

THE ACTIVIST: LOCAL 548



Canadian Union of Postal Workers, Hamilton Local 548

Volume 1, Issue 8

President's Message: September 2009

~ The Local consulted with management regarding the change of schedules for the Part Time PO 4's moving to Shift 1 in Finals at the Hamilton Mail Processing Plant (HMPP) and they were unwilling to make any compromises. The Local has filed a grievance.

~ Management has informed the Local that the new mail processing machines coming to the HMPP next year will all be the new OCR's, not a mix of BCS's and OCR's. They have also committed to monthly updates on Postal Transformation. The Local will let the membership know about any ongoing changes as soon as we find out.

~ Management informed the Local at the September consultation that a new security system will be put in place at the HMPP for employees to swipe in to gain access to the second floor offices. This system is already in place at other plants.

~ The Local requested that Management work out a process with WSIB when a member is approved for a claim they not be paid by both WSIB and CPC, creating salary overpayment. They told us they would review with the Board and respond.

~ Once again, Management is trying to tell members who their Union representatives will be for the purposes of disciplinary interviews and accident investigations. This comes up from time to time and is management's way of trying to control the membership. The Union's position is that every member has the right to a representative of their choice and management has honoured this right for many years. If you are having problems with requesting a Union representative of your choice, please contact the Local.

~ The yearly Labour Day parade took place on September 7th. The weather co-operated and the membership was well represented by members from all over the Local. FT PO 4, David Rennie (City Sort, HMPP), was one of the Section leaders at the parade.

~ The National Policy arbitration on the employer's right to request information through their subcontractor, Manulife, has come down. The arbitrator affirmed the em-

ployer's right to request medical information but noted that CPC and Manulife are obligated to include the Union throughout the process. If you are dealing with CPC and Manulife and they do not make you aware of your right to Union Representation please contact the Local immediately for assistance.

~ Management has taken a drastic step and discharged a Shift 1 Shop Steward at the HMPP for taking more than 15 minutes for grievance time. Please contact the Local if management is threatening you with discipline for grievance time. The Local has filed a grievance and will make every effort to defend our Shop Stewards.

~ The Employer is stepping up its attacks on Union Representatives in the Local and across the country. Locally they have taken the unprecedented step of interviewing the 1st Vice-President, Brother Langley, for his actions in defending a member. I, too, have received correspondence threatening to sanction me for my behavior in defending a member. The Local Executive will not back down in its defense of the membership and will never submit to employer attempts to intimidate or bully the Union.

In solidarity,

Mark Platt,
President, Local 548

New Additions

Joining Ken Heydrich, Ruth Otterman, and Robin Evans on the Education Committee are Joette Waddell and Adam Kieswetter.

Joette is a PO4, currently working #3 shift at the HMPP (oversize section). Adam is a letter carrier working out of LCD 1. Both are also serving as Shop Stewards.



**STAY INFORMED!
KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!**

Following, is a review of a book written by Robert I. Sutton, PhD. Please note that some words in both the title and the article may have been altered for publication purposes, but their meaning has not! Enjoy.

Book Review: The No Ahole Rule: Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't**

By Robert I. Sutton, PhD

Stanford University professor Robert Sutton distinguishes early in his book on toxicity in the workplace between people just having a bad day and those others so habitually evil in their attitude and their actions they can be considered nothing less than, as he puts it, “a certifiable a**hole.”

*The No A**hole Rule - Building a Civilized Workplace and Surviving One That Isn't* sets it straight early that we all have the potential to act like a**holes under the wrong conditions. But to be a certified a**hole, “a person needs to display a persistent pattern, to have a history of episodes that end with one ‘target’ after another feeling belittled, put down, humiliated, disrespected, oppressed, de-energized, and generally worse about themselves.”

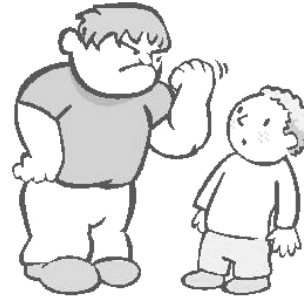
Before judging someone too harshly, Sutton points to the difference between those colleagues and customers you simply don't like from those who deserve the label. “It can help you distinguish people who are having a bad day or a bad moment (“temporary a**holes”) from persistently nasty and destructive jerks (“certifiable a**holes”).

Two small tests are used for spotting whether a person is acting like an a**hole. One, after talking to an alleged a**hole, does the “target” feel oppressed, humiliated, de-energized, or belittled by the person? Two, does the alleged a**hole aim his or her venom at people who are less powerful rather than peers or those more powerful?

Scholarly research in bullying, interpersonal aggression, emotional abuse, abusive supervision, petty tyranny, and incivility in the workplace reveal that many workplaces are plagued by “interpersonal moves,” says Sutton.

Workers in some studies report “persistent hostility” from coworkers and supervisors. Abusive and aggressive behaviours include yelling, temper tantrums, glaring, exclusion, nasty gossip, sexual and nonsexual insults and even unwanted touching like pushing, shoving, biting, kicking.

Sutton reports on the style of leadership known as “man-



agement by intimidation,” the result of which is people more focused on protecting themselves from recrimination than on accuracy, productivity or well being.

“Being put in positions of power blinds them to the fact that they are acting like jerks,” says Sutton, a professor of management science and engineering. “It is astounding how rapidly even tiny and trivial power advantages can change how people think and act - and usually for the worse.”

More grimly, he cites studies in the United Kingdom which find the highest rates of workplace bullying occur in prisons, schools, and the postal system.

In the later parts of *The No A**hole Rule*, he discusses various strategies companies and individuals can use to keep themselves safe from soul crushers and ugly tactics. He suggests more enlightened companies enforce a “no a**hole rule,” and individuals arm themselves with insights into how the true a**hole operates. Look for what he calls “small wins,” and start looking for small battles you can win. Build your confidence and work towards gaining back the feeling of control. Practice indifference and emotional detachment when what you're doing seems like a prolonged insult and just focus on going through the motions. Make winning rituals for yourself and build pockets of safety, support and sanity in your workplace. For another calming strategy see the following article, “Satan's Cesspool Strategy.”

Adam Kieswetter,
Shop Steward, LCD 1
Education Committee



Satan's Cesspool Strategy

Ruth's coping strategy was inspired by advice she had gotten as a teenager from a river rafting guide: If you fall out of the boat in rapids, don't try to fight it; just rely on your life vest and float with your feet out in front of you. That way, if you are thrown up against rocks, you can use your feet to push off, and you will protect your head and conserve your energy.

Ruth remembered this strategy when she was trapped in a different kind of cesspool: a meeting - the first of several - where she and a few others were subjected to personal attacks, dirty looks, and excessive blame. The a**hole contagion spread like wildfire, even infecting people who were usually kind and sensible. Ruth stretched out her feet in front of her under the table and then the river rafting image came to her. She told herself, 'I just got thrown out of the boat by these a**holes,' and she realized, 'I know how to survive.' Instead of feeling like a wimp for floating along, it felt like she was making a choice to bounce off the boulders that these jerks were flinging in her path. She just kept reminding herself to 'just stay feet first.'

Ruth's "Satan's Cesspool Strategy" contains two key points that help people keep their mental health intact - and get their jobs done: First - learn to reframe the nastiness in ways that help you become emotionally detached from the a**holes. Second - don't struggle against larger forces that you can't control. Focus instead on small ways to gain tidbits of control, including supporting others who are victimized by bullies and "assholes."

(As it turned out, Ruth had fallen overboard, in a stretch of the American River in California known as Satan's Cesspool. The guides advice worked perfectly: after an amazing trip through the rapids, with her feet out in front of her, Ruth came to a smooth stretch of river and swam over to shore.)

Adam Kieswetter,
Shop Steward, LCD 1
Education Committee

"Bullies are always cowards at heart and may be credited with a pretty safe instinct in scenting their prey."

Anna Julia Cooper

Full Moon Fever?

There is something that changes on a monthly basis at HMPP. It is not the usual expected changes on the programming of machines, process procedures, or your supervisor. Is it the effect of the full moon?



Fact or Fiction? Does the presence of the full moon affect human behavior?

Since the moon affects all bodies of water (for example the tides) does the human body respond in the same way, as we consist primarily of water? Do changes in the positive and negative ions in the atmosphere at the time of a full moon affect us? Scientific studies vary on the subject. Many scientists agree that homicides, "lunacy", increases in the number of babies born, mass hysteria, and other negative human behaviors, escalate when studied in co-relation to the changes in the moon cycle. Others disagree.

HMPP is an interesting study in the effects of the full moon on human behavior. As a shop steward over the last few years, I have joked about the onset of the full and new moon cycles and the increase in grievances and disharmony on the work floor. What I once believed to be a superstition has become increasingly questionable. Tension and irrational behavior seem to reach their highest peak during these periods. Fortunately or not, management seems to display the greatest degree of irrational behavior in response to the pull of the moon on these occasions. They interview, antagonize and pressure workers at a much greater degree than any other time of the month. Perhaps it can be explained by the degree of hot air combined with water contained within their systems. One such "superior" has recently displayed the unexplained growth of facial hair just prior to the last two full moons! Is *this* a coincidence?

The point behind this is to warn workers to take note of the calendar. Expect that the week or several days prior to a full moon may be more chaotic and disruptive at work. Prepare yourself. If you find your co-workers less rational than usual, your supervisor huffing and puffing over numbers (okay, that doesn't change so much on a day-by-day basis), take a moment and breathe. The questionable side effects of the full moon usually only last a few days. Superstition or not, scientifically proven or not, HMPP is an ongoing scientific experiment in the effects of the full moon and the results to date suggest that yes, in fact, human behavior *is* affected negatively by the onset of a full moon.

Joette Waddell, HMPP
Shop Steward & Ed. Comm.

New Postal Service Charter

September 14, 2009 saw the release of the new Canadian Postal Service Charter. As with many government papers, the rules and regulations set out in the charter are quite vague and open to interpretation.

Although the new charter stipulates that CPC will deliver 5 days a week, it does not guarantee where our customers will receive their mail. At their door? At a community box? Or, perhaps, 15 km. away at a P.O. general delivery?

For nearly 3 decades now, the CUPW has been battling Canada Post to increase service to Canadians. Becoming a Crown Corporation has had its benefits, but making a profit is always primary for corporations and this is generally accomplished at the expense of both their employees and the public they serve.

Rural service has been a major bone of contention of late, with service diminishing due to legitimate safety concerns of the RSMC, combined with retirements of those who staff the smaller offices. At first glance, the new charter appears to safe-guard that service, stating that, *“The moratorium on the closure of rural post offices is maintained.”* However, that stipulation is quickly diluted with the qualifying statement, *“Situations affecting Canada Post personnel (e.g., retirement, illness, death, etc.) or Canada Post infrastructure (e.g., fire or termination of lease, etc.) may, nevertheless, affect the ongoing operation of a post office.”*

Safeguarding both our jobs and postal service to all Canadians will be an integral part of our negotiations in 2011. **Be prepared. Be educated. Be ready.**

Robin Evans
Education Committee

(note: The Canadian Postal Charter can be found at <http://www.tc.gc.ca/mediaroom/infosheets/canadapost.htm>)

Discontent on the Work-Floor

Full moons, new moons, and all other unexplored phenomenon can be used to explain the goings on at HMPP. Perhaps these factors contribute, but each and every worker is responsible for the complaints they make to management against their co-workers. I am not just speaking about the serious complaints but the day to day grumblings about he did this and she didn't do that and so on and so on and so on. Are you aware that every time you go to management with a complaint against a co-worker (not-

withstanding illegal or unsafe activity) you are possibly violating Article 8 of the CUPW National Constitution? This means that you, as a member of the Union, may be held accountable for your actions and lose your status as a member in good standing.

Fortunately, when the Union deals with such issues, no member loses their right to representation against management. No member is subject to harsh disciplinary measures or, ultimately, termination of employment. Only management will impose such measures and they are grateful to you for giving them the opportunity to do so when you complain. Such complaints take them off the hook for blame in disciplinary measures.

The membership needs to recognize that management encourages your discontent and complaints. These things provide them with the tools and opportunity to threaten, discipline, and ultimately fire workers.

Think first about how you would feel if co-workers ganged up on you and monitored every move or statement you made on a day to day basis. Think about the impact if they reported every flaw they perceived to management. Each and every member would not want this to happen to themselves so why put a co-worker through it.

As stated in the past, 2011 will be a challenging year for all. This membership needs to give up on their complaints to management against each other, past and present, and unite. If you have serious complaints about a co-worker, seek out Union intervention first and foremost. A Union Steward or the Local Executive will advise you if your complaint needs to be reported to management. Under our Collective Agreement and the Canada Labour Code each member is obligated to ensure the health and safety of themselves and their co-workers. A union representative can help you discern between what needs to be reported to management and what does not.

Joette Waddell,
Shop Steward, HMPP
Education Committee

How much more grievous are the consequences of anger than the causes of it.- MARCUS AURELIUS