

COMMUNICATOR

A LABOR RELATIONS NEWSLETTER

August 5, 1998

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CONTRACT ADMINISTRATION (APWU/NPMHU)

Just what is the Mystery Shopper Program?

The Mystery Shopper Program is designed to improve service and satisfaction in the Postal Service Retail environment as seen from the customers perspective.

The Postal Service has contracted with private companies to conduct quarterly surveys of a number of retail units. A representative of one of these private companies anonymously visits a retail unit and makes a number of standard observations regarding certain aspects of the operation. The representative records the observations on a survey form with a numerical score for each. The final score is tallied at the bottom of the form which is then forwarded to the District. The form is intentionally designed so that an individual Retail Clerk may not be identified.

There are a number of observations concerning the facility and availability of Postal Service products. Additionally, there are specific observations dealing with the "Shopper's" interaction with the Postal Service Retail Clerk. The clerk is expected to ask a series of questions leading the customer to receive the products and/or services which best meets his/her needs.

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CONTRACT ADMINISTRATION (APWU/NPMHU)
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There have been reports that some supervisors/managers may be using the Mystery Shopper Survey results from the outside vendor as a basis to initiate official discussions with or issue discipline to employees. In a June 30, 1997 memorandum to Vice Presidents, Area Operations, Patricia M. Gibert, Vice President, Retail, communicated that "The Mystery Shopper program's purpose and intent is as a corrective, not punitive, diagnostic tool to correct conditions that are detrimental to customer satisfaction. The survey does not, and should not, identify individuals, and must not be used as the source for disciplinary action."

This does not preclude supervisors from making independent personal observations of Retail Clerk interaction with customers to ensure they are performing all aspects of their duties as instructed. This would include observations that allow them to coach employees to ask questions that will determine customer needs. As with all employee performance observations, supervisors should recognize positive performance as well as less than satisfactory performance. Any corrective action for failure to follow instructions or other performance issues must be taken in accordance with Article 16 of the National Agreement.