

# Seniority on the Easton And Potomac

## How to reward loyalty and improve operations at the same time

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On September 25, 2006 I started operations on the Easton And Potomac (E&P). For the first few years attendance was light and I seldom had a full crew. But thanks to my wife's excellent cooking (I serve lunch at all of my weekend sessions) attendance grew. It grew to the point where every session in 2010 was full with many on the Extra Board.

I place the entire schedule for the year online in January so people can sign up. 2010 saw a rush to sign up to the point that all of the open slots were gone by the end of February. When I couldn't get full crews I never thought demand would be a problem. But the increased demand made it hard for some of the regulars that had supported my sessions from the beginning to attend a session in 2010.

I needed to do something that would allow those that supported me over the years a better chance at attending a session. As I saw it I had several options. The first option could be to open the sign up period for a session just before the session. But this would still only guarantee attendance to the first eight that signed up. Another option could be to invite a set of regulars and then fill in

with others from a sign up sheet based on some process. I didn't like this because it didn't keep the open invitation policy I had been using since the first session. Another option could be some form of seniority that would reward frequent attendees but still allow for an open invitation policy. Enter E&P seniority.

### Seniority Policy

I wanted to reward those with higher experience and attendance so any solution needed to have this attribute. To do this I developed a seniority system that is weighted towards experience and attendance. The seniority policy shown in figure 1 was posted on the website [www.easton-and-potomac.com](http://www.easton-and-potomac.com) which is the same website attendees use to sign up for a session.

As the seniority policy states the two main criteria determining your seniority are experience and attendance. Attendance is easy to determine, just count the number of sessions someone has attended. (This was easy for me because I keep a record of every session, who attended and what position or positions they filled.) But experience is a little more difficult to determine. Enter the fully qualified operator or FQO.

### Fully Qualified Operator (FQO)

People tend to shy away from jobs they are not comfortable with or stick with jobs they enjoy most, which is fine. But this means few volunteer for the yardmaster or dispatcher jobs. However I felt the railroad would run better if the attendees had an appreciation for all of the different jobs. So I needed a way to encourage them to try other jobs. I could assign positions but I prefer to use self motivation.

I decided to assign the title of FQO to anyone that at least manned all of the different positions on the railroad and post this list on the website. To facilitate getting the process started I developed a training program and started rotating attendees through it. (The training rotation is freight engineer to passenger engineer to mail engineer to local engineer to White Hall assistant yardmaster to Thorny Point yardmaster to White Hall yardmaster to operator to dispatcher.)

At first assignments were strictly done by me. (Sometimes self motivation needs a jump start.) As time passed more and more attendees started requesting the positions to move them towards FQO status and a higher seniority since attaining FQO status moves you up in the seniority list above all non FQO attendees. This has motivated many attendees to get their FQO status.

### Seniority Process

So how does it work? First there is a seniority cutoff date. After the cutoff date your seniority does not come into play and you are assigned an open slot based on first-come first-served. (In my case this cut off date is one month prior to the requested session.) If you sign up for a session before the seniority cutoff date then your seniority will be used to determine if you will be on the Call

Figure 1: Seniority Policy

(This policy will take effect on January 1, 2011)

### Seniority is based on the following criteria

**FQO status, number of sessions attended and first session attended. FQO status has priority over the number of sessions attended which has priority over the first session attended.** (After every OPS session this information is updated and a new seniority list published.)

Anyone signing up on or before the third Saturday of the month preceding the requested session will be assigned slots based on their seniority. These slots will be assigned on the Sunday following this advanced sign up period prior to each session.

Anyone signing up after the third Saturday of the month preceding the requested session will be assigned slots based solely on the date and time the request was received. These slots will be assigned when and in the order the requests are received.

# EASTON AND POTOMAC

## Crew Management System

The next OPS session, session 75, is a weekend session scheduled for 4/16/2011

### Up Coming Sessions

Update Crew Stats

Update Attendance

Update Position Summaries

Update Seniority

Load the Call Boards and Extra Boards for Session ==>

75

Sign Up Crew

Print Name Tags

Print Session Crew Report

Print Seniority Report

Print Position Summary Report

Print Session Position Report

Print Crew Position History Report

Print New FQOs Report

Print Crew Individual Report

75	4/16/2011	we
76	5/4/2011	wn
77	5/21/2011	we
78	6/1/2011	wn
79	6/18/2011	we
80	7/6/2011	wn
81	7/16/2011	we
82	8/3/2011	wn
83	8/20/2011	we
84	9/7/2011	wn
85	9/17/2011	we
86	11/2/2011	wn
87	11/19/2011	we
88	12/7/2011	wn
89	12/17/2011	we

Board or the Extra Board. This allows attendees to sign up as late as one month

before a session and still have a good chance of getting into the session.

Assuming you have signed up before the seniority cutoff date, I look first at your FQO status. Anyone with FQO status is placed ahead of anyone without FQO status. Thus experience is rewarded before attendance.

Next I look at attendance. The greater number of sessions you attend the higher your seniority. This is also true within the FQO ranks. This rewards those that have supported my operations over the years but not attained FQO status.

And finally if your FQO status and attendance are equal I look at your first

session number. The lower your first session number the higher your seniority. (If this also results in a tie then it goes to first-come first-served between the ties.)

Seniority is dynamic and changes after each session. Since experience and attendance are the top two criteria and they change with each session a new seniority report must be posted after each session. This means even though you might have a high seniority it will deteriorate unless you maintain your attendance.

### Supporting System

To help keep track of experience and attendance and to automate the filling of

the Call Boards and Extra Boards I developed a crew management system (CMS) written in Microsoft Access.

After each session (usually that night), I enter into the CMS each attendee and the position or positions they filled. I then execute the Update Crew Stats function which updates the attendance, position summaries and seniority for each person that has ever attended a session. I then use the CMS to generate a new Seniority Report that is posted on the website.

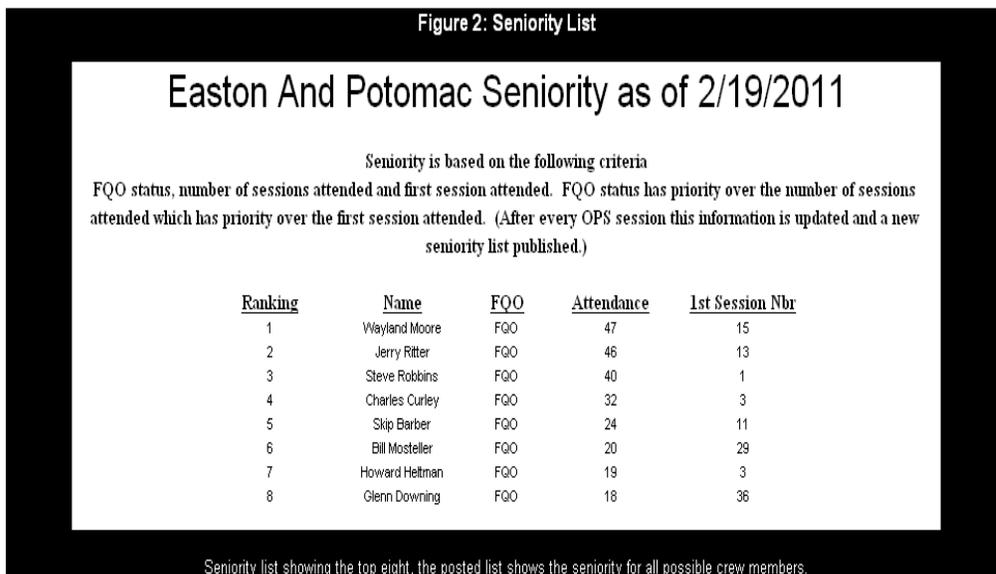
On the Sunday following the Saturday session I execute the Load the Call Boards and Extra Boards for Session function to fill the call boards and extra boards and post these on the website.

### Conclusion

In conjunction with the new seniority process I started having week night sessions. These sessions are low keyed and on a first-come first-served basis. This allows less senior attendees to get a shot at operating and expanding their experience. (Most of my senior attendees are out of town and most of the week night attendees are in town.)

For the weekend session the E&P seniority process allows senior attendees to grab slots for the next session as late as one month before the session but still allows other attendees to get into a session on a first-come first-served basis. That is if less than eight senior operators sign up for a session.

Figure 2: Seniority List



The Easton & Potomac is on the web at  
[www.easton-and-potomac.com](http://www.easton-and-potomac.com) and [eastonpotomac.blogspot.com](http://eastonpotomac.blogspot.com)

As I had hoped the seniority process has expanded the experience of all attendees and smoothed out operations to the point that attendees are asking for more unplanned exceptions to handle. (Be careful of what you ask for!)

Operations started smoothing out as more and more attendees became familiar with the railroad. I get comments, especially from the dispatchers that they didn't fully appreciate the operator position until they were relying on it as their eyes and ears. The attendees will often say they didn't have a complete picture of the operations and how the various jobs came together until they filled the operator's position.

And the Seniority List gives everyone something more to rib the other attendees about! All in fun of course.

### Post Script

While the seniority process has worked as expected it has not allowed new attendees to get into a session. In fact it has made it almost impossible for new attendees to experience the E&P.

Weekend Session August 18, 2012				Week Night Session August 01, 2012		
Call Board				Call Board		
SENIORITY	NAME		ASSIGNMENT	NAME	FQO	ASSIGNMENT
1	Wayland Moore	FQO	Engineer	Doug Barry	FQO	
3	Steve Robbins	FQO	Engineer	Wayland Moore	FQO	
5	Dick Munnkhuysen	FQO	Engineer	Dick Munnkhuysen	FQO	
6	Bill Mosteller	FQO	Operator	Glenn Downing	FQO	
7	Mike Kipps	FQO	Dispatcher	If less than four sign up these sessions will be canceled.		
8	Glenn Downing	FQO	White Hall Yardmaster			
9	Philip Taylor	FQO	White Hall Assistant Yardmaster			
10	Skip Barber	FQO	Thorny Point Yardmaster			
Extra Board				Extra Board		
SENIORITY	NAME			NAME	FQO	
11	Bruce Kaufman	FQO		Mike Kipps	FQO	
13	Doug Barry	FQO		Jason Chicirda		
19	Rick Lull			Paul Mirick		
26	George Gaige			Bill Mosteller	FQO	

People familiar with the E&P sign up as soon as a session is posted. The new people usually sign up too late for the first-come first-served sessions and are shut out by their lack of seniority for the seniority-based sessions.

To address this issue, I implemented an apprentice program. Any first time attendee is guaranteed a slot at a session and I expand the crew size by one to accommodate the apprentice. After the

first session, the apprentice falls into the normal seniority process. This allows new people to experience operations, meet the regular crew and establish the contacts needed to get into other sessions in the area. If more than one new attendee signs up for a session I take them on a first-come first-served basis. This change to my attendance process seems to be a hit.