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Press

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Election Day: Formula for success

By Tony Carobine, President

Election Day is Tuesday, November 4. Postal workers and all working families have a stake in the 2014 elections, as control of the House of Representatives, Senate, governorships and state legislatures will be determined.

As of this writing, the election is shaping up to be a close, especially for control of the Senate. Spearheaded by huge sums of cash as a result of Supreme Court rulings, conservative forces are pouring huge amounts of money into this election.

These obstacles and others, while difficult, can be overcome. In the remaining days before November 4, we must convey to our members and their families the significance of this election and where the candidates stand on issues important to postal workers.

We must also be wary of attempts to distract attention away from issues affecting working people. We must not allow ourselves or our members and their families to be misled and as a result cast a vote not based on which candidates are better suited to address the important and critical issues facing postal workers and all working people, but instead a vote based on so-called wedge issues and untruths.

As communicators and representatives of the union we need to prepare our members for this election. We need to advise them about how candidates stand on issues important to postal workers and all working families, help them become registered voters, and remind them about the significance of voting on Election Day.

As the late labor leader Walter Reuther said, "There's a direct relationship between the ballot box and the bread box, and what the union fights for and wins at the bargain-

ing table can be taken away in the legislative halls."

Preparing members and their families for the upcoming election is an important task. Communication is the key. The best way to increase turnout is to educate members about the issues and candidates.

The right approach

The following excerpt from the PPA produced booklet, *Federal Elections, Union Publications and Union Websites* examines techniques for increasing the participation level of members and their families on Election Day.

"Many working people are not keenly involved in the political process and therefore may not be familiar with the candidates and where they stand on issues important to their lives. The less working families have become involved in politics – the more that politicians will be elected who don't represent their interests.

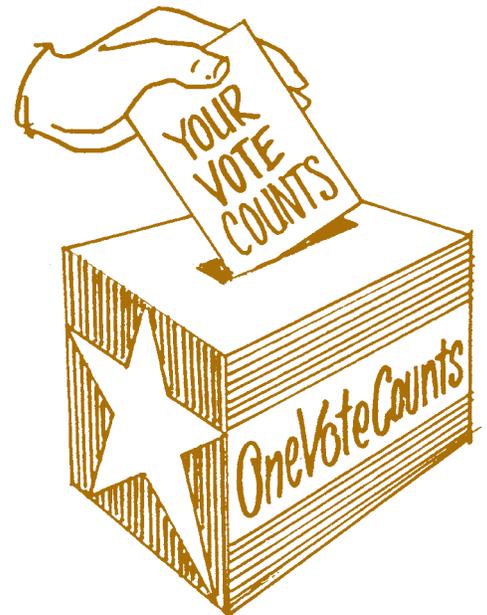
Adding to this dilemma are labor unions whose only election effort is to tell their members who to vote for on Election Day, often just a few days before they were asked to go to the polls. With this practice union members don't feel any ownership of the process and resent being told what to do.

Research indicates that members desire unions to focus on two key elements:

(1) Members desire political action to be, first and foremost, about them and their needs, not about candidates or political parties. Unions need to make clear that their criteria for making political and legislative decisions are based on what is in the best interests of members and other working people.

(2) Political action should focus on in-

forming and involving the members so they can be politically empowered. The traditional candidate endorsement of labor political action does not empower them. What members want most from their union is more political information and then to be trusted to make the right decisions, rather than receiving endorsements that often seem like "marching orders." Members understand that knowledge is power and they



want their unions to give them the information they need to be smarter voters and to make a difference.

Surveys conducted after elections offer some interesting facts about the influence that communication had on the elections. Union communications to members and their families made a difference in the election – not only in how they voted, but also, in many cases, with the outcome of the election. Local union

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How does your local communicate?

By Jenny L. Gust,
Editor-at-Large

Facebook? Web Site? Bulletin board? Word of Mouth? How about a union publication?

Facebook is great for family and friends. Not so much for a union. Web sites: Nice to look at but who wants to sit and read columns of information? Bulletin board: A bit old fashioned you have to admit. Meeting notices: OK because they are a quick read. Word of mouth: Well we all know what that can lead to and it's not necessarily good. It's like that game of telephone you played as a kid (or you heard about from old folks – sorry I am showing my age) – things get changed and added on, dropped and what comes out at the end isn't what your members need to hear! They need the truth.

So what's the best way to communicate with your members? **A union publication of course!**

Your paper helps with the image of the union – always keep this in mind. Keep it informative, positive when possible and a reminder to your members that we are all in this together. Your paper is there to tell the members what the union is doing for them. How the union is protecting them every day. What the officers are doing to deal with postal management; activities being planned by the local for the members.

Keeping members in the loop, setting the record straight when needed makes members feel as though they are included. They are paying their dues for something. By reinforcing the benefits of belonging you build union pride. People need a reason to be proud of the union. Each issue you have a chance to promote that pride. Make that member feel like they are getting their money's worth.

Another thing about a publication – it's usually mailed and hey that's what we are all about in the first place!

PPA membership renewal time

By Edward J. Brennan,
Secretary-Treasurer

We are all reminded that it is now time to renew our membership in the Postal Press Association (PPA) for 2015. Although we began taking in dues for 2015 at the national convention we will soon be sending out our membership notices for the coming year. This will be the first of several notices we send out each year.

We also attempt to reach members by phone should we not hear back from our notices and do not see copies of their publications come through the mail. We even check at conferences and with local and state officers and send out requests to delinquent publications in order to find out if their dues notices were not received by the correct people or if the publication has been discontinued for some reason. We make every attempt possible in order to ensure our members that the PPA is there to serve you.

As I stated above, we will soon be send-

ing out the dues notices for 2015. Please see that they get to the responsible party so that your dues are promptly paid and we know that you are still publishing. Also, please let us know if your paper was merged with that of another office and no longer publishes so that we can avoid sending unnecessary reminders.

The strength of our union lies in an informed membership and the Postal Press Association is the conductor and primary supplier of that information. Your publication is the lifeblood of the information network to your members. Your continued membership in the PPA keeps that information lifeline flowing.

When you receive your membership notice please return your payment as soon as possible or inform us as to the status of your publication. Remember, we can only inform you concerning your membership. The continued flow of information to your members is up to you. Thank you for your continued support of the PPA.

Election Day: Formula for success

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communications were particularly effective and had the highest degree of credibility with the membership.

As a result of surveys and polls among union members, it was also discovered that when it comes to politics, members want information, not orders from their unions. They want to know about issues – not partisan agendas. Following are guidelines based on union members' views to keep in mind when communicating political information:

Issues come first, candidates and parties second. From the members' perspective, political information should be based on issues. Working to elect pro-worker candidates is a legitimate union activity, but only as a means to win on important issues – not as an end in itself.

Members are very distrustful of information that comes from politicians, and are even skeptical of much they see in the mass media – so they are looking for independent sources of information. Communications with members, therefore, should emphasize the union's independent perspective and respect workers' general skepticism. Union publications should feel like *Consumer Reports* for working people, providing an objective and independent view on important employment and eco-

nomics issues. Most members already believe their unions generally provide accurate and truthful information – a significant accomplishment amid today's cynicism.

Members want information, not voting instructions. Information is what most members want from their union. Members say they do not want to be told for whom to vote. Often they perceive endorsements as "instructions" on how to vote, to which they react with indifference or even resentment. Some also suspect that endorsements are driven more by unions' institutional interests than by what is best for members.

Before members will respect endorsements, they need to see what lead to them – such as issue positions and voting records. Members prefer information from the union that shows the positions of both candidates on key issues.

If solid information is provided, most members do not object to the union also making a formal candidate endorsement. But recommendations or suggestions – indicating respect for members' intelligence and good judgment – are received better than what members perceive as commands. The first choice of many members is to have the union evaluate candidates, provide information and leave it to the individual to make the final call.

Present information credibly and objectively to overcome members' distrust of politics. Members trust their union more than many other sources, but they are extremely skeptical regarding anything dealing with politics. Therefore, it is important that information is credible – with information sources cited, for example, and without unbelievable claims about how good (or bad) candidates may be.

Members' favorite union political materials are voter guides that evaluate candidates for an office. Side-by-side comparisons of the candidates and their positions and records on key issues allow members to make direct comparisons, which is very helpful in decision-making. Such pieces also suggest that the union actually evaluated the candidates, and didn't simply make a partisan choice.

Downplay partisan rhetoric and stress the unions' role as an independent voice for working people. Members don't want their union drawn into the excessive

partisanship that Americans generally consider the downfall of our country's political system. Political communications should be based on issues, not on parties. Members recognize that unions may endorse Democrats more often than Republicans, but want reassurance the union's support is a result of a candidate's commitment to workers and their families rather than a reflection of a pro-Democratic bias.

Members want unions to represent their interests as workers, addressing issues that directly affect them on the job and by advancing a populist economic agenda. Labor's issue agenda should focus primarily on work-related and economic issues – the areas where members feel unions have clear understanding. Members trust the union to represent their interests on matters directly relating to their jobs.

Most members are also comfortable with the idea of unions representing their economic interests beyond the workplace. Members generally consider such issues as Social Security, Medicare, the minimum wage and tax fairness to be "pocketbook" concerns within the proper sphere of union involvement. Members see that large corporations and the wealthy have hugely disproportionate political influence, and believe that unions' counterweight on economic matters benefit working families.

Information is a key to increasing participation. Members strongly support union efforts to encourage them to vote on Election Day. Regardless of party, they feel this is an important and legitimate union activity.

Traditionally, mobilization is thought of as a fundamentally different activity than persuading members to support particular candidates. Research suggests, however, that the most important barrier to participation is members' low level of knowledge. People who do not feel they know much about the issues in a campaign, or where the candidates stand, are reluctant to walk into a voting booth.

Consequently, the best way to increase turnout is to educate members about the issues and candidates. Armed with this knowledge, members and their families are more likely to participate and will make informed choices when going to the polls on Election Day."



To meme or not to meme

By Lance Coles, Editor-at-Large

In the world of selfies, we also have the me me – take the spaces out and it's a "meme."

A "Internet meme" according to Wikipedia is a concept that spreads rapidly from person to person via the Internet; largely through Internet-based emailing, blogs, forums, image boards like 4chan, social networking sites like Facebook or Twitter, instant messaging, and video hosting services like YouTube.

In 2013 Richard Dawkins characterized an Internet meme as one deliberately

altered by human creativity, distinguished from Dawkins's original idea involving mutation by random change and a form of Darwinian selection.

For the purposes of this article, a "meme" is the graphic cartoon or image board.

Meme's are a great way to make use of a message through a picture, cartoon or just words.

You see them all the time on Facebook and tumbler, and they are really easy to make.

You can use PowerPoint, publisher or scan handmade images.

Why make a meme – because we live in a "mc society" – we want things fast, and we don't tend to spend a lot of time with them.

A meme on social media, is your virtual billboard, your advertisement that you don't have to pay for, and with some luck and a lot of friends, your meme can go viral and really get your message out.

When creating a meme – KISS – keep it simple!

Great images get their attention then they go for the words – the message.

Remember we tend to read in a "Z" fashion. We start in the upper left and go across then down to the bottom right and then leave the page.

Build your meme with that flow in mind.

Keep the words – your message – short. Make your type as large as you can and readable. Keep it nice and clean, bold, and reverse the type if you can on dark backgrounds. Use as much color as you can.

When making your meme, look for quotes from someone and use them. You don't need to use quotation marks, unless you want.

Where do you get the art work? Use your own photos, ask local artists, or you can go to a place like "Google images." Be careful with taking things from these sites. If you pay for them, then you have all the rights to use them. Most of what is on Google images is open and free, but not all.

A suggestion when making a meme is you can create a story board, or a "Burma shave" story. Make one that starts a thought, and then follow with a second that continues that thought, and so on.

When you are building your meme, it is best to save them as a TIFF or JPEG. Social media accepts these better when you are posting them.

Don't be afraid to repeat memes over a time. Facebook has a system where all you post is not sent to all your friends.

Memes also work great in your print publications or on your web page. They are easy, fun and effective.



Union members' views on politics

Union members are typically skeptical of parties, campaigns and candidates. Despite this, there are key issues that unite union members, and in general they support the Labor Movement's engagement in the political process and its legislative priorities. Opinion research shows:

- **75 percent** of union members agree that, "unions need to invest time and money in politics and legislation today to counter the influence of corporations and wealthy special interests."

- **70 percent** of union members say they are more likely to vote for a candidate who "is supported by the AFL-CIO and national unions, and has strong pro-union positions on the issues."

- **86 percent** of union members agree

with labor's positions on issues like the minimum wage and Medicare.

Yet, members have real concerns about the way unions approach politics.

Members sometimes feel their union is overly partisan, focusing more on political candidates and parties than on working family issues. This alienates many union members who feel the political system is generally corrupt and hostile to working people. Members prefer that their union give working people a voice in a political system that currently excludes them.

Members do not like being told who to vote for. Members understand that knowledge is power, so they want their unions to give them the information to make intelligent choices on their own.

Content development: What's news?

Ask any person "what's new," and the reply will be about something timely, important, useful, or of some consequence. Or it may simply be about something that is interesting. It will often contain elements of conflict, competition, or accomplishment. Something happened . . . or didn't happen. The main character may be somebody important and well known . . . or a stranger. And so on.

Although "news" is hard to define, we all know it when we hear or read it. News is what makes a newsletter interesting, informative, and worthwhile.

To determine what's news for your newsletter, ask:

- Is this news to me as an editor?
- As a member of this organization?

If something is news to you, chances are it will be news to your readers, too.

It seems obvious that readers want to know something if it will affect them personally. Sometimes only you may know it is something they need to know. But you always have to make them want to know.

To do this, you have to grab the reader's attention in the headline and the very first sentence. Learning to write like newspaper journalists is imperative for the volunteer editor.

Writing in a traditional newspaper style can be a real boon to a volunteer editor. It is easy to read, easy to cut, and easy to write, once you get the hang of it. Getting the hang of it may be even easier than you think. Get to the point fast. In the first sentence or so grab your reader's attention and get your message across quickly. Put first things first. You'll keep the reader's interest

longer. And you don't waste their time.

Most people can get to the point quickly when they have to. For example, you have to make a long-distance call to relay an urgent message. You only have enough time for a 60-second call. You dial, your party answers, and you say:

"Becky, help, I'm stranded at a gas station on US 1 south of Pemberton."

Then you fill in the details:

"The car broke down. It was making horrible noises; smoke started pouring out from under the hood. I barely escaped with my life."

By the time you're out of phone time your listener is out the door to rescue you. But since you've just got started on your tale you go on to add:

"And I ruined my shoes, I'm going to miss my appointment, and my whole day is messed up. It's 100 degrees in the shade out here. Oh . . . and I left the dog locked in the back seat."

The caller got to the point fast. Becky is long gone, and the dog might be, too. Perhaps getting the dog out of the car was the most important point. Even after such a great start, the caller forgot to put first things first. Forgetting to put first things first loses readers, too.

Turn things upside down

The elements of good news writing require that reporters turn things upside down to get the facts straight and told in a fast, easy-to-read manner. You don't want your article to read like the minutes of a meeting or like a speech. Public speakers often lead up to the main point or an announcement.

This keeps the audience listening . . . sometimes. But if you do the same thing, you are most likely to lose your reader.

Use the inverted pyramid which contains all the important information at the start.

Then as time and space permit, you can fill in the details.

The five w's: a good news article contains all of the relevant facts answering these questions:

- Who?
- What?
- When?
- Where?
- Why? (or How?)

You can't write the article until you have the basic facts. You may not even know what your story is until you have all of the relevant information.

The lead is the most important element of a good news story. A good lead is short and to the point. That's why it grabs attention. It may be only one sentence, but it is never more than two or three.

When you have all the facts, try to say the main message quickly. Pretend you are that person on the pay phone making an urgent one-minute call.

You'll find that you leave out some facts because they aren't necessary at that point. They come later – all the way down to the tip of that "inverted pyramid."

The inverted pyramid by another name is an upside down triangle. The whole point of it is to put the main point at the beginning of the article. Arrange the rest of the facts in descending order of importance, closing with the least important point.

**Make plans to attend the 2015
PPA Editors' Conference
August 20-22
Concourse Hotel • Madison, Wisconsin
(Pre-conference session August 19)**

Sharpening listening skills

Effective listening can make you more efficient and more productive.

Unfortunately, most people are only 25 percent effective as listeners.

The following tips and suggestions can help you become a better listener.

The benefit of listening

- **People will** respect and like you more because you have shown that you care about them and what they have to say.

- **You'll be** better informed, because when you actively listen, you learn more.

- **You'll be** better able to get things done, because you'll understand how to motivate people when you pay attention to what they're really saying – and thinking.

- **People will** listen to what you're saying because they realize that you have made them feel important – and they want to please you.

What good listeners do

- **Look at** the person who's speaking.
- **Question** the speaker to clarify what's being said.

- **Repeat some** of the things the speaker says.

- **Don't rush** the speaker.

- **Pay close** attention to what the speaker is saying.

- **Don't interrupt** the speaker.

- **Don't change** the subject until the speaker has finished his or her thoughts.

How to listen better

- **Listen for** ideas not just for facts. When you listen only for facts, you may not grasp the ideas or themes of the speaker. Here are some questions you might ask yourself when listening:

- Why am I being told this information?

- What does it lead to?

- If that's true, what does it prove?

- **Judge what** the speaker says, not how it is said. Don't let the speaker's delivery get in the way of your understanding the message. Ignore any peculiar mannerisms or speaking problems the speaker may exhibit.

- **Be optimistic** when you listen. Try to find something of interest in the subject no matter how dry it may seem at first. Open your mind and try to find out what attracted the speaker to the subject.

- **Don't jump to conclusions.** Don't listen to the beginning of a sentence and try to fill in the rest. Wait and keep listening. Clear your head of your own ideas and listen to those of the speaker.

- **Be a flexible listener** when you're taking notes. Determine as soon as possible how the speaker puts forth his or her ideas, and gear your note-taking style to the speaker's style. *Example:* Ask yourself, "Is the speaker concise or does he or she take a while to make a point?"

- **Concentrate.** Remain relaxed but attentive. But don't become tense, or you'll

strong words that may offend you. Train yourself to note the presence of emotional words – but to let them pass without an emotional reaction on your part. Work on interpreting and evaluating what the speaker is saying.

- **Practice mental exercises.** Use every opportunity to sharpen your listening skills. Work on your attitude. And practice, practice, practice.

A few more tips

Try these valuable tips which will help you develop rapport with the speaker.



make any distractions more pronounced. *Your best bet:* Try to remove as many distractions as possible. *One way:* When going to meetings get there early and sit up front where there will be fewer distractions.

- **Remember that** you can think at least four times as fast as someone can talk. That means that your thoughts will race ahead of the speaker's words – and you can become so detached that you'll have a hard time catching up with what was said. To stay on track, try to summarize what was said, or interpret the speaker's ideas, or evaluate the speaker's logic. You'll have time to do these things because your thoughts move so swiftly.

- **Work at listening.** Try to listen alertly and enthusiastically. Strive to "be alive." *How:* Respond to the speaker by giving feedback. *Examples:* Come up with an appropriate comment, smile if appropriate, and summarize what the speaker just said.

- **Keep your** mind open – and restrain your emotions. Don't be distracted by

- **Accept the** speaker's feelings. Show that you have empathy for the person or his or her problems.

- **Ask questions** to let the speaker know you are paying attention to him or her. People realize you're listening to them when you ask a question, wait for an answer, and follow up with a related question.

AIM to listen

Try this simple formula that will help you remember three vital listening concepts. It's called AIM.

- **A – Attention.** Don't fake paying attention. If the person is important enough to listen to, then try to resist distractions.

- **I – Interest.** Try to maintain interest even if you don't think the topic or person is interesting. Tell yourself that the content might prove useful to you someday.

- **M – Motivation.** Try to motivate yourself by going over all the reasons you should pay attention. Be sure to list motives that offer you the greatest benefits.

Editor's toolbox: Helpful ideas for APWU communicators

Libel vs. slander

These words are often confused. Both apply to damaging another person's character or reputation. In general, libel is written or published defamation, while slander is spoken. Note: Avoid confusing libel with liable, which means "likely" or "at risk of."

Quote mark etiquette

Quotation marks should be used honestly and sparingly, when there is a genuine quotation at hand, and it is necessary to be very rigorous about the words enclosed by the marks.

If part of it must be left out because of space limitations, it is good manners to insert three dots to indicate the omission, but it is unethical to do this if it means connecting two thoughts which the original author did not intend to have tied together. Above all, quotation marks should not be used for ideas that you'd like to disown.

How to write a successful lead sentence to your next news story

The trick to good lead writing is to focus immediately on the most newsworthy point of the story and to reserve other details until later in the story. Try to reduce the essence of the news to a single sentence or even a single word.

Use this simple device. Pretend you are calling a friend to report the news. You might start: "Do you know what happened?" "No, what happened?" Your answer to that question is your lead.

Language usage made easy

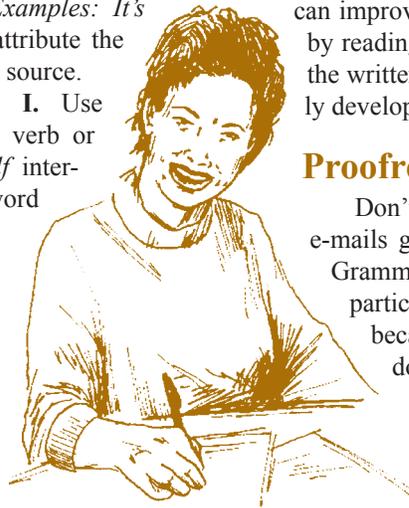
Here's a list of some frequently misused words. Use this cheat sheet as quick reference to the appropriate spelling or term.

- **Fewer or less.** This is a matter of numbers. If you are able to count the number of things or people use *fewer*. If you are unable to count a portion or quantity, use *less*. Example: With *fewer* people attending the meeting we will need *less* time.
- **Affect or effect.** *Affect* is a verb

meaning "influence." *Effect* can be either a verb meaning "to bring about" or a noun meaning "the result." Examples: The cold weather *affects* our heating bill. The company will *effect* some new attendance policies. What *effect* will the new laws have on compliance?

- **It's or Its.** *It's* is a contraction of the words *it is*. *Its* is a possessive pronoun denoting ownership. Examples: *It's* extremely difficult to attribute the statement to *its* original source.

- **Me, myself or I.** Use *me* as the object of a verb or preposition. Use *myself* interchangeably with the word *personally*. Use *I* as the subject of a verb. Example: Call Fred Smith or *me* with your answer. *I* will handle the job *myself*. Fred Smith and *I* will pass along the results of the survey.



Ways to polish your writing skills

Even if you don't think of yourself as a professional writer, your writing reflects your professionalism. If your writing is sloppy and disorganized, you will be perceived as sloppy and disorganized. So, how can you hone your writing skills? Use the following pointers:

- **Use your own words.** Don't puff up your writing with pompous language. If you wouldn't say something in normal conversation, avoid it in your writing.
- **Search for the dramatic.** Even business communication can have an element of drama. Search for the unusual. Example: If you are working on a research report, organize your writing around the most interesting findings. Let the content shape your style.
- **Let it sit.** If you have time, set your writing aside for several days. You will be surprised what time will tell you. Good writing rings true; weak wording wilts over time.

- **Ask a friend** to read your work. Even when you proofread your own writing, you can miss something.

- **Develop a thick skin.** You have to learn to accept criticism without taking it personally. Every writer has to endure some red ink. The more you embrace criticism, the more you will learn.

- **Read, read, read.** Finally, you can improve your writing immensely by reading. By exposing yourself to the written word, you subconsciously develop a better ear for language.

Proofreading tips

Don't let your documents or e-mails go out riddled with errors. Grammatical mistakes can be particularly difficult to catch because spell-checkers often don't flag them. That's why proofreading is still the best antidote.

Here are two tips for checking your work:

- **View your document** at 125% or 150%. You can better see what you're reading and more easily spot errors.
- **Switch your font to Courier**, a mono-spaced font. That makes it easier to catch mistakes, because it forces you to pay closer attention to the text.

Organization's past helps point the way to its future

Most organizations have a rich history from which you can draw ideas to help define new goals and strength. The history will point to values on which an organization was built and how those same values can apply to the future.

Who can you rely upon to obtain such information? In every organization there are a few people who've been around for long enough to tell you how things used to be. If you draw out their stories, they'll open your eyes as to how the organization has progressed and came to embrace certain beliefs. Such stories reveal a past that can strengthen the organization today.

Help with avoiding libel

You can always be sued. The suit may not prevail against you because the person suing may not want to pursue it any further, or the suit has no merit, but you can still be sued. Therefore, it's best to be careful with controversial subjects.

There is a rule of thumb: "when in doubt – leave it out," but this is not always the proper route. If you think, however, that running a certain photo, article, cartoon, or piece will bring out the worst in someone, strong enough for them to want to sue you or your local, maybe you shouldn't run it.

Your local can be ruined by a large libel suit. So could you. You don't want your local to disappear just because of the newsletter you work hard to produce. Here are a few guidelines:

- If you quote a source, identify it.
- Double check facts.
- Be critical – but is it in good faith and for the public good? Never criticize for a personal reason. It's not "your" newsletter.
 - Avoid commenting on anyone's personal life.
 - Are you being fair and impartial?
 - Keep opinion and statement of facts separate. Mark them as such.
 - Cartoons can be particularly effective. But be clever about them. Don't just jump into the gutter with those you want to criticize.
 - Don't "doctor" photos to make a point. Picturing a supervisor with (or as) a famous criminal or murderer may seem

funny, but it's actually quite juvenile and libelous.

Unsure of whether or not an article is libelous or inappropriate? Your Postal Press Association can help. Upon request, (if the

material has not already been published) the PPA will provide a confidential review and offer guidance. Over the years this service has helped to avoid many potentially costly lawsuits.

