

Where do Rural Carriers Go from here?

By John Amtsfield

For all but the most isolated of rural carriers, we have watched the evolution of USPS from a bunch of clowns, boos and dimwits emerge as an effective, professional organization with an impressive methodology for setting goals and achieving impressive results. Twenty years ago, I often heard senior postal officials complain that delivery employees were spending most of their time not delivering and that it was wasteful, inefficient and counter-productive. At the time I was spending probably 65% of my total time in the office and only about 35% of my time actually delivering mail.

I watched year after year as USPS did totally inexplicable things that seemed to be in complete contrast to what made sense. I watched as people who were little more than thugs tried to manage the impossible with no creativity, no innovation and nothing other than brute intimidation. I watched clowns trying to orchestrate conspiracies to manipulate mail counts, route adjustments, workhours and extra job requirements with laughable results. Twenty or thirty years ago being a steward was like playing with dim-witted little boys who were perpetually trying to pull a fast one.

In the intervening years, something strange has happened. Most of the thugs and the lizard brained bullies have faded away. In many ways the culture of intimidation still pervades USPS, but the overt exploitation and intimidation is changing. It's still there, but it is much more subtle, much more refined and usually not nearly so easy to spot anymore.

Something else has changed. USPS is a more focused and goal driven organization; where everyone is on the same page. They are more like the Army. They have strategic plans that they have had for decades and they have what amounts to military campaigns broken down into timetables. Usps Has operated on strategic five and ten years plans for some time and even though they are to some degree out in the open; because they always have had new campaigns and elaborate plans, the new initiatives, the new campaigns and the new programs attract little attention.

USPS is a radically different organization today then they were twenty years ago, ten years ago or even five years ago. They are no longer "the gang that couldn't shoot straight." Now they know where all the targets are and they rarely miss. While we have been sleeping, USPS has become the Evil empire in a Star wars analogy, with death stars and we still have clubs and bows and arrows and not a Jedi Knight in sight.

USPS obviously examined their shortcomings and set about to fix them. The NRLCA has still not yet determined necessarily that we have any shortcomings, let alone examined our structure, mothdos of operating and developed strategic plans.

What we needed to do a long time ago (a position I advocated and pushed hard for) is to immediately do the following:

- A complete and impartial analysis of what NRLCA should be now, five years from now and ten years from now.
- A complete analysis of the NRLCA National structure, state structures and how that structure serves the needs of the membership.

- A complete and impartial analysis of the optimum responsiveness to membership requirements, membership knowledge and membership access to representation.
- A complete and impartial look at standardizing membership resources, membership access to representation, membership services and standardizing steward responses and removing steward anomalies.
- Develop a research capacity to identify trends and problem areas and to feed into strategic one year, five year and ten year plans.
- Identify and document independent research, independent statistical review and independent trends through processing the incredible statistical records gathering USPS is doing. Identifying offices with variances in worktimes, variances in mail volumes and other statistical anomalies is like finding a target list for closer examination and investigation. It is also a prime source for the kind of statistical evidence necessary to prevail in Step 4 and/or interest arbitrations cases.
- There must be a focused and dedicated effort to partnership with USPS in Research and development. Knowing what USPS is looking at, trying to accomplish and designing remedies for is a blueprint to what USPS will be doing two years from now, five years from now and ten or more years from now.
- IMMEDIATELY HIRE A PERMANENT “GEEK SQUAD” to number crunch, to do statistical analysis and to do projections. USPS is relying heavily on Six Sigma methodology to drive their business plans and the keystone of Six Sigma (Total Quality Management) is a heavy reliance on statistics and mind numbing reports of numbers, surveys and field data. We need to keep up with what they are doing and use all of that data as well.
- IMMEDIATELY HIRE and ESTABLISH CONTRACT COMPLIANCE AGENTS to work with state officials to investigate offices, issues and situations that are clearly identified through the strategic research. To document and to address these issues in conjunction with or even as a supervisory role over state officials.
- THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT or contract compliance unit should be an adjunct to and apart of either the Director of Labor Relations or the President, but they should be true “computer geeks” employees and not rural carriers. The same should apply for the contract compliance officials say 1 each representing two Postal Areas or specific states so that the workload is balanced evenly. I would start with five, but could envision a lot more than that.

The NRLCA needs to have their entire operation analyzed by labor experts to suggest areas of improvement and whether or not the methods, structure and operations are efficient and effective. Also the report should include projections for the future and suggestions for improvements with possible costs involved.

We can't hope to match USPS in 2010 with the same basic structure and methods we have used since 1972. We also can never hope to match USPS as they transform if we rely on either the National

Headquarters to make recommendations that might significantly affect them or to rely on the delegates who have an imperfect understanding of how the NRLCA operates at the Duke Street Headquarters.

If we wait for someone else to make the changes we desperately need, those changes will never happen and we will continue to fall further and further behind as our out matched structure tries to cope with new challenges.

We either change or get used to having National Officers explaining why they were unable to prevail in explaining our positions or in protecting our job structures.

John Amtsfeld, January 3, 2008