

Episode 1: Introduction

Alright. Welcome to the first episode of From A to Arbitration!

My name is Corey Walton and I'm going to be the host of this thing.

Let me start this off by saying that I work as a city letter carrier for the United States Postal Service, and we're represented by the National Association of Letter Carriers. So, when I talk about different handbooks and manuals, and you'll hear me say the JCA.M, that's the Joint Contract Administration Manual, and that's the manual that both parties, the union and management, have agreed upon. So, you'll hear me talk about JCA.M, you'll hear me talk about M39 and M41, those are handbooks related to city letter carriers.

I believe that this podcast can be for all labor organizations but when you hear me talk about, I'll say Article 16 or 17, that's talking about the Joint Contract Administration Manual. So, I don't want you to be confused if you're from another labor organization. Like, what is he talking about this JCA.M? That's the Joint Contract Administration Manual.

I wanted to clear that up first and just to let everybody know that I'm coming solely from the perspective of the National Association of Letter Carriers, that's who I represent or that's who I work for, as far as a labor organization. We represent every city letter carrier in the United States.

That being said, I didn't want any confusion being put out there by anybody listening that's outside of that organization. But I do feel like this can be a part of any labor organization, as far as what we talk about.

I think that most labor organizations cover grievance procedure and collective bargaining. I believe it's for everybody!

We're going to cover in detail the Informal Step A and everything that leads up to that. We're going to cover in detail the Formal Step A and everything that goes along with that. We're going to cover the B Team and we're going to cover Arbitration.

I've been thinking about doing this for quite some time. I see on social media a lot of things that are covered with my brothers and sisters on those

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platforms and there's a lot of disinformation going on. So, I've had some people that I respect ask me to do this, and so, here we are, we're going to finally do it.

A little bit about myself. I've been a city letter carrier for about 27 years. I've been a shop steward since 2006. I remember when I became a shop steward. I knew nothing about the JCAM, the National Agreement, nothing like that. The man who was eventually the branch president came up to me and asked me if I would do that, be the shop steward, and I told him no, because I'd never seen a JCAM. Through some talking with some other carriers, I decided, finally, that I would do it.

When I decided to do that, I told myself I was going to be the best that's ever done it. So, I took it on as such. I studied every handbook and manual I could get my hands on. During lunch, I had the JCAM, I would read it constantly. On my breaks I read the M41 and M39 Handbooks because I wanted to know those things better than management. I wanted to know the M39 better than management did, which didn't take a whole lot. I wanted to be the best that there was, so I studied to make sure that was the case. Now that doesn't mean I was the best that there was, but I studied so that I could be.

Eventually I became the Formal Step A for the installation that I worked in. During that time, I probably handled several 1000 cases, dealt with several thousand grievances. Back then, we didn't have the things that the shop stewards and Formal Step A's have now. We didn't have social media to help. We pretty much did it on our own. The templates that I made were original templates. I'm talking about Article 8 templates, discipline templates and things like that. We didn't have the access that carriers do now, so it was a lot of research and a lot of study.

I remember calling my business agent at the time and telling him, hey look, send me everything you can send me to help me out. He sent me two huge paper boxes filled with B Team decisions. I read those and I studied those and memorized most of them because I wanted to know the arguments that

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they were looking for. If we lost, why did we lose? If we won, what helped us win?

I did that for a few years, became an Arbitration Advocate in 2012 and I've been doing that ever since. It's a great passion of mine. I love Arbitration, I love the setting and I imagine I'll do that until my retirement, I've got 10 more years.

I've done approximately 140 Arbitrations, so I know that process well. So, when I say I'm going to cover the Informal Step A, the Formal Step A and Arbitration, those are things that I've done, and I've done well. So, I know what I'm talking about. Am I the best? No. Am I a resource? Yes. The B Team, I have not done that, but I do know people that have. As we go along this journey together, I'll have certain people that I respect, in our craft as you would say, on as guests. There are people that I respect highly, that I'll have on to talk about the different steps, Informal A, Formal A, B Team, and Arbitration. I'll have a few Arbitrators on, just asking them questions. When we get to the level of Arbitration, I'll just have Arbitrators talk about, hey what do you look for in an opening statement? What do you look for in direct testimony, direct questioning? What do you look for in cross examination? What temperament do you look for out of your Advocate? What about Closings, what do you look for? Briefs, when you get a brief, what is it specifically that you want to see? And so, I think that would be a help to those Advocates that are new and if you've been doing it a while. I think that this will help new shop stewards. I think that this will help older shop stewards.

I became an Arbitration Advocate 2012. I'm the district NALC cochair for the NALC and USPS safety taskforce, of course we don't do a whole lot. I've been on the National Safety Committee. I've met in Washington with those people under the direction of Manny Peralta, who have a lot of respect for. I've done regional training. When we go to regional training, I've done training there, which is something that I love doing.

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Let me state this right off the jump, I'm in no way associated or endorsed or supported or encouraged by the NALC. I've not talked to anybody at that level about doing this. When I decided to do it, I didn't need anybody's permission. I decided to do it because I'm going to help my brothers and sisters, hopefully, that are new to this or that are older to this. So, in no way am I endorsed by the NALC.

I think that we will have fun during this process. By no means am I an expert, but I've done it for quite some time. I know what we're looking for, as far as, when it gets to the final step. When I talk about the Informal Step A, we're going to discuss things from the very beginning. Pre-disciplinary, talking about that, we're going to cover that in depth. We're going to cover what happens when you receive discipline. What are we going to request? We're going to talk about researching those things. We'll talk about every aspect of the contract, Article 8, Article 41, those things. What do we need to look for, as far as, showing a history of those violations? What are we looking for, as far as, the remedy? What are we looking for, as far as, an issue? We'll cover those things in depth.

When you get to the Formal Step A. To me, the Formal Step A, is without question, the most important step of all the steps. Cases are won or lost at the Formal Step A. Obviously, Informal is important because you've got to file the grievance but the Formal Step A, generally, is that person who has dealt with a wider range of grievances. They should be well versed in things. They know how to prepare a case file for Arbitration. They should know, once you get to Arbitration you see that's not always the case. Some of these Formal Step A's need help. But, the Formal Step A's should be the one step that they've got a grasp on case file building. When I get into the B Team, I've never been on the B Team, but I've dealt with them a lot. I'll have some people on from the B Team. Past B Team members talk about what they're looking for. Why they resolve grievances the way they do. I've not always agreed with the B Team decision, and I've let them know that, but, you know, there's a method to their madness as well.

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When you talk about Arbitration, like I've said, I've had about 140 Arbitrations. We've done pretty good, you know, as far as, wins and losses. I've got a little bit of a different style, but everybody has their own style. We'll talk about those things. I'll read some opening statements to you, so that those Advocates that are new, that are wondering, trying to find their way, you know, what should an opening statement sound like? I have some saved, I'll read those. That doesn't mean it's right, but that's just something that you can hear. You can determine, hey, is this something that I want to do, something I want to sound like, questioning witnesses, cross examining witnesses and closings?

A friend of mine sits in with me sometimes and he records my closings, so I have a few of those recorded. I get kind of animated in my closing. Those are things that I'll have recorded, and I'll be able to play for you.

If you're navigating, you're wondering, how am I going to do this? Do I bullet point it? Do I write it out? Should I write a brief? 99% of my closings have been oral closings, I hate briefs. So, I'll play those for you, I bullet point mine.

I think that we're really going to have a good time doing this. I think that it's going to be very informative. At some point, I'll ask and answer questions that you might have, and I look forward to it. I think that if you have a labor organization, this will be beneficial to you. Anybody that has a collective bargaining agreement. I think this would be beneficial because it talks about each step and we're going to go in depth about each step.

I'm excited about it. I hope that you tune into it. Whether it's one person or 1000 people. I'm going to do the same thing. We're going to have fun with it, and I hope that it will help you along the way. I look forward to it. So, I'll see you on the next episode, where we'll get started getting in depth about some things. Until then y'all take care.