of weaknesses and strengths, with dignity and respect. In this regard, Diversity Development personnel can provide sensitivity training for all employees so they can understand people with disabilities and issues that affect them. If persons with disabilities are accepted and valued, retention of these employees is more likely.

Veterans With Disabilities

Through the proper application of veteran's preference and removal of barriers previously associated with the hiring and selection process, the Postal Service has consistently introduced qualified veterans with disabilities into its workforce. Managers and supervisors should be aware and sensitive to the special needs of some veterans. The Human Resources manager is a good resource for assistance in this area.

Hispanic Program

The Hispanic Program's goal is to ensure that Hispanics have an equal opportunity to compete in every aspect of employment, including recruitment, hiring, training, career development, and promotions. While many Hispanic employees are fully bilingual, there are those for whom English remains a secondary language. These employees, like any other employee whose native language is not English, may occasionally have trouble communicating, establishing rapport, and participating in the overall work environment of a postal installation. Therefore, it is important that personnel working with Hispanic employees have an understanding of their culture.

Women's Program

The mission of the Women's Program is to eliminate under-representation of women in the Postal Service through communication, education, and involvement. Managers are encouraged to develop and make use of the skills of female employees. The Human Resources staff can aid in the identification of employees whose skills are underdeveloped or underutilized. Diversity Development staff can provide information regarding women's issues.

Exit Interviews

Sometimes the best efforts of managers and supervisors cannot keep a good employee from leaving the Postal Service. It is important to find out why a good employee leaves and what can be done to see it does not happen in the future with other good employees.

Although managers and supervisors do not routinely conduct exit interviews, Human Resources personnel are experienced in conducting such interviews, which can provide a great deal of information about why employees leave. An analysis of this information can help determine if employees have similar reasons for separation that should be addressed and corrected. It can also assist in identifying major problem areas in both voluntary and involuntary separations.

Supervisors aware of problem areas should report them to the responsible officials, who may include the Human Resources manager and the Operations manager.

Summary

- 1 Start efforts to retain an employee the first day the employee reports to work.** The employee may need assistance from personnel services office in filling out required forms, or may not know how to provide proper documentation. A simple explanation may be all that is necessary to overcome this first hurdle. During and after orientation, let the employee know that assistance is available if needed. Establish rapport and clearly outline job expectations for the probationary period.
- 2 Continue efforts during the crucial probationary period — a delicate time in the work experience of a new employee.** New rules and regulations, a different work environment, and postal terminology can all be possible areas of confusion. Pair the new employee with a buddy. This should be a trusted and experienced employee. Monitor the employee's progress and establish rapport. Although career job requirements pose a challenge for some, in most cases the probationary period is the turning point at which the employee either adapts to or leaves the Postal Service.
- 3 Be ready to help when personal or family problems develop for new and experienced employees.** At any point in the employee's postal career, circumstances may arise that can adversely affect employment. Be sure to seek advice on specific situations and direct the employee to any additional resources for the assistance that may be needed.

- 4 Follow up and assess identifiable causes of retention problems and design creative solutions.** Think creatively when dealing with employees experiencing retention difficulties and encourage consideration of such alternatives as a new work location, a change of tour, reassignment, or a transfer to a new unit or installation, if possible. Because many of these changes involve collective bargaining agreements and memorandums of understanding, coordinate with Labor Relations and Human Resources.
- 5 Maintain good working relationships with all postal units that have an impact on the employee.** The cooperation of craft, management, and other functional areas is essential in identifying ways to overcome and alleviate the problems interfering with the retention of employees.
- 6 Try to motivate those who are discouraged.** The best way, but also the most difficult, is to encourage employees to help themselves.
- 7 Be prepared to mentor and coach all employees.** Treat all employees with dignity and respect. Listen to them.