

The Professional Flagman

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The Professional Flagman is a book to help the Qualified Flagman contracted by Amalgamated Transit Union 308 to the Chicago Transit Authority make our work a highly-respected craft in the rail transportation industry. It is not an official publication of the Chicago Transit Authority nor the Amalgamated Transit Union.

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<https://www.facebook.com/flagmanforum>

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Mr. Leon Jones, Rail Supervisor. He is a veteran who sets the bar high for all trainmen and uses every flagging briefing as a serious teaching opportunity.

Contents

Acknowledgements	5
Introduction	9
Mental Preparation	11
Physical Preparation	13
Operations	27
Working With Others	47
People Problems	49
Radio Communications	51
Exercise	53
Diet	57
Teaching Others	59
Code of Conduct	61
Index	63

Introduction

Disclaimer: Unless cited by Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) Rules, Bulletins and Standard Operating Procedures, all advice and opinions in this book belong to the author. This book is not an authorized publication of the CTA. It is a book of techniques I have learned from others and taught during Line Instruction.

Also, I, the author take no responsibility for anyone's conduct from the suggestions and advice in this book. The respective authorities should be consulted for any questions or program the reader engages in. Regarding the sections on diet and exercise, please check with your doctor and clear any exercise and/or diet changes with them before using the advice contained therein. I am not a doctor or dietician.

Our duties as a Flagman are essentially defined as a protector of workers on the railroad right-of-way (ROW). When done properly, with courtesy and consistency, our work becomes exceptional. While some contort rules, we choose to exceed expectations and make the Flagman craft something for others to envy. This is being a professional.

A Professional Flagman does not need a taskmaster to threaten him or her in order to conduct safe operations. We do not follow the crowd. We follow the Rules. We do it because we care. We do it because our Union represents us as reliable and hard working. Our compensation—and the ability to bargain for it—is linked to our willingness to be prepared for and perform our jobs to the best of our abilities.

This book is a guide to help us be positive examples for future Flagmen. Although its context presupposes the reader is an Amalgamated Transit Union Local 308 Flagman contracted to serve at the Chicago Transit Authority, this book may also be relevant to Flagmen in other rail transportation locals.

I hope you find this book useful in becoming a safe, outstanding and inspirational worker on the railroad.

Moreover, I encourage you to join the Flagman Forum. This is a member-led labor union effort to help improve the Flagman craft, support each other and share useful and relevant experiences. Learn more online at: <https://www.facebook.com/flagmanforum>

Mental Preparation

As a Flagman, the difference between a good day or a bad day depends almost entirely on how prepared you are for the assignment. Your state of preparation is mental and physical.

Being mentally prepared enhances on-the-job safety.

1. Arrive at the terminal at least 45 minutes early (an hour is best).
 - a. Sign in.
 - b. Complete a radio check. It is best to do it outside and away from heavy shielding (steel or concrete enclosures). The Controller should receive a clear signal. You should also enunciate your words. Not only does that make it easier for the Controller to understand you, but it makes you sound confident.
2. Review bulletins for the day. Bulletins are important to read, because they often provide insight about the persons you are assigned to protect. If the bulletin is not specific to your project, it can inform you about activity operators may encounter—and have an affect on their stress level in when going into your worksite.
3. Be quiet for a time. Use it for being a student. Many of us make the mistake of not studying after we qualify for the position. Learning must be an ongoing process or we will stagnate and easily deviate from what is correct. While you are awaiting a briefing—or during any other moment of downtime—review the following items for 5-10 minutes each.

- a. Standard Operating Procedures and Rules regarding Flagging.
 - b. Rail System Rule Book.
 - c. Collective Bargaining Agreement (Local 308 “Contract” / CBA).
 - d. Your Local Union Bylaws.
4. Do something positive: Take a walk, listen to some uplifting music on your headphones, read a novel (or write a novel!), complete a maze, knit, draw, share information about a Union meeting or discuss workplace problems/solutions with a coworker. Whatever you choose, make sure it is something *positive*. Most people use their smartphones to pass the time. This can actually leave one feeling drained, depressed or angry. *Relaxing* one’s self is different from *distracting* one’s self. Being a Professional Flagman is about making good habits.
5. Avoid negativity at all costs. Negativity can manifest itself in other people and yourself. This is very important. When you are approached with gripes about the job, gossip about coworkers and things out of your control, try to respond with a positive perspective, walk away or simply ignore them. You may even become a target for negative people. In such cases, it is important to document each incident and take steps to end it. When negative thoughts enter your mind, counter them with enthusiastic liberation. Free, or unchain yourself from them. You are responsible for your soul and the ruin that can come about after a steady diet of negativity.

Physical Preparation

Each Flagman is required to wear certain items and check out equipment at the beginning of each tour of duty. A Professional Flagman takes preparation very seriously—from being properly dressed for the weather to having all necessary items on-hand.

1. Safety Boots: Your footwear should be just as high—or higher—than your ankle. This supports your foot properly. The following suggestions will help you get the most out of your footwear and minimize discomfort.
 - a. Tie the laces up tightly and use a double-knot. Use all eyelets. This protects your foot and prevents tripping or getting snagged.
 - b. Use heel guards if the inside back heel of the shoe wears out. This protects your socks and skin from the rough plastic of the boot or shoe.
 - c. Buy a shoe ½ to 1 whole size larger. This will give your toes wiggle-room, accommodate thicker socks and/or toe warmers. You might also buy 2 pairs of shoes: One for warm weather to fit and one a full size larger for cold weather.
 - d. Polish your boots at least once per week. Avoid liquid polish at all costs as it will eventually cause cracking. Use the cream polish in a small round, flat tin. This helps hide the frequent damage your shoes go through on the rugged railroad right-of-way.
 - e. Keep a can of your preferred disinfectant (eg. Lysol, Seventh Generation) near your front

door. When you come home from work, take the shoes off and spray the bottom sole. Keep the boots in a shoe tray or somewhere safe they can dry. The right-of-way is littered with chemicals and various biohazards that you should not track into your home.

2. Whistle: Purchase a non-metallic type. Don't go with the cheapest one. Higher price tends to have a durable material and a comfortable, breakaway lanyard (to prevent a choking and entanglement hazard). Put your whistle on while dressing at home for the day. That way, you will never need to look for it when needed. Also, it will be easier to oblige, when a supervisor, manager or instructor asks to see it. If a whistle bouncing around your neck is annoying, just put it in your shirt like a necklace.
3. Safety Vest: Not only does the garment make you visible to train operators, but also reflects your attitude about safety and professionalism. Always close your vest—especially when on the right-of-way. Your visibility from reflective light can be reduced up to 50% by simply leaving it open.
 - a. As of this writing, there are two types of vests used by Flagmen: A pocketed type and a non-pocketed type. The non-pocketed type is limited on the amount of times you can wash it before requiring a new one. It has a clothing tag with checkboxes to mark off for each wash. Use a permanent marker when checking off each wash (and put your name). When the vest gets smudged with grease or grime, wash it right away. However, be sure to pre-treat the stains with stain remover (e.g. Shout). It may not completely eliminate the stain, but it will help make your vest from looking too filthy. Too many stains can interfere with the reflective

properties of the vest. So when it is 40-50% covered in stains, obtain a new one.

- b. A pocketed vest is best because you can keep various items easily accessible such as a notebook, pen, paperwork and other useful items. It can also be a little heavy—and that can make worker in hotter areas a chore.
 - c. Sometimes the company decal may begin to peel off—whether it is from washing or not. Use fabric glue to re-fasten it before it rips. Fabric glue dries hard. So apply it in single drops instead of lines so your vest can roll up or fold it easily when you store it.
4. Uniform (or no uniform): If you wear the uniform—such as a CTA jumpsuit—wear it properly and keep it clean. It looks very un-professional to mix uniform items with your own non-uniform items. This includes small details such as a belt. At no time should you not have a belt on your pants (or jumpsuit). The main reason is the belt serves as an emergency life-saving device used to pull a person off of an energized third rail. When you wear it on the inside of a jumpsuit, it takes too much time to remove the belt (every second counts in third rail emergencies). The belt is also an efficient way to carry your flashlight, radio and other items. Wear a belt right.
 - a. A jumpsuit has two side pockets. One is just a gap to allow you to reach into the pocket of the pants you wear under the jumpsuit. It is very easy to lose items in this false pocket.
 - b. The jumpsuit belt loops wear out quickly. So take a few minutes with needle and thread to reinforce them.

- c. Wear a long-sleeve shirt to protect your arms from possible electrocution by an arc explosion or other unexpected electrical burns.
 - d. Avoid wearing any metallic rings or bracelets on your hands, wrists, arms or neck.
 - e. Wear bright clothing. In the very least, buy some fluorescent green and orange shirts.
5. Flashlight: The Professional Flagman will always have a back-up for almost everything—especially the flashlight. Your back-up can be a smaller, second flashlight or spare batteries for the one on-hand (if you or a partner loses a flashlight while on duty, the batteries will not be enough). Ideally, you should have a main flashlight and 2 smaller LED bulb types. If using rechargeable batteries, always charge them before you leave (keep the charger and empty flashlight near your belongings so you don't forget them before going to work).

Make sure your flashlight has a sturdy clip, on which you can attach it to a carabiner on your belt. This will prevent the flashlight from falling and keep it nearer to your hands than it would be in your bag or pocket. You can count on losing your flashlight if you don't have it secured this way. If the clip for the flashlight is connected to the battery compartment, it will be a screw-on type that can get loose. Be sure to put tape around the edge of the cap to prevent losing everything as the cap opens. It is a bad feeling when your flashlight falls into subway sludge or from an elevated structure where you cannot easily go down to retrieve.

6. Radio: If the company does not assign you a radio, you will need to check one out from the terminal. To ensure you obtain a radio of your choice with a fully

charged battery, the radio should be the first piece of equipment you check out. Without delay, perform a radio check (do so outdoors and clear of steel and concrete walls if possible). Let the Terminal Clerk know if the radio does not work. As a Professional Flagman, your life—and those who you protect and work with—can depend on a functioning radio.

- a. Obtain a holster for your radio. It should be adjustable and snugly fit your radio. It can be slightly loose to make it easy to remove the radio. However, it should have a strap to go over the top of the radio so it cannot slip out. It should also fit the radio's clip—if your radio has one. It is safer for the radio if it stays in the holster permanently while you control it through the lapel speaker microphone.
- b. Keep the lapel speaker microphone clipped to your safety vest with the cord across your back and over your shoulder. The benefit of the speaker microphone is that you get most of the functionality of a full size radio in a smaller package. You will also have a speaker and microphone closer to your head, making it so much easier to communicate (much safer). Due to the fact that the speaker is so close to your ear, you will not need to set the volume as high as you would with a full radio in your pocket. This will save a great deal of battery power and give you freer use of your hands. This comes in handy when ambient noise levels are very high (loud construction activity, other rail traffic or an expressway).
- c. Like your flashlight, you should make it a goal to buy a second radio and/or a back-up battery for your radio. This includes a backup speaker

lapel microphone and antenna (make sure the antenna is tuned for 450-470 MHz). Antennae can be damaged. When they are cut, bent or crushed, they will no longer be tuned. The result is a poor signal and overheating of the radio. Batteries, microphones and antennae types are exclusive to the type of radio. Kenwood and Motorola are not interchangeable.

- d. Test the radio's short-range and long-range functionality. Sometimes they can only transmit on long-range, regardless of the A or B setting. Report this problem to the Clerk or Administrative Manager right away.
7. Flag: The condition of an available flag is always unpredictable. Some flags contain a thin, rigid piece of plastic, which keeps the flag straight when in use. However, some Flagmen do not store it properly. Instead of folding it properly, they roll it around the wood stick—which breaks the plastic reinforcement. This reinforcement helps the flag to unfold quickly when in use—which in turn, increases its visibility. To store a flag properly, simply put the reinforced section over the length of the stick. Then fold and roll the non-reinforced sections around the stick. You can fasten it with a rubber band.
 - a. Avoid using your flag as a digging instrument. This will just damage the handle and create slivers.
 - b. Make sure the red part of your flag is securely fastened to the stick. Otherwise, a strong gust of wind may blow it off the stick.
 - c. Never work without a flag—even for low light or subway assignments. Simply put, you may

be outside after sunrise or you may be transferred to another work location in daylight. You also might be on an assignment where another Flagman will relieve you on-site. So they will need to use your equipment (sometimes there will be a shortage at the terminal).

- d. A flag can serve as a cover when kneeling on muddy surfaces as you install or remove the portable track trip.
8. Wristwatch: Your watch should be water-proof and shock resistant. A so-called smart watch is a bad idea since they are internet/phone enabled, fragile and very expensive (As the safety rules regarding digital devices become stricter, avoid wearing smart-watches when on duty). They are also very sensitive to electromagnetic surges (which surrounds us on the right-of-way). A battery-operated type with a seconds hand is fine. Digital is very useful because it can give you the exact time and date—which you can synchronize to the Control Center. Alarm clock and stop-watch features can be useful. For example, when you want to set the time for 30 minutes of work in one place, the alarm will remind you that the workers must set up a Slow Zone. Another important feature is the ability for the watch to display 24-hour time.
 9. Dietz light: Like the flag, a Professional Flagman will always be prepared by packing one in their equipment bag. Extreme fog, shorter daylight hour, being kept on duty past sunset or being reassigned to the subway can happen anytime. If it is too heavy to carry all day, simply keep it in a secure location until you need to return to the terminal. Don't forget to retrieve it when you return to the terminal.

A Dietz light is also useful if a Slow Zone board light malfunctions. If you are working with others where you can share lights, you can substitute your light for the malfunctioning Slow Zone board light.

10. Air horn: No matter which brand you are assigned, never leave the terminal without less than two plastic horn tops and two full air cans. Be sure the horn tops fit the air cans! If you cannot obtain a full can, then take no less than three partially full cans for every missing full can. Keeping two horns is best because you may accidentally drop it from a bridge or other elevated structure.

When working outdoors in temperatures below 40 degrees Fahrenheit, you will need to keep at least two cans warm at all times. Otherwise, the cans “freeze up” and make no sound (whenever that occurs, use your whistle and short-range radio to alert partners). The easiest way to keep them warm is to hold them in the torso area of your jumpsuit. This is another reason why you should always wear your belt on the outside of your jumpsuit. The entire area around your waist is the perfect storage area for 2-3 air cans.

Keeping your hands free and tools secure as much as possible makes flagging properly much safer. During warmer weather, consider attaching a power drill holster to your belt. An air horn will fit perfectly. You can reach for your side and press the horn button without grabbing or fidgeting with it.

11. Portable Track Trip (PTT): Without a doubt, this is the most important tool for the Professional Flagman. There should never be a time when you check one out and not have it with you (with an intention to use it). Whenever possible, try to use the same PTT each time you work at a specific terminal. Each one has subtle

qualities that you will begin to notice over time.

12. Equipment bag: Make sure there are no holes or tears at any part of the of the bag—especially the leather bottom portion. Some flagmen leave trash and food scraps in the bag. Professional Flagmen will always take their trash with them.

Avoid putting the equipment bag on tables and seats, as the bottom of it is extremely filthy because we must leave it on the right-of-way. Wipe off any globs of grease on the handle or inside the bag.

When you pack the bag, place the items in order so it is easy to unpack:

- Dietz Light.
- PTT base.
- PTT staff (place between the Dietz Light and the wall of the bag.
- Flag.
- Fill the gaps with air cans.
- Place the plastic horns in the small inner pocket of the bag. This prevents them from breaking under pressure or sounding off if they are still attached to the air cans.

13. Clothing (non-uniform): Wear pants and shirts suitable for outdoor construction work. Pay close attention to weather forecasts and your tolerance levels for temperature. Whether you have dark or light skin, sunblock lotion is important to reduce the amount of harmful UV rays that can burn or make exposed skin rough over time (which increases your chances of melanoma).

When you are standing for long periods of time, you require more layers as you would if you were in a moving gang. Use long underwear and layers of thin

clothing when appropriate. However, be careful with long underwear! If you are working in the subway, you may easily overheat. Long-sleeve—even in the summer—protects your arms from possible electrical burns.

After some trial and error, you will figure out the right combination of clothing to wear in specific environments.

Keep a well-stocked supply of disposable hand and toe warmers. These are crucial to cold-weather survival. It really does not matter how thin your socks and gloves may be. As long as your skin is covered and there is space between your fingers and toes—which provides the air necessary for them to function—these little things will do the job. As described in the section about Safety Boots, be sure to buy a ½ to 1 size larger than your regular shoe size. Otherwise toe warmers can hurt your toes and get cold as they crystalize and loose heat due to lack of air and movement.

14. Rain gear. A hooded rain jacket is an absolute necessity. The company should provide you one if you request it (be persistent). Otherwise, buy your own. However, make sure it is no longer than the top of your knees so it does not make contact with the third rail when wet. Be sure to wear a safety vest over it. The non-pocketed type is best, as it will not add weight if it gets wet. However, the vest will fit best—and stay closed—if it is at least 1 size larger.
15. Hats: In cold weather, keeping your head covered with a knitted cap is the least you can do to keep warm (heat escapes quickly from your head). However, a full face mask is best. Use an anti-fogging wax on your eyeglasses and safety glasses. When it is warm, use a brimmed hat to protect your face and neck from sunburn. Even if you have dark skin, you can still get

sunburn at certain times of day in the summer.

Although it is not required of Flagmen per current company rules, you should wear a hardhat designed for fall protection (chin strap). Everyone working on or near the right-of-way has head protection except Flagmen. I personally have seen and been told of many occasions when falling objects have hit Flagmen on the head (some incidents have caused them to miss work). For the most convenience and safety, make sure your hardhat has clips to accommodate a headlamp type flashlight. That will eliminate the need to hold your flashlight as you walk in dark areas.

16. Eye protection: Explosions, flying debris and electrical arcing can permanently damage your eyes. As with falling debris, these things have disabled Flagmen in the past. You cannot anticipate when a powerful arc or explosion from a tool dropped on the third rail will happen. Safety glasses—or a visor on your hardhat—will protect you from such accidents.
17. Earplugs: There will be assignments when you are positioned near loud machinery. Keep spare earplugs at home as they can be easy to misplace or get too dirty after repeated use.
18. Gloves: Keep at least two pair of gloves: A thin pair to protect your hands and not make them sweat too much in warm weather. The other pair should be for cold weather. They should have rubber palms and no metal parts. Using gloves with reflective or bright colors just for hand signals is a good idea. However, only use them for hand signals as they will get dirty and harder to see.
19. Monocular: This is a small device that resembles binoculars, but has only one lens. Buy a waterproof type with clip. Use a holster for it for added

convenience and protection. Use this to see signals, trains in the distance, switchpoints and track trips. It can also help you identify details and persons approaching the worksite.

20. Sunglasses: These are an absolute necessity when outside in sunny to partly-sunny skies during summer or winter. The intensely bright reflection of sunlight on snow or rock ballast can be blinding. Repeated exposure can damage your eyes. Keep a high-quality pair in a sturdy case with you at all times.

21. Diary/notebook: This is probably one of the most important items you need on the path towards becoming a Professional Flagman. Buy a bundle of small 2x3" notebooks (they fit easily in most pockets). Document the basics—and necessary detailed information—for each day you work. As you go through your routine, write down what happens. Do not wait until later to do it. You will probably forget. I suggest recording the following events:

- a. Date.
- b. Time you are scheduled to begin/Time you actually arrive. When finished for the day, write the time you are off the clock.
- c. Job number.
- d. Location/description of assignment.
- e. Radio number.
- f. Trip number.
- g. Dietz light number.

- h. Names and badge number of assigned partners for you job on the duty sheet (update it if you are reassigned or switch partners).
- i. Name of crew leader/foreman who you meet at the worksite. Observations about incidents involving you (Include time and identifying information).
- j. Tips about flagging from others.
- k. Compliments you receive (include name if possible). This will help you build a network of allies and possible mentors.

Example of the bare minimum you should record:

05/06/2020 CP19-777 Belmont Brown
T401, DL08, R7771 (Trip 401, Dietz light #8, Radio #7771)

Example of additional notes to log the day:

0855: Arr (Arrived) Belmont
0910: Called on ROW (right-of-way)
0920: Turned WA light on. Box door was broken. Reported WA-6723 to control. Also missing lock.
1025: 3x3 insulation sheet fell from scaffold. Gave to worker on platform. No train nearby. No delay.
1035: 498/5713 (run #498 with head car #5713) proceeded before my signal. Asked him to please wait for my proceed signal on SR (Short-range radio). Complied. Work area clear. Proceeded. He apologized.
1215: Workers called for break.
1300: Returned from break.
1407: 491 shouted "good job."

1445: Requested foreman to turn slow zone boards. Refused. Only wanted to turn 6 board. Cited Cited bulletin requiring that all slow zone boards be turned or removed at the end of the workday (use Bulletin number if possible). Complied after whining. All boards turned. Turned off WA light. Box door still broken.

1458: Called off ROW. Ctrl 19.

1310: Dep. (Departed) Belmont

When you maintain a habit of writing everything down, you will be able to present the facts quickly if you are questioned about it. You will also learn more about your job and be less stressed out trying to remember people and incidents. If there is a persistent problem, your notes can help prove your case. However, if you must make a report, keep it short. Everything in your own notes does not need to be in a report. That could have unintended consequences!

Operations

Always try to obtain as much information about the job as possible. If you can get it from a coworker with intranet access, a printout of job orders and finding the Flagman Requirements for the work area will be very helpful. If you take a train to work—and it passes the worksite—pay attention to what is in place. Even if you do not know precisely what you will be doing and where you will work, you can get clues from a currently installed Slow Zone, materials and general conditions.

Do your best to arrive early to the worksite—at least 10 minutes. Be prepared. Go to the bathroom ahead of time. Before departing the terminal—and if the Clerk is not too busy—you can ask if he or she has information on what time you must report to the worksite.

The majority of flagging assignments involves protecting workers on the right-of-way in Slow Zones or moving gangs. Your questions—and information in the foreman's instructions must satisfy the requirements. Do not assume they know or understand the rules. Some workers will go through the most incredible acts to avoid setting up a Slow Zone. Some may even manipulate coworkers in an effort to pressure you to comply with their incorrect interpretation. Even if their ideas—or that of your coworkers—seems to make sense, if it is not congruent with the Rules, a you should get approval from a Supervisor or Manager.

Riding the train to worksite: A Professional Flagman does not sit in seats while customers have filled the train and/or are standing. Stand near a door, keep your phone out of sight, your voice low and be polite to customers who may ask questions. A Professional Flagman knows that he or she may not be in a recognizable uniform, but avoiding being caught in a customer complaint or compliance sweep is more important than 20-30 minutes of comfort staring a smartphone.

Be courteous to the Crew Leader/Foreman. Introduce yourself and shake his or her hand when meeting them. Treat the foreman/crew leader as if he or she were a guest in your home. For example: “Good evening, my name is Eric and this is my partner Brittany. We are your flagmen for today.” Ask the crew leader/foreman important questions such as:

1. What are you working on today?
2. Where exactly will you be located?
3. How long will you be there? Emphasize the rules regarding a Slow Zone. As per the Rules, if the Slow Zone is already set up, ask them to wait while you check that it is proper (walk the distance of the entire Slow Zone(s) with the Foreman or his designated representative). More importantly, when you check the Slow Zone, make sure the “Begin Slow Zone 6 MPH” board is posted near a safe area for you to stand—and escape, should there be a need for it. Slow Zone or not, standing for long periods of time between two tracks should be avoided if possible. Always try to get a spot with bunched crossties and a fool-catcher (the tiny platform extended from the tracks that usually holds signal equipment, power cabinets or other permanent fixtures). That way you will be clear of train traffic on the other side and have something to hold on to when it is windy. If there is no alternative to standing between two tracks, it is very important that you get regular reliefs every 45-60 minutes.
4. Will you have a scheduled break or will it be an ongoing work (which would require you to have a Flagman on relief standby)?

5. Will you be working in a WA light zone for any amount of time (with the exception of walking through it)? If so, 3-4 flagmen may be needed, depending on the location.
6. Do you have a Slow Zone? If so, walk through a previously established Slow Zone to make sure all signs are properly spaced and lit. Also, this is the time to adjust the location of the Begin Slow Zone 6 MPH sign to ensure safe footing. If you can adjust the board’s location closer to a “fool catcher,” do it. A Flagman may need to stand at the board in high winds. Also, it can provide a place to lean against if the structure vibrates or the Flagman experiences fatigue or vertigo.
7. Politely inform or remind workers that staying more than 30 minutes in one place requires a proper Slow Zone. You must be willing to enforce it. Follow up your words with action. Study the Rules so you can function with confidence and make no mistakes. The Slow Zone must be proper. As per the Flagging Bulletins, moving gangs—crews working at a location for less than 30 minutes—require the protection of a portable track trip. The Rail System Rulebook also requires the use of a portable track trip with or without a Slow Zone. There is a commonly accepted “rule” that a portable track trip *cannot* be used if there is no Slow Zone. **This is not true and is very unsafe.**
8. Politely inform the Foreman that they must wait for you to install the portable track trip before they can begin work. Remind them to wait. If they go out anyway, give a stern warning (some workers can be forgetful as they may have not worked with a Flagman that insisted they follow SOP). If they are intent on doing it their way after a second or third warning, call the Controller (I prefer the “three strikes and you’re out” method). After you are acknowledged, calmly tell

the Controller something like “Workers refused to wait for me to protect the track with my trip...Workers are not cooperating with the Rules and are unprotected...Please send a supervisor, manager or call the police to arrest the trespassers.” The latter is extreme! However, if you must deal with a rebellious worker, toughness is required. After the Controller calls the supervisor, the workers may suddenly change their attitude and choose to comply. Call the Controller again and report something like “the workers have decided to comply with the Rules and we are working this out...a supervisor is no longer needed as the workers have promised to follow the Rules.”

Although SOP may assert that the foreman/crew leader has jurisdiction over the flagmen, that does not mean a flagman is subservient to the foreman/crew leader. Jurisdiction is defined as “the official authority to make (esp. legal) decisions and judgments.” It means they can adjust and work within the Slow Zone/worksites as needed. This includes coordinating breaks, requesting protection and where to move and adjust the Slow Zone/worksites. If you disagree with the leader, express your concern and try to find a happy medium within the Rules. As always, when they desire something that seems outside the bounds of the Rules, calmly request a supervisor or manager to make the final decision.

A Professional Flagman must strive to be 100% prepared to work within the Safety Rules. Even if you are assigned with flagmen who seem to be unenthusiastic about working, never give in to pessimism. Be a good example.

Never expect that workers are prepared to set up a Slow Zone. You should expect them to follow the rules. Whether they or your coworkers think there is an exception to the rule, you should assume the motivation is to avoid the hassle of setting one up. Moreover, if you are prepared with the detailed diagrams and information in the “Flagman Requirements” publication (a document available on the

company intranet that is used by workers to figure out how many flagmen are needed for particular areas throughout the system), you will have the upper hand for any dispute. Regardless, if cooperation is unattainable, call the Controller for a supervisor. If the supervisor is uncooperative, call the Controller for a supervisor or manager. If the manager is uncooperative, request a Safety Officer. The pressure to conform will be *intense*. You must remain *calm* and not buckle under if you know the situation is *unsafe*.

A Professional Flagman is always focused on protecting the workers within the Rules on paper—not someone’s interpretation or exceptions to the Rules. However, your interpretation of safety within the confines of a hazardous work area also holds weight in your assessment. If the workers are unwilling to ensure the area you are in is free of ice or has secure footing, then the worksite is unsafe. Your personal safety is not to be compromised. However you handle the situation, remain calm.

Sometimes the pressure to give in is so intense that you may become very angry or feel hopeless. Your frustration can boil over into shouting matches. You definitely want to avoid laying your hands on anyone or using threatening postures—especially while holding object that could be used as a weapon! You are not trying to get out of working for the day or boost your ego. You are trying to change and unsafe and non-Rules compliant worksite into a safe worksite that a Rail Instructor would admire. In order to do that, you need cooperation from the workers. Ideally, you should have your Flagman team on-board with the plan. Show them your diagrams and rules. Ask for input. However, you may not be appreciated. In some cases, you will be ignored and undermined. In more cases than none, you will be the only one who understands the seriousness of what must be done.

When you find yourself alone in the effort of safety, you should hold fast to the facts. Managers and safety officers only want to know the facts as you see it. Be a good influence. If you are

flagging trains as you promised when signing the Letter of Understanding during the pre-hire session at CTA Headquarters—which is the foundation of the Rules—you can be a major influence in making flagging into a skilled trade.

The following are very important steps to running a safe flagging operation:

1. As outlined previously, it is critical to obtain as much information possible before and during the meeting the Foreman.
2. When the job is finished, make sure to turn or remove ALL Slow Zone boards in the proper order: Clear, Slow Zone Ahead, Slow Zone 600 Ft. Ahead, 15 MPH and Begin Slow Zone 6 MPH. It is ALL or NOTHING. When we leave Slow Zone signs up in various areas, it creates “Slow Zone Fatigue.” That is, train operators can be confused or become accustomed to seeing Slow Zone signs with no workers. Then, when work is really being done, it can be difficult for them to be prepared. In addition to the signs, train operators must obey cab and wayside signals that restrict their speed. This interferes with the regular schedule of service. Never hesitate to signal an Operator to slow down or stop if safety is involved, but do not delay service unnecessarily. Leaving the Slow Zone signs in place cause an unnecessary delay (against the Rules). Leaving the “Begin Slow Zone 6 MPH” board is particularly careless since it functions as a restrictive signal—Unless a Flagman near it displays a proceed signal. However, according to SOP, there is a small exception when tracks may not be in a safe condition for normal speeds. This is a small exception that may never apply in the majority of Flagman assignments. Never, ever make up your own rules from exceptions. If a Slow Zone sign is attached to or near another sign, make sure it does not block the face of the other sign—a potential delay to service. If the workers

refuse to turn ALL the signs, politely cite Flagging Bulletins that require all of them be turned or removed. If they persist, you can report it to the Controller or submit a Report to Manager (be sure to include the job number and name of the Foreman).

3. Leave everything as you found it—but safer. If you activate or turn off a WA light control box, be sure to close and lock it. The lock is crucial to preventing sabotage or unauthorized use. As per the Workers Ahead SOP, non-CTA workers cannot touch the control boxes. If a non-CTA worker says they will do it, politely remind them that is against the Rules and do it for them. If the lock is missing, damaged or non-functional (due to rust), notify the Controller as soon as possible. Mark the control box number in your notes as another employee may need to confirm it with you later or in a report. Also, make sure to lock any platform gates, doors and anything you open or unlock. Never leave your own trash on fool catchers, on platforms or anywhere but in a garbage can.
4. Stop the train before removing the portable track trip staff. Various Flagging SOP contain explicit instructions regarding this important procedure. A Professional Flagman is consistent in his/her operation. Operators run on tight schedules and are frequently delayed. Any delay can pile on stress, as they may lose time for a meal or have an urgent need to use the bathroom. Often, a Flagman will be tempted to avoid stopping the train so as to not inconvenience or anger the operator. Moreover, a Flagman is persuaded by some supervisors to be fearful of angering operators because they may not help or instruct them during RTO training. However, there exists no exception regarding safety for the Professional Flagman.

Be courteous with train operators. However, be mindful that human flesh cannot win in a fight with a train. Your attention must be undivided and all eyes must be on the incoming train. Sounding your air horn too early to compensate for not stopping the train will inconvenience the workers. Looking back and forth between the workers and the oncoming train will divide your attention and could confuse the train operator. Whipping out that trip staff while the train is moving can lead to amputation or decapitation. When in the habit of doing or being ordered to “just proceed the train,” you forfeit your responsibility to chance. That is, you will be held responsible in many ways for any and loss of life or property damage if the train goes out of control. Keep your focus on the moving train. Look backwards after it stops.

“Just proceed the train” is a dangerous game. When it comes to the proper use of the only device that can stop a train—the portable track trip—the Professional Flagman rejects all shortcuts. There is no exception.

5. Use good form when giving signals. Rail System Rules instruct us to use hand or lantern (flashlight) signals that are easy to understand.

Try to avoid giving hand, flag or light signals to trains on tracks you are not capable of fouling. This can confuse train operators. For example, if you are at track 4 and a train is passing on track 1, do nothing more than a wave or nod your head. Same with expressways where both tracks are separated far enough that it would be impossible for you to step into the path of a train.

Always make sure your head and body are facing oncoming traffic when giving signals. As per SOP we should stand in full view and face approaching

trains. If the train will pass you on your left, use your left arm to give signals. Use your right arm if it will pass on the right. A body facing the train sideways reduces visibility to the train operator. It also obscures a hand signal because your arm is in the same visual plane as your body.

Try to stand still when giving signals. Never be one who is caught walking and giving a proceed signal at the same time

6. When removing and displaying the portable track trip staff to the train operator, hold it high above your head. Extend your arm. Slightly twist your wrist it for added emphasis. When working in darkness, illuminate the staff with your flashlight, moving the light beam slightly up and down along the staff. As per Rules and SOP for Slow Zones, the train operator must sound the train horn twice to acknowledge that he or she sees your trip staff in the air. When they do, look back at the worksite one more time to confirm it is clear and promptly give the train operator a proceed signal. You may need to call your partner on short-range radio to confirm.
7. Sometimes, train operators forget to sound the horn. Use the short-range radio to politely ask something like “If you see my trip staff, please sound the horn, thank you.” In some cases—usually when dealing with the rare operator who has no respect for flagging Safety Rules—you will need to say it on the long-range radio. Sometimes the horn is not working or they feel the horn is too loud. If you can see their face and the yellow parking brake lights are still lit, you may need to settle for a nod of the head, thumbs up or acknowledgment over the radio.

If the train operator is intentionally stopping too far away for you to see them—and the yellow parking

lights—clearly, and they refuse to communicate on the radio, you may need to contact the Controller to request that the operator move up to 50 feet and sound the horn. If the operator has a restrictive cab signal, they will not be able to move closer. Do not use long-range radio unless the specific operator does it over and over, despite your attempts to communicate with them (especially in person). People forget. People get distracted. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Courtesy will get you what you need when it comes to cooperation—in most cases.

Sometimes, a train operator will proceed when you remove and lift up the trip staff. Again, some simply forget to acknowledge and wait for your proceed signal. The trip staff is a red object (not allowed as an object for giving a proceed signal as per SOP). Do not show it or a red flag after giving a proceed signal (this is why it is so important for the operator to confirm you were seen holding it up with their horn). Red is a color that means “Stop.” This is a governing signal. That is, before you removed the trip staff, you gave a “Stop and Remain Standing” signal. A governing signal is the most restrictive of your hand, light or flag signals. In this case, give them a “Stop and Remain Standing” signal. Hold the staff up again. If they do not stop or sound the horn, try to ask them in person—or on short-range radio—something like “Operator ###, please stop...please follow my signal.” Sometimes your partner or a worker is giving the train operator a proceed signal (who you cannot see because you are facing the train). So when it becomes out of control and the operator continues to proceed, just keep the staff up for the outward facing camera on the train. That way, if there is an incident investigation, you will be in the clear from giving conflicted signals or improper procedures. Hopefully, you will never need to call the Controller for an operator who passes you without giving a proceed signal. Try to communicate.

Try to be courteous. Try your absolute best to be consistent with safe flagging procedures.

A train operator’s part in safety is to follow the Rules just like you. These little procedures may seem useless or redundant to some. The operator may even hurl insults at you and complain about you to your partner or the workers. They may even yell about you slowing them down (ironically they will have enough time to engage in negative behavior which can turn a minor delay into a major delay). You will be tempted to retaliate in words or deeds. Smile, note the encounter in your diary and keep working. You will need skin of steel to be a Professional Flagman and hold fast to the Safety Rules. However, when it comes to your life and that of the workers, you must find ways to encourage their cooperation (face-to-face discussion, completing a workplace complaint to your Local union office, etc). When all that fails, and the same operator commits the same violation, you must notify the Controller. Be prepared to complete a Report to Manager and be the object of ridicule and scorn for “ratting out” or “snitching” among fellow union members. No matter the outcome, know that you are doing your best to be a Professional Flagman who follows Standard Operating Procedures. As mentioned earlier, document everything in your diary. You may not use it for a report. But if there is a pattern, you will have the documentation to prove it.

8. Flagging from the platform: This is not allowed as per SOP, which reads instructs us to stand at track level next to the portable track trip, whenever clearance permits—even when flagging for workers on a platform or work train. In some cases it may seem appropriate to flag from the platform—especially when there is heavy snow and ice on an elevated footwalk. This is not common to most flagging

assignments, however. The danger with flagging from the platform—where it is impossible to safely use a portable track trip—is if a worker or object from the worksite falls on to the track and the incoming train is out of control. You will not be able to stop the train because you are not at track level with a portable track trip. If for some reason you deem flagging from the platform as necessary, then contact the Controller to get permission from a supervisor or manager. Most likely they will not allow it. However, they may be amenable to allowing you to stand in a safer area with a portable track trip, like a fool catcher or down the stairs at a platform without a Slow Zone (presuming the workers will change locations within the 30 minute time limit).

9. Flagging near interlockings, switches and wherever a permanent track trip is located: Whether you are in a Slow Zone or with a moving gang, avoid installing a portable track where the train will need to stop in the switch track circuit. In fact, there is a Rail System Rule that does not allow train cars to stand on interlocking circuit. There are many reasons for this rule. One is that when a train is in that circuit, it cannot be easily rerouted. For example, if a scaffold collapses on the track you are protecting, the train operator cannot be routed to the other track and quickly get back on schedule. The operator will need to change ends, pull the train back past the circuit, get back to the front, and then take a route to the other track. So place your “Begin Slow Zone 6 MPH” and/or portable track trip about 50 feet before the interlocking circuit. Of course, you could give the “Stop and Stay” signal and hope the operator stops clear of the interlocking. However, a Professional Flagman can assume nothing. The permanent track trip cannot be a substitute for your portable track trip. If a track trip is not under your control, it is not a trip you can use. Avoid walking on or installing your portable track trip near switch

points or moving parts. Also, many switches are near third rail section gaps. These have a tendency to be the source of intense electrical arcs under passing trains. Be cautious when standing near them.

10. Flagging in low-light areas: Similar with your hand and flag—at night, twilight or in subways—signaling with your flashlight should be done in very broad, steady gestures. Short motions can make your light harder for the train operator to interpret. Some Instructors further advise that after you give the “Stop and Remain Standing” signal and the train’s parking lights activate, you should hold the flashlight still. When the work area is clear, then give your “Proceed” signal.

When starting a flagging operation in low-light, you may experience a type of “Flagging jet lag.” That is, when shifting to midnights or being outside after sunset, your habits and mind may still be in “daytime.” So it is not unusual to find yourself using hand signals and a flag when you should be using a flashlight. So always “warm up” before flagging a real train to break the habit.

In areas surrounded by busy expressways, your flashlight beam may be impossible to see by a train operator. If you use a headlamp, turn it downward so it illuminates *your* face. As usual, face the direction of traffic at all times—in clear view of approaching trains, unobstructed by wayside equipment or other people. Moreover, you probably will not hear an approaching train. The ambient noise from fast moving cars and trucks is extremely high—enough to drown out a train horn. This fact begs the importance of walking against train traffic. Whether the WA light is on or not, a Professional Flagman walks against normal train traffic. You will need to remind the workers to comply—and follow your lead.

When ambient noise levels are high, you need to sound longer horn blasts. So bring at least 3 cans. If it is cold, keep at least 2 cans close to your body (torso or under arms), sandwiched between your layers of clothing. Otherwise, the cold air will render the horns useless. When ambient noise levels are high, whistles are just as useless as frozen horns.

When flagging at night in neighborhoods, long, exaggerated horn blasts that you might use near a loud expressway can be very annoying to residents. Keep them short in such areas.

Your Dietz Light should be placed ahead of you. If you are near a WA light, put it on the opposite side or further ahead of the WA Light. Do not assume a WA Light is slowing down the trains. If there is a malfunctioning Slow Zone board lamp, you can use a Dietz Light as a temporary remedy. However, be sure to remind the workers that working Slow Zone board lamps are their responsibility. Do not use your Dietz Light in place of a defective lamp if it could jeopardize your safety.

11. Subways: You may encounter coworkers and contractors who say there is no need for a Dietz Light when working near a subway station. Of course, this is against the safety rules. Always use a Dietz Light in the subway—no matter where you are positioned.

Subways are ideal locations for flagging because you are protected from rain, snow, most ice and extreme temperatures. So do not overdress or you will get too hot. This is especially relevant for moving gangs when you will be constantly on the move.

Try not to leave your equipment bag or personal items on surfaces where rodents or roaches can get inside.

Hang them from a place where a train cannot snag it. Alternatively, you can tie up your personal items in a plastic garbage bag.

Watch your step! The subway right-of-way can be littered with feces, sewage, used syringes and flammable substances. Rodents are in abundance. Make sure your boots are double-tied. This will prevent tripping and dragging laces through the filth. If you brush past equipment, signs, signals or walls, you will pick up dirt. When laundering, treat the smudges with stain removers like the Shout brand. That includes your reflective vest.

In the subway, always be sure to position yourself—and the “Begin Slow Zone 6 MPH” sign—in sections that allow you to have ample space clear of trains.

12. Elevated Structure: You will learn ways to overcome acrophobia in a few consecutive days of work on the elevated structure. Like other areas, this will include navigating through convenient third-rail section gaps. However, the hazard that distinguishes elevated areas from others are worn-out foot-walks and cross-ties. Decayed wood and tripping hazards such as partially displaced nails and lead to death or severe injury. Lift your knees higher than normal when walking and stepping over walls.

Most times, these hazards have been marked with bright-colored spray paint. Walk on areas that appear to have reinforcing beams under them. As stated in Rulebook, avoid stepping on rails. Many workers are in the habit of stepping on rails. Moreover, they also tend to step across and increase the chances of electrocution if they slip and/or trip on the rail. When there is ice around the cross-ties, sometimes it is good to keep part of your boot on an ice-free bolt for traction. Other than that, you will be doing so based

on luck. “In the event of snow or ice in the work zone,”

As per a Flagging Bulletin the work crew is responsible for providing the flagman with a safe path to enter/exit the right-of-way as well as a safe clean area to work from. So be prepared to ask the foreman to apply sand over slippery areas. Also, if you are unable to coordinate this with them, have a bag or cup to do it yourself. Whether it is ice, water or oily creosote residue, make sure you are safe! Creosote is a wood preservative used on the railroad cross-ties and catwalks. It can become slippery during hot weather and make icy spots worse during cold weather. Throwing sand on it can make a big difference.

Use the fool-catchers and track-level walkways for setting up your portable track trip. Always try to keep your equipment bag out of the middle of a foot-walk. Take trash and empty air cans with you. These are fire hazards and add to the litter problem that already exists.

Plan an escape route. “What if?” must be foremost in your mind—especially on the elevated structure. You may need to climb down to street level if a major derailment or explosion occurs. In the very least, be near a fool catcher. Stay clear of gaps in the third rail and large cables.

13. Ballasted areas (ground level right of way): Rocks are very unstable, cold and deceptive. It is easy to assume that ballasted areas are generally even-leveled. However, the unevenness wreaks havoc on your feet, ankles knees and back. Walk carefully, with good posture. When standing, try to do so on a non-metallic flat object or surface nearby.

When you install a portable track trip, pick out the

rocks by hand. However, use durable, non-permeable gloves. Using a flag stick or portable track trip staff will damage the object and possibly send debris into your face. If a metallic piece of debris flies into the third-rail, it can cause an explosion.

In heavy snow on the ballast, it may be impossible to dig out a space for a portable track trip. If you can obtain a non-conductive tool, try and dig out a space.

14. Keep your belongings and equipment safe as your work. As per the Rules, backpacks are not to be worn on the right-of-way. Even if you cover it with a reflective vest, it is not allowed. If you must carry it to a spot where it can be safe, keep it in your hand or slightly over one shoulder. But secure it right away. When trains pass, a backpack can get easily snagged and cause injury or death.

Platform sandboxes with switch-lock type padlocks are reliable places to store your belongings. You should leave space for a janitor to scoop out sand without needing to move your items. Keep your bag wrapped in a plastic bag to keep sand and dirt out of your backpack.

Some flagmen use janitor closets to store belongings. Try to get permission from the janitor on duty first. This can eliminate conflict. Always take your trash with you. Until we can negotiate for better places to wait when on standby, or to warm up, avoid sitting in the janitor closets without their permission. Respect the janitor’s workspace. Knock first before unlocking the door and be polite at all times.

You may feel compelled to ask a Customer Assistant to keep your items—or wait—in their kiosk. Only do that as a last-resort. Rules for Customer Assistants does

not allow more than one Customer Assistant at a time in the kiosk. Although it does not specify other employees, it could attract unwanted attention by authorities. Do this with caution. If you need to use the bathroom in a kiosk, definitely ask permission from the Customer Assistant. A Professional Flagman is courteous at all times.

15. Be accountable: Note your arrival time to the worksite in your diary. Also keep track of movement when you change locations. It is important that you touch your ID to the turnstile for the station you are assigned to meet the workers. Try to repeat the process when you leave for the day. If there is every any question about where you were during the day, this simple act will ensure that no one can say you were never present.

Never leave the work area. Avoid giving anyone your cell phone number. If a manager, supervisor or overzealous passenger catches you on a phone, you will be open to a safety violation (two-year hit on your record). If you are on probation as a new employee, your Union will not be able to save your job if you are terminated for such a violation. There is a strict Bulletin about using a cell phone use while on duty. If you must check your phone, do it in a bathroom. Cameras and eyes are everywhere. A Professional Flagman does not tempt fate.

Also, as a Professional Flagman, you want to strive for keeping all communication face-to-face or through the Controller. If a kiosk or platform phone is nearby, you can call the Clerk to reach out to a Foreman. They can call you back at the kiosk. Also, you don't want yourself or anyone else to be the sole point of contact for a Foreman. That can lead to all kinds of problems and miscommunication. If you go away from the work area for standby, relief or breaks, let the Foreman and

your partner(s) know where you will be located. Agree on a specific time to return from breaks. Using duration—such as “see you in 30 minutes”—is always up to interpretation.

Some coworkers will take excessively long breaks, opt to cut corners, whine about working a particular location or time and threaten to leave. Document it in your diary and continue to do your duties unless it compromises safety. Try to phone the Clerk or the Controller form a platform or kiosk phone if you need more flagmen. But never ever allow a coworkers' poor decisions or attitude cause you to make excuses for them or lower your standards. In fact, you should expect some of your coworkers to slack off (you will slack off from time-to-time as well). However, keep a patient and courteous demeanor at all times. You may eventually inspire them to change their attitude.

Working With Others

As a Flagman, at least half of workers you encounter may have more time on the job at the company than you. No matter what type of work they do, you will find that many are unaware of the latest Rules and Standard Operating Procedures that you are responsible to uphold.

Some workers will intimidate you into going along with their complacent state-of-mind. Some workers may actually discourage you from using a portable track trip. You must be prepared to deal with them in a calm, but forthright manner. Unsettled disputes or doubts should be handled with a Supervisor or Manager if all other communication fails.

In moving gangs, you always need a portable track trip for each track fouled. You may be assigned with a Flagman who chooses not use a portable track trip. Be a good example and protect the track to their rear. That will be the most vulnerable spot.

1. Carpenters and Trackmen: They almost always work in groups of three or more and cover areas requiring a Slow Zone on one or more tracks. Due to the nature of their work—using many tools and large parts—they foul more than one track. They may also choose to repair sections as they spot them (not all defects are able to be found ahead of time). They often walk into adjacent tracks that lack proper protection. So you will almost always need at least 3 flagmen and two Slow Zones (you will need 4-5 flagmen if you are near curves). Carpenters provide a vital service on the railroad. Be hyper-vigilant about protecting them—and disregarding protestations that you do not need a portable track trip another Flagman for a curve section of track.

2. Electricians: These workers often work near or under the railroad tracks. When they are between running rails, it usually for replacing signal bonds or welding connections. When they are working on cameras, conduits or lamps and displays on station platforms, they still need the protection of a portable track trip in case they fall or drop items on the tracks.
3. Painters, surveyors and billboard installers: They work fast. Make sure you have the portable track trip in place before they enter the right of way. Accidents happen when you least expect it. Be prepared to protect the workers properly. Always warn them that you are there to do a job and you require their cooperation. If you need to call them in for non-compliance, be ready to give them another chance if they change their attitude.
4. Ironworkers: They tend to have large work areas over multiple days and require multiple Slow Zones. Double-check your Slow Zone placement as they are not working close to you. Get the "Begin Slow Zone 6 MPH" set up near a fool catcher.

People Problems

Workers really cannot be your friends or your enemies. A Professional Flagman should be courteous, but firm regarding the Rules. At times, you may need to bare your teeth. As you get more experience with resistance you will find your tolerance level. No matter the outcome, document the details in your diary.

Calling the Controller about every issue is not necessary. However, there is nothing excessive about a brief Report to Manager about dangerous working conditions and reckless foremen or crew leaders. You can also use the Report to Manager to submit commendations for cooperative and helpful workers (and coworkers). A Professional Flagman should be courteous and fair.

When you choose to go by the Rules and shirk your coworkers' shortcuts, you will be maligned and slandered. However, you must remember that the company's Rules regarding safety were generally originated in the losses of those who did the job before you (their injuries and deaths). If you respect the Rules, you will earn the respect of those who care about their own safety. That includes the passengers who learn about our work. This attitude will also eliminate anyone's argument that you are paid to do nothing. Although some coworkers may scoff that strict adherence to the Rules for some odd catastrophe with a 1-5% chance of happening is "doing nothing" or "bullsh*t," we signed our names to an Agreement between our Union and the Chicago Transit Authority to do the job as defined by the Rules. Our word is our bond. Our bond is life.

The reasons are many why some coworkers find you to be a threat. They may say you are "doing too much" and you are "extra." However, you have a job to protect people on the right of way and if they have a problem with it, they should contact the manager. If they threaten you, work with your Union first.

Then coordinate a resolution through the company management as a last resort. Regardless, never give in. Document everything. It only takes a few minutes per day while on standby or travelling. It will help clear your mind and be less reactionary. When you are wrong, be quick to apologize. When you are offended, be slow to anger. Be ready for the worst and keep expectations of yourself high.

Radio Communications

Courtesy is critical when going on the air. When calling the Controller, press and hold the transmit button for two seconds. Your signal will go through a device called a repeater. The repeater literally repeats your signal through a much higher antenna with more power for everyone else to hear. This is called “long range.”

When you are on “short range,” that is actually a direct (simplex) transmission from your radio to whoever is in range of your radio. Since the Control Center is connected to the antenna at higher elevations, they can still hear your “short range” transmission if you are nearby. Our radios work on Line Of Sight frequencies. That is, transmissions are easy to hear when you are at higher elevations. Conversely, when you are at lower elevations, transmissions are more difficult to hear.

Whenever possible—especially during a radio check at the terminal—transmit outside or in an area with as little shielding and as high in elevation as possible. Give the Controller a good signal to make their job easier (they spend 8-12 hours listening to noisy transmissions). If it is possible to stand in place, that will reduce the chances of your signal “breaking up.”

During transmission, enunciate your words clearly and pace the speed. Recite your badge number somewhat slowly and repeat it one time. If the Controller asks for your badge number, cooperate with him or her. That is for your safety and accountability. Periodically, review the Standard Operating Procedures regarding radio transmissions. If you have time to monitor the bus supervisor channels, you can learn how to describe situations efficiently.

Exercise

Fitness of mind and body is actually a form of preparedness. You should make time for a minimum of 15-30 minutes per day of intense exercise. It could be before going to work or after. Switch between cardiovascular and strength training. Jogging (long-distance or high-interval sprints) and bicycling is always a good choice for cardiovascular exercise. You may need to wrap your wrists, ankles and/or knees for additional support. When we stand on uneven surfaces at work and carry heavy objects, we wear down our joints. So we need to minimize trauma to those weaker joints during exercise.

Below are suggested exercises. These are common techniques of which you can find detailed instructions on the instructions on the Internet or fitness books.

For your back, it is important to stabilize and strengthen your core abdominal muscles. Some suggested exercises:

1. Sit-ups
2. Toe-touch sit-ups
3. Crunches
4. Planks

A Flagman needs to have strong shoulders. You will be lifting heavy equipment, climbing ladders and holding flags and flashlights up for long periods of time. When you flag with broad movements, you don't want to be hampered by shoulder fatigue or injuries. Some suggested exercises:

1. Military press (barbell or dumbbell)
2. Shrugs (barbell or dumbbell)
3. Farmer Carry (dumbbell)
4. Chin-ups
5. Single arm row (dumbbell)

Arm exercises will make carrying equipment easier.

1. Bicep curl (barbell or dumbbell)
2. Overhead tricep curl (barbell or dumbbell)
3. Hammer curl (dumbbell)

Chest exercises help your posture and overall compound muscle strength. Some suggested exercises:

1. Push-ups
2. Bench-press (barbell or dumbbell)

Legs contain some of the largest muscles in the human body. Strong legs and hips will help you step high over the third rail, walking up stairs and enduring long walks on the right of way. Strong legs also support your knees. Some suggested exercises:

1. Running (sprinting)
2. High knees raises (bodyweight)
3. Bicycling (or stationary bicycle)
4. Leg curls (seated bench)
5. Squats (barbell)
6. Goblet Squats (dumbbell)
7. Hamstring curls (seated bench)
8. Calf raises (barbell or dumbbell)

Improving flexibility is also an important part of any exercise program. It can be as simple as 5 minutes of isolated stretching before and after exercising. It can also include yoga practice.

Self-defense: Depending on whom you talk to, this could include signing up for a class or reading materials about situational awareness. You need to be ready for anything when working in the public. Avoid escalation with angry passengers. Never turn your back. Always try to avoid blowing things out of proportion. Your job is to start work on the right of way. Notify the Controller if you are not being allowed to enter or re-enter the right of way due to a threatening person.

Diet

You are what you eat. Drink water, regardless of weather. It is easy to dehydrate when your mind is on flagging operation. So keep a bottle with you.

When you are working midnights, the caffeine in coffee or black tea can be very helpful with keeping you alert. It is natural to feel sleepy after midnight. So coffee or tea can be a good remedy to push back the sleep monster! However, if you don't start the workday with a bank of 6-8 hours of sleep, you will probably suffer for it.

Sugary "energy" drinks cannot help you more than they hurt you. These beverages will weaken your immune system, cause your metabolism to crash after the "rush" and add unwanted fat to your body. Try to prepare your own healthy food or snacks. Find innovative ways to store them. You will save a great deal of money and be healthier in the long-term.

Avoid carbohydrate-heavy food like bread, pastries and pasta. They can also cause a sugar rush and leave you feeling drowsy. Obviously, falling asleep while flagging should be avoided! When you feel that tired, ask your coworkers to give you a break. At least have them take your place for awhile so you don't fall on the tracks or get hit by a train.

In hot summer weather, keep your water cold by freezing a bottle the day before. Keep it wrapped in a rag in your bag. That way, it will not soak your belongings. You will always have cold water.

Teaching Others

A Professional Flagman Line Instructor always teaches “by the book.” We never want to show a student the wrong way to work. Let them see professionalism and pride in following the Rules. When we start them off right, it is easier for them to become a Professional Flagman. Our students are the future advocates for safety on the right of way. Even if a student qualifies and chooses to cut corners, you will not be accountable for them. Do your best.

Think of Line Instruction students as potential activists for improving Flagman pay and benefits. When they flag properly, we all look good. When they conduct themselves as professionals, we all look like professionals.

Give your student a full day of Instruction. Use any downtime to review the Standard Operating Procedures and Rules that re relevant to flagging. Other important tasks for you and your student:

1. Let the student experience flagging real trains. Or, role-play on a station platform or sidewalk nearby. Do it over and over until they get it perfectly. Then change it up.
2. Role-play radio communications.
3. Role-play interactions with uncooperative train operators, supervisors or workers. Be creative. Have fun. Discuss steps for handling harassment and disregard for safety.
4. Call on to the right of way near a station with an out of service track to help them practice stepping over the rails. Include the student’s badge number. You can also do simulated flagging procedures. Use this to walk along a short stretch of track. Always do it when it is not rush hour.
5. Let them experience signing in equipment, time slips and turning in the equipment.

Fill out the student's Instruction Record truthfully. This is very, very important. If a student goes home early, write it down. Warn them if they want to leave, you will not lie about what happened. There is a folly about students who "make it" through qualification. That is, if they were pushed through, they are really not ready to be a Professional Flagman.

If you are the most senior Flagman, ask the Clerk to give students to you. Well-intentioned, but recently qualified Flagmen will not be able to teach like you. Do not just instruct a student. Inspire him or her. Be the mentor who will influence them to a Professional Flagman.

CODE OF CONDUCT

To the best of my ability, I promise to do my best, be prepared and protect myself, the workers and my coworkers according to Standard Operating Procedures, Rules and Bulletins.

I promise to never leave my fellow Flagman alone on the right of way. I promise to defend them from others who attempt to intimidate or humiliate them—especially when they are performing their duty as per the Rules.

I promise to accept my assignment and never leave unless illness or injury makes it impossible to continue. Even so, I will let my fellow Flagman know my intentions.

I promise to be courteous and patient with the train operators I encounter. I know they are under stress and time constraints out of my control.

I promise to treat my fellow Flagman as I desire to be treated.



Index

SYMBOLS

308 3, 9, 12

A

antenna 18, 51

B

bag 16, 19, 21, 40, 41, 42,
43, 57

billboard installers 48

Boots 13, 22

break 25, 28, 39, 57

Bulletins 9, 11, 61

C

caffeine 57

carbohydrate 57

Carpenters 47

Chicago Transit Authority 3,
9, 49

coffee 57

Controller 11, 29, 30, 31,
33, 36, 37, 38, 44,
45, 49, 51, 55

D

dehydrate 57

Diary 24

Dietz light 19, 20, 24, 25

E

Earplugs 23

Electricians 48

Elevated 41

escape 28, 42

Eye 23

F

Fitness 53

Flag 18, 21

Flashlight 16

fool-catcher 28

fool-catchers 42

G

G24-16 44

Gloves 23

H

Hat 22

horn 20, 34, 35, 36, 39, 40

I

Ironworkers 48

J

jumpsuit 15, 20

K

Kenwood 18

L

Line Instructor 59

long range 51

M

Manager 18, 27, 33, 37, 47, 49

microphone 17, 18

Monocular 23

Motorola 18

moving gang 21, 38

N

noise 17, 39, 40

notebook 15, 24

P

Painters 48

portable track trip 19, 29, 33, 34,
35, 37, 38, 42, 43, 47, 48

R

radio 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 25,
35, 36, 51, 59

Rain 22

Role-play 59

S

Self-defense 55

short range 51

signal 11, 18, 25, 28, 32,
35, 36, 38, 39, 48,
51

Slow Zone 19, 20, 27, 28,
29, 30, 32, 38, 40,
41, 47, 48

snow 24, 37, 40, 42, 43

student 11, 59, 60

subway 16, 18, 19, 22, 40,
41

sugar 57

Supervisor 5, 27, 47

surveyors 48

T

tea 57

third-rail 41, 43

Trackmen 47

U

Uniform 15

Union 3, 9, 12, 44, 49, 50

V

Vest 14

W

warmers 13, 22

Whistle 14

wristwatch 19

Notes

Notes