

update

A Newsletter for Amtrak Employees



VOLUME 2-ISSUE 12

AUGUST 15, 1973

"Our performance as measured by our passengers will determine our future as a national transportation system."—ROGER LEWIS, President of Amtrak



on the track

Virtually every letter I receive from our passengers emphasizes one important fact—they expect us as employees of Amtrak to place no constraints on our service to them from the moment they telephone for reservations to their arrival at their destinations.



More succinctly, our passengers want—and deserve—full value for their money.

These letters bear an obvious message for us; our riders consider passenger service an Amtrak responsibility. They expect us to devote all our resources and all our energies to one goal — making train travel as comfortable, as

pleasant and as efficient as is humanly possible.

Amtrak today is in the passenger-carrying business in a massive way. Last year almost 17 million people rode our trains, an average of more than 46,000 a day. At least 20,000 American cities can't boast of populations equaling our daily figure. We are well into 1973 now, and we know that our total ridership this year will exceed last year's by a large margin.

These millions of passengers are turning to us for one reason; they have discovered that we can offer them a pleasant and welcome alternative to other forms of transportation which have been unable to keep pace with our nation's constantly growing transportation requirements.

It is our responsibility to be constantly seeking ways to improve this "alternative" our passengers have found. Our standards of service must always be of the highest and our preceptors must be our passengers who constantly remind us that "the customer is always right."

And as we improve and perfect our passenger service, we will, in effect, be helping ourselves. We are a service organization dealing directly with the people we serve. There is no middle man between us. We receive the kudos or the slings and arrows according to how our passengers judge our service. It follows then that for those of us who perfect this most vital of skills—the ability to provide courteous, competent and efficient service to our passengers—the future is good. As a corporation, we are going to grow and these employees will fill increasingly responsible positions.

You and I are aware that we have accomplished a great deal in our 27 months of operations. We have taken many actions to improve and modernize rail service. Working together, we have succeeded in halting and reversing the historic decline in train ridership on many of our routes.

Our ridership figures show without any doubt that our passengers are increasing. Travelers who formerly rode trains and remember them fondly are returning to us. People who have never ridden trains are giving us

the opportunity to provide them with at least part of their travel needs.

It will be these passengers who determine whether we succeed in our mission. If they find in us a seriousness of purpose and a sensibility to their needs, then we will succeed. If we adopt a "business as usual" attitude to them then we will fail.

Our passengers rightfully look to us as the developers of a totally new system of rail transportation in the United States. To satisfy them, it must be a system that considers the passengers first and foremost. Our passengers are our jury and our judge, and, in the final analysis, our performance as measured by them will determine our future as a national transportation system.



Roger Lewis
President

newsletter now being mailed to railroad employees

With this issue of UPDATE, the Amtrak newsletter broadens its service to railroad employees engaged in passenger service. Beginning with this issue, the newsletter will be mailed directly to the homes of all employees in passenger service who filled out pass request forms.

Approximately 6,000 railroad employees will receive the newsletter and as new pass requests are received their names will be added to the circulation list also.

It is hoped that railroad employees will find the newsletter interesting and informative. Suggestions from railroad employees for material to be included in the newsletter will be warmly welcomed by E. E. Edel, vice president—public relations, Amtrak.

In order to keep the mailing current, the newsletter henceforth will run the box shown below in each issue. If you are moving, we ask you to take a moment to fill it out and mail it to us. It will assure you of uninterrupted service.

HAVE YOU MOVED????

Please let us know so that you can continue to receive UPDATE.

Name _____

Old Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

New Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Amtrak Employee? _____

Railroad Employee? _____

Railroad? _____

Mail to: Amtrak Public Relations
955 L'Enfant Plaza North, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 200024

positive attitude is crucial in dealing with public



Allen Christofferson of Amtrak's Manpower Development Center, instructs a class of reservations trainees in proper customer relations.

Right or wrong, first impressions are lasting and hard to reverse. For this reason Amtrak reservations personnel must be particularly skilled in dealing with the public.

To help prospective information and reservations agents handle the "average and not so average" customer, Amtrak's Manpower Development Center stresses customer relations as a crucial part of its training program. To teach proper customer relations, Allen Christofferson, Supervisor-Training, has developed an attention-getting combination of films, pamphlets, lectures and group discussions with the underlying theme that "the customer is always right."

Mr. Christofferson impresses upon future agents the importance of having a positive attitude. "It is when a passenger feels conned or slighted that he gets nasty. A negative attitude can turn the average passenger into a monster," he said. He advises his classes to "treat each customer as though he or she were your first customer of the day, even though you may be on your sixteenth hour of overtime."

According to Mr. Christofferson, attitude is particularly important when dealing with an angry or unreasonable customer. He feels that most agents have a positive attitude until a negative customer is encountered. In that situation, it is easy for the agent to become defensive and consequently negative. Then there are two negative personalities ready to do battle. Which brings us to Mr. Christofferson's cardinal rule, "never do you engage in an exchange of 'gunfire' with the customer. Your objective with the difficult customer is to calm him down. In dealing with the public you can never blow your cool. The minute you do, 'the party's over.' You have lost control and control is what we're looking for."

Mr. Christofferson teaches his classes basic customer relations techniques which apply equally well to the average customer and to the irate or difficult customer.

He tells future agents to begin by listening. Wait for the customer to speak first. Ask questions designed to get at the customer's needs and ask yourself "is there any way I can help him?" There are two reasons why listening is important. First the agent discovers the exact nature of the customer's problem and secondly he "steals the customer's thunder." Many angry customers need an opportunity to "blow off steam." Once they have had their say, most customers will automatically calm down.

Next Mr. Christofferson instructs agents to simply share their information with the customer. Here attitude is again important. He cautions agents not to approach the customer with the intention of "straightening him out." Give the reasons behind the rules and ask the customer to take a fresh look at the situation. Mr. Christofferson believes that knowing your information and sharing it early in the conversation prevents many hassles.

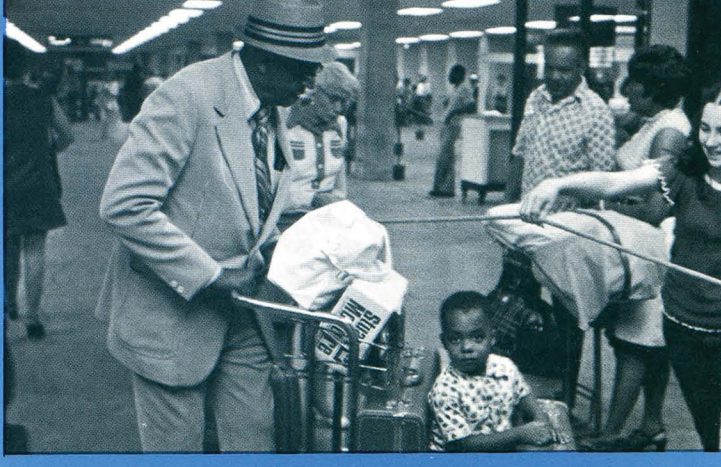
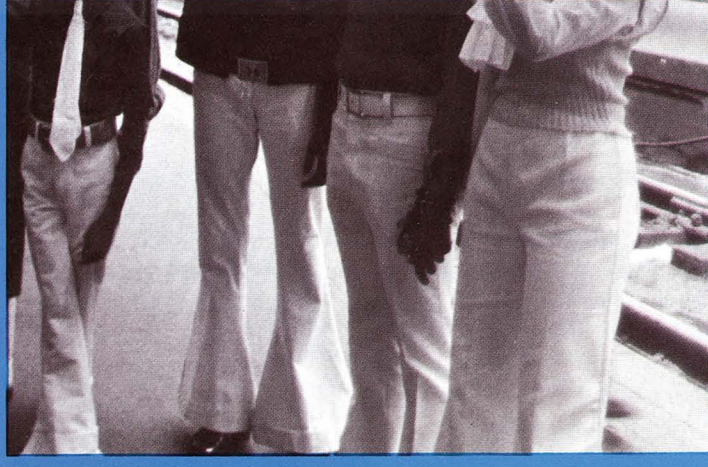
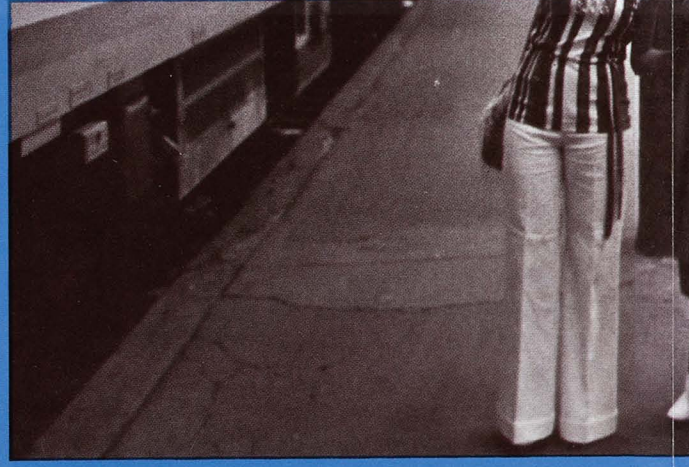
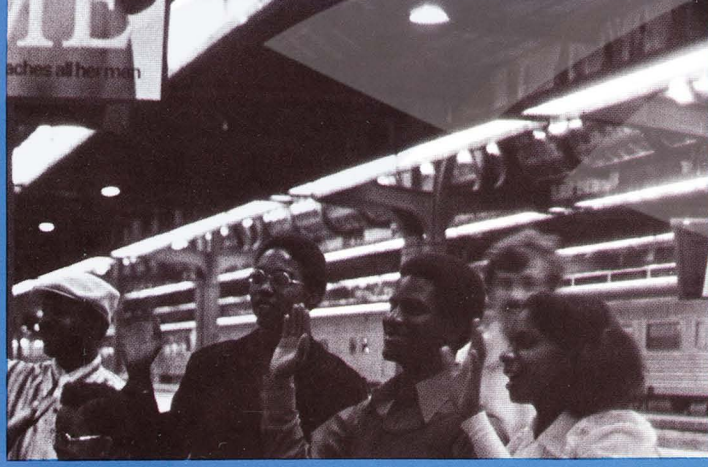
Lastly, present the alternatives open to the customer. No one likes to get boxed into a corner; let each customer decide for himself which course of action to take. This helps solve the apprehension many agents have about dealing with so many different kinds of people.

If an agent has listened, shared his information, presented the alternatives and the customer still is not satisfied, Mr. Christofferson instructs agents to refer the customer to higher authority. An agent can and should handle each situation only to his "level of authority" (as far as he is empowered to go in his position). "As you progress in public contact your ability will determine your own level of authority," Mr. Christofferson said.

The techniques he teaches can be applied by all Service employees to their dealings with the public. How well individual Amtrak employees make use of these methods will determine to a large extent whether, in Mr. Christofferson's words, customer relations is a "confrontation or a challenge."



From cowboys to composers, Amtrak's passengers expect fast, efficient, courteous service. Shown at top right is Russia's Dmitri Shostakovich, considered to be the world's greatest living classical composer, boarding the Broadway Limited at New York. The cowboy at left was waiting for a west-bound train at Chicago's Union Station. The other pictures also were made in Chicago.



a steward, a conductor and a psr stress the importance of customer service

robert hegg

Dealing successfully with passengers in various forms of stress has earned for dining car steward Robert Hegg of the Burlington Northern the distinction of being called "the unflappable Robert Hegg."

Mr. Hegg has fed hundreds of passengers snowbound on a train in North Dakota. Food was ordered and delivered to the train via snowmobile to keep the diner going and the stranded passengers free from hunger pangs for the four days the train was unable to move.

He has also supervised the feeding of hundreds of passengers in a dining car where the temperature reached 100 degrees. Mr. Hegg had to keep his crew working long past midnight but all his passengers got fed.

Perhaps his most difficult moment came on another run when a hysterical passenger ran through the dining car screaming someone was trying to kill her. Mr. Hegg calmed her down by talking quietly to her and giving her a cup of coffee. He did have to taste it first to assure her it wasn't poisoned.

According to the silver-haired steward, the secret of it all is liking people. "If you make people feel as if they are wanted," he said, "you win the game before it even starts."

As far as Mr. Hegg is concerned, the passenger is always right. "You know what they want, give it to them," he instructs the waiters. "After all, they are paying for it." He is known for his courteous service and some who have seen him in action say he is the most gracious steward they have ever seen.

The veteran steward insists that the waiters who work under his direction also be pleasant and seldom has a complaint been filed against one of his crew members by a passenger.

Mr. Hegg admits some waiters may curse him in the kitchen for his insistence on good service, but they are pleasant to the passengers.

Mr. Hegg left the restaurant business in California in 1959 and at the suggestion of his brother, chief dining car steward on the California Zephyr, he joined Great Northern. Mr. Hegg worked trains from Chicago to Seattle during the 1962 Seattle World's Fair. It was not uncommon to see 10 or 11 Pullmans on the trains serving Seattle that year and the dining car was always busy. He now serves as steward in the Ranch Car, one of Amtrak's refurbished cars done in a Western motif which operates on the San Francisco Zephyr. Hundreds of passengers are served hot and cold meals daily in the Ranch Car as it winds its way from Chicago through the Midwest across Donner Pass to California.

The steward continually strives to deliver the best possible service and to treat everyone equally. "If we don't know the answer to a passenger's question, we find out," he stated. "Little things like what town we are in or will we arrive on time mean so much," he says.

When the diner is hot and the air conditioning shows no sign of working, Mr. Hegg has been heard to say, "The diner is probably hotter than the food will be, but come on in anyway." If there appears to be a wait involved, he offers the passenger a drink of ice water with the assurance that it won't be long. For passengers who stumble groggily into the diner in the morning, he is quick to give them a cup of coffee. When the train is late he often informs complaining passengers that some time can be made up. "We've done it before," he explains.

Mr. Hegg feels he and the crew members are on the train to please and if passengers aren't pleased something must be done to correct the situation. Passengers understand and seldom complain if they know you are trying, he believes.

An ancient axiom states "you can get more with honey than you can with vinegar" and dining car steward Robert Hegg couldn't agree more.

russell s. mellinger

Russell S. Mellinger, a veteran Penn Central passenger conductor who was once personally commended by a Chief Justice of the Supreme Court for his courteous service, operates on one simple rule: "Let the passenger know you are his friend."

Mr. Mellinger's cheerful, efficient attitude toward his work has paid off in numerous ways for him. On one train trip Bing Crosby pulled Mr. Mellinger into his drawing room and sang one chorus of "In the Blue of the Night" for the conductor alone. Another time, Bob Hope regaled him with a patter of jokes he was to use later in a coast-to-coast broadcast.

The conductor is no stranger to "show biz" himself. At one point in his railroading career, the former Pennsylvania Railroad sent him on a speakers' tour as far west as Ohio. "I talked to civic clubs such as Rotary and Lions and to boys' clubs," he recalls. "I really had two speeches. To the civic clubs I talked about my experiences in railroading. I gave a very serious safety lecture to the boys' club, however. With the youngsters, I emphasized the dangers in playing on railroad tracks and also explained to them that it was anything but a lark to throw rocks at passing trains."

A conductor in passenger service for 33 years, Mr. Mellinger says he learned early in his career that to be successful in dealing with the public "you have to like people and you have to let them know that you like them."

Mr. Mellinger believes in quickly letting his passengers know they are in capable hands. "The first thing I do when I enter a coach," he said, "is to announce loudly enough for everybody to hear, 'Good morning, everybody. I'm your conductor and we're on our way.'"

"That seems to put them at their ease and from then on they are on my side."

The most frequent problem Mr. Menninger runs into with his passengers is incorrect ticketing. When this happens, he quickly assures them that the mistake can be corrected easily and he is going to see to it that they get to their destinations. "You have to get this message over fast," the conductor added, "because people who suddenly find their tickets are not in order jump to the conclusion that they are going to have to get off at the next stop."

Although he is a big, husky man, Mr. Menninger isn't quick to throw his weight around. "Just as in every line of work, I occasionally encounter an obstreperous passenger who seems to be bent on disturbing every other passenger in the train. In almost all instances, however, a firm word of warning quiets him down. I can count on one hand the times I've actually been forced to put a person off a train at the next stop."

The conductor, who runs on both the Metroliners and the Southern Crescent, believes that one of the secrets to being a good conductor is to study the passengers carefully. "If I'm collecting tickets and a passenger I'm approaching is a businessman with his head buried in a briefcase full of work, I don't attempt any small talk. I take his ticket, give him his check, thank him and then move on," Mr. Mellinger said.

"But if the next passenger is a mother with several small children, I will spend time with her. I always make it a point to talk to every child and if the mother is a little nervous with trying to keep several excited children in line, I try to put her at her ease. I tell her that the train crew is there to help her and I assure her that we aren't going to let the children do anything that might result in injury to them."

The one action a conductor and his train crew must always take is to keep the passengers fully informed. If one of Mr. Mellinger's trains is going to be delayed, the conductor makes certain every passenger on the train knows it. The worst thing a train crew can do, he believes, is to have a train stop out in a corn field and then permit the passengers to "stew" over what is happening. "Your passengers have appointments to keep, friends waiting for them and frequently another train to catch on a close connection," he said. "The train crew must keep reassuring them that the problem is being worked on and that the train will get under way again as soon as possible. If a train crew acts in this fashion when a delay is unavoidable, most passengers will relax and wait calmly for the train to get under way again."

What ever Mr. Mellinger is doing, he must be doing it right. There are well over 100 letters in his personnel file written by passengers to commend him for his service and attitude to his job.

christie koontz

Christie Koontz, one of the first PSRs hired, knows the importance of each service employee to Amtrak. "One person can make or break our service," she said. "I've

had passengers tell me that they will never take another train because of one incident. There have been times when I've earned good friends for Amtrak simply by showing passengers that I cared for their welfare."

For example, Miss Koontz remembers one of the Montrealer's first northbound runs. Two coaches were missing from the consist and about 150 people were forced to stand from New York onward. "I apologized to each of the passengers personally and assured them that these were not normal Amtrak travel conditions," she said. "It was well worth the effort. When I stood on the platform in Montreal, those same people came up and thanked me for a pleasant trip. It shows how much personal attention means to passengers."

Miss Koontz started riding the trains in September 1971 as a PSR based in Jacksonville. In December of that year her base was changed to Miami.

Miss Koontz has no delusions about an on-board service career. She considers it hard, physical work and has great admiration for those crews who can smile despite problems encountered en route. The turning point in her career with Amtrak came when she realized that she was on the train for the passengers. "I was not there to argue with or ridicule them. In every situation I tried to be the bigger person—more broadminded and understanding. I could not afford to let my own petty preferences come out."

From January to June of this year Miss Koontz was detailed to the Southeast Reservation Center in Jacksonville, Florida. There she had an opportunity to help choose and train Amtrak reservations personnel, quite a thrill for someone who believes that "service-oriented personnel mean more than anything." Miss Koontz told the new employees that "without enthusiasm you won't go anywhere." To be successful in the service profession, she advised employees to "realize their importance to Amtrak" and "read, read, read"—inform themselves about every aspect of the corporation.

She has similar suggestions for prospective PSRs. She advises them to always introduce themselves to the crew and to speak to everyone on the train. "The passengers who appear most aloof are usually the ones who most need someone to talk to." She also feels that promptly announcing all delays is most important. A PSR faced with an angry passenger should realize that the passenger probably has had a bad experience. If the passenger is treated with courtesy and sympathy, Miss Koontz has found that he or she will usually relax and unwind en route.

Christie Koontz has a genuine interest in people and their lives. She considers herself very fortunate to work for a company which deals directly with people. Her philosophy is so simple that its wisdom is sometimes overlooked. She feels that "your job is your life and you make it what you want. You're not doing it all for the passenger, a lot of it is for yourself. Simple human kindness and interest in people's needs make you a broader, more interesting person. That's not a job. It's an opportunity."

Kelly Kreller, passenger service representative at the Denver Station, has been working for the railroad for 37 years and he insists it's the place to be if you enjoy working with people.

Mr. Kreller began working for the Denver Union Terminal Company as a redcap when there were about 100 trains a day in and out of Denver and 100 redcaps to serve the thousands of passengers. Denver area doctors, lawyers, judges and even a mayor redcapped with him during those busy years working their way through school.

After his redcapping days, Mr. Kreller became the night station master and in November 1972, he became the station passenger service representative for Amtrak.

To the delight of younger passengers, the veteran railroader tells funny stories and often buys the children ice cream and candy. "What did the monkey say when he caught his tail in the lawn mower?" he jokes. "It won't be long now," he answers, sending the younger passengers into gales of laughter.

Mr. Kreller, who entertains the older set with humorous railroad experiences, finds the majority of people to be pleasant and understanding once they realize they are in good hands.

As a PSR, he likes to make things fun for the passengers, but he also recognizes the serious side of his job.

Recently he was advised of a sick passenger passing through Denver with one of the special tours. Mr. Kreller went aboard to check and found the woman ill indeed. She was hesitant to get off the train in a strange city and leave her friends. He advised her that Denver had excellent medical facilities, but if she continued help might not be as readily available. After thinking the situation over she decided he was right, got off the train and was admitted to one of Denver's best hospitals. During her four day confinement Mr. Kreller visited her every day so she wouldn't be lonesome.



Kelly Kreller

A Denver native, Mr. Kreller checks tickets and keeps track of the trains as well as handling many and varied problems which arise. If there is a problem with a passenger, his co-workers invariably call him to handle the situation, knowing his perfect record for smoothing ill feelings.

His special interests other than railroading include golfing, going to school, visiting the sick and reflexology—the study of behavior in terms of reflexes.

Every day is different when you are dealing with the public, Kelly says with obvious delight in being part of it all.

amtrak asks u.s. industry to design new cars

Amtrak has taken a major step toward the development of "totally new" standard rail passenger cars to provide the nation's rail passengers with fast, efficient, comfortable transportation.

In letters which went out late last month to 13 American manufacturing and design firms, Roger Lewis, President of Amtrak, asked them to submit designs for the new cars and to incorporate in them the best available transportation technology.

The chief executive said that after two years of operating experience and studies of equipment design and travel patterns of the nation "our objective is a totally new rail passenger car."

The new Amtrak standard car will combine maximum saleable space with the best attainable ride quality at speeds up to 125 miles an hour on conventional track. In addition, Amtrak wants a car which will be flexible enough so that interiors can be changed easily to meet changing markets.

A successful design would be used by Amtrak in taking bids for an initial order of at least 100 new passenger cars.

The cars would be used on all Amtrak routes other than those serving New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Washington where tunnels put special restrictions on car heights.

The firms solicited were: Bechtel Corporation of San Francisco; Boeing Vertol of Philadelphia; the Budd Company of Philadelphia; Coverdale and Colpitts, Inc., of New York; Day and Zimmerman of Philadelphia; General Electric Co. of Washington, D.C.; Kaiser Engineers of Oakland; Louis T. Klauder and Associates of Philadelphia; Parsons, Brinckerhoff, Quade and Douglas of New York; Pullman Standard of Chicago; Rohr Industries of San Diego; United Aircraft Systems Center of Farmington, Conn.; and the Vought Aeronautics Division of LTV, in Dallas.

The competing companies were asked to design a car with maximum standardization in the exteriors and in mechanical and auxiliary equipment but with the greatest possible interior flexibility. The cars should be capable of being configured as either a high density or long distance coach, or a parlor car, lounge car, bedroom, roomette, dormitory car or diner, the companies were told. Passenger comfort requirements were specified and special attention was directed to ride quality and braking. Designers were asked to consider the advantages of active controls to make the cars lean into curves. Bi-level cars were not ruled out but maximum length was set at 85 feet and maximum unloaded weight at 80,000 pounds.

The first new cars bought by Amtrak would be used to augment existing rolling stock and to begin the gradual replacement of Amtrak's inventory of passenger cars acquired and leased from railroads in 1971 when the newly created corporation took over operation of the nation's rail passenger service.