

TRANSCRIPT – YOUR POSTAL PODCAST – SEPTEMBER 2016

Diedre Tillery: Welcome to *Your Postal Podcast*. I'm Diedre Tillery. In this edition, you'll travel to the wide-open plains of Wyoming, where a Postmaster and the daughter of a postal clerk recently participated in a reenactment of a Pony Express ride. You'll also learn how people are refining their business networking skills – using the mail.

The legendary Pony Express was a commercial delivery service contracted by the U.S. government to bring news to the sprawling West from 1859 to 1860. While it failed as a moneymaking venture, it sparked a nation's curiosity – an interest that continues to this day. David Rupert recently met with some Pony Express reenactors in the middle of a long night's ride. Here's his report.

David Rupert: The Pony Express was an ambitious operation to help speed communications to the frontier and the Wild West. Although the commercial venture lasted for just 18 months, the legend continues to this day with tales of wonder and bravery retold through the big screen, books and oral history.

Earlier this summer, more than 600 riders reenacted the ride with a non-stop gallop from Sacramento, California, to St. Joseph, Missouri. I caught up with one group of riders in Southwestern Wyoming unloading their horses, preparing for their midnight ride. Curt Artery was one of those riders.

Curt Artery: I've got 40 years with the Postal Service and I'm presently the Postmaster of Guernsey, Wyoming.

Rupert: Guernsey is home to the famed Register Cliffs, where frontier travelers carved their names into the sandstone rocks. Rutted wagon trails can still be viewed after more than 150 years of weather. Curt is impressed with the dedication of the riders back in the day, and it's something that carries over to the current riders and the present United States Postal Service.

Artery: Oh, there's a lot of pride in it because you're actually carrying mail from all over the United States. For military people. For people overseas. And you treat it just like it's your own. You know, those riders had a real dedication to get from Point A to Point B as fast as they could with the mail in good quality and that's the way we try to work as postal employees.

Elana Heer: Yes, this is my horse, his name is Coniger.

Rupert: That's Elana Heer, daughter of Guernsey, WY, Clerk Jane Heer. The 16-year-old wasn't daunted by the challenge of riding alone across the prairie.

Heer: It's really nice. It's peaceful. It calms me down.

Rupert: She has a four-mile run through the pitch black, but with a full moon glistening over the range, her horse is stomping, and yes, "chomping at the bit."

Heer: Nervous comes with the dark here. All your nerves are worked up. You have to trust your horse, because you can't see in the dark.

Rupert: Stephanie Goulart was one of the riders, who along with her horse Slim, serves as trail captain. She oversees the route and the riders of the run through Southeast Wyoming, Northern Colorado and into Nebraska.

Stephanie Goulart: The trail captain sets up the route for this area. I just assign the rides. I make sure everyone gets to their destination safely and I make sure that everything goes smoothly.

Rupert: She's ridden the trail long enough to know that it's a lot tougher in real life than the movies.

Goulart: I think it was a lot of hardship. I think it was probably not as dreamy as we make it today. I think there was a lot of struggle. I think we've done a good job of making it more exciting than what it actually was.

Rupert: While he's riding, Postmaster Artery thinks about those young, wiry riders from long ago and he puts himself in their saddle.

Artery: They were by themselves and they rode a lot further distance than we did. So, especially at night when you're riding from Register Cliff across to Fort Laramie all you have is the open prairie and the stars or the moon. It's just kind of an eerie feeling to know that somebody before you passed this way and was actually carrying the mail and doing the job.

Tillery: The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines networking as "the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business." Most people who have achieved success in business or a career will tell you it's important to network with others both inside and outside your field of expertise. However, networking doesn't come easily for everyone. Peter Hass spoke with an author of several productivity and time management books about one effective way of networking without meeting face-to-face: Via the mail.

Peter Hass: While some people have a knack for networking, others don't. They may be introverted or, as author Laura Vanderkam noted in a recent article for *Fast Company* magazine's website, they may feel the networking process is "fake" or "disingenuous."

Laura Vanderkam: So, networking is so important for anyone's career – and unfortunately, it tends to get a bad reputation. It seems a little sleazy, it seems about taking and forcing your interests upon other people and asking for things, and no one wants to do that. So, how I like to think of it is more about just establishing relationships with interesting people. Not because you have a need of anything but just because it makes life better to connect with other people. They don't even have to be business acquaintances – just people you like to have in your life. So, that's the best way to be thinking about networking.

Hass: In researching her recent article, Vanderkam came across successful people who had something in addition to face-to-face contact in their networking arsenals: Handwritten letters.

Vanderkam: It is so rare for people in this age of email to think first about writing a note, but it is one of the best things you can do to make yourself stand out. Somebody who gets a handwritten letter from you is going to notice it, and they're going to know that you sent it, and they will think about it. It is not something they are going to forget very easily in the way that a quick email – if you say, "Hey, I read about your company in this publication, congrats on the mention." Like, that's a very easy email to send, but it's somewhat forgettable. Whereas if you

took – and it literally takes five minutes. If you've got stationery on hand, pull it out – write down that same phrase: "Hey, I saw your company mentioned in whatever publication it was; that was a great article. Congratulations on your success. Hope you're doing great." Stick it in the mail. It will create so much more of an impression. And so I found some that some of the real disciplined networkers were writing somebody a note every single day. Took five minutes, cost them a stamp, but they were making an incredible impression.

Hass: Vanderkam said interviewing these letter-writing networkers has inspired her.

Vanderkam: Especially when that gentleman described it to me it as just taking five minutes – I think that, like, you can hem and haw over an email for a similar length of time. (Laughs.) We're really not talking a difference in time. And yes, it arrives more immediately, but that doesn't mean that the person's paying any attention to it. I mean, we all get so much email, whereas we don't get a lot of handwritten notes that are things we would love to receive and think about and all that. So, I'm certainly trying to make that more of a habit in my life.

Hass: So – you can find a person's email address, but not their physical address. What should you do to get it?

Vanderkam: People are out of the habit of getting addresses, and yet, if you think about it, a lot of people still send physical holiday cards. So you at least you have those addresses, and that's a good way to start. So, you know, in the next holiday season, really make a point of getting people's addresses. That's a good reason to reach out to basically almost anyone you know and say, "Oh, I just want a pop a card in the mail to you. What's your address?" Right? And people will send it to you; I mean everyone sends holiday cards, or a lot of people do at least, so it's not a big ask to say, "What's your address" for people you may not know that well but would like to know better. And then you build up that file; just a spreadsheet of everyone's addresses – and then you have it. So then, you can get in touch with people at other points, you know, that are not the holidays, and you have it there and it's not a big deal.

Hass: Vanderkam lives near Philadelphia and is the author of *What the Most Successful People Do Before Breakfast* and several other books. Her articles have appeared in *Fortune*, *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal*. You'll find her blog posts about productivity at LauraVanderkam.com.

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