

Change is one thing that we can count on in the Postal Service. What transpired this past year and what is in store for us in the near future has created some fear and anxiety. For the next 18 months, we are all going to be challenged again and that is not necessarily a bad thing. If handled properly it can be healthy for us as well as the Postal Service, and it is evident that the Postal Service needs change to survive.

This is why I say we have the “perfect storm.” Postal reform is creating change that most of us have never seen, including our leadership. In my 35 years I have never seen volume decline like what we are experiencing this year, and the decline in revenue is worse than what we were expecting, caused by both the FY07 rate increase and a slow economy.



## DEALING WITH THE ‘PERFECT STORM’

We had another rate increase that just took place in May, and we may need another increase next year. This, coupled with the coming of the Flat Sequence Sorter (FSS), has put us in an accelerated change mode. This goes beyond just choppy water. The big question, as in the movie, is, “Do we as leaders—as well as the leaders above us—have a plan to keep us out of a head-on collision, or do we stay in the middle of the storm to claim a little more bounty?”

As I travel the country and talk with postal management, it is evident that we have a crew that is scrambling to answer this question.

I recently attended the Pacific Area quarterly leadership meeting in California. I want to acknowledge USPS Area Vice President Mike Daily. He has the management organizations involved in his quarterly meetings that are attended by the District and plant managers to celebrate their success and discuss future challenges, and he solicits input from everyone.

The Pacific Area uses a “Performance Management” foundation model that balances *skill* and *will*. This entire article could be written on the model, but the point I want to make is that it is fairly simple. The model

centers on the use of available tools (*skill*); teaching, coaching, leadership, goal setting and staying focused on what needs to get done.

The balance is then in the *will*. There is the possibility that the employee simply has an attitude and does not want to do the job. We have to make sure that we are not the ones with the lack of *will* and, if needed, seek out the *skill* to get the job done.

I have only a few reservations with the Pacific Area’s model and really it is the same for all our leadership today. Be very careful with the *will* and what is perceived as *will*, or lack of it. During these challenging times of drastic declining volumes and loss of revenue, we have leaders facing challenges few in our postal management have faced in their careers.

We all have come up through the ranks under the good times, increasing revenue and growth. Many can step up to this new challenge and truly lead; some simply are not capable of meeting this challenge and this will be a problem. We should ask ourselves, as well as our leaders, do we have a plan for both short term to stay afloat during the heavy seas and long term to retool and get back to more than just surviving? We have to



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accept the change, brace ourselves and meet this opportunity head on.

For many reasons, I see that *will* is being taken from Postmasters because of numerous issues, some relative to

all and some to the individual office. We are seeing hiring issues and long hours as we have never seen before. We have more programs to manage than we have ever seen: SOV, CDV, CSV, CSAW, SPII, CSO—and I could go on and on. It seems as the seas get choppier, the more reports they use to manage us. What is sometimes forgotten is that at the end of the day, all we have is people, not computers to program ... and mistakes happen.

In most cases we are up to this challenge, but then we look at a report card (NPA) that tells us we have failed; we are a non-contributor. Not because of the effort but because of some adjustment from Area or Postal Headquarters or because of a plan that simply makes no sense: hours being spent that we do not even control and a revenue plan given by the Area that runs head on into basic leadership 101. Then comes the amazing part ... they scratch their heads and wonder why we have lost the *will*. So, I ask that we be very careful, make sure to read the perceived *will* correctly. Is it a bad manager or has the *will* been stolen away?

Regarding the *skill* portion of the model, none of us should assume that our employees, both EAS and craft,

have the skills to manage in today's environment. None of us should forget that it our job to teach and coach our employees or to learn the programs so we can use them to assist in our work load. We need to keep in mind that we still have people—not programs—to manage. As mentioned earlier, even our supervisors have never had to manage with all the programs and pressures of today. They are dealing with routes that are not eight hours, splitting five to 10 a day and then being told to do quality 3999s.

We need to make sure they are well-trained to work and inspect in an overtime environment versus an overtime environment. Let's make sure we are giving the training and support they need to have in today's workplace. Make sure that the entire team, including us Postmasters and our neighboring Postmasters, seeks the training it needs to weather today's choppy sea and not yesterday's calm water.

Each of us is the captain of our ship. Realize there is a storm on the horizon and make smart choices that will keep you afloat for another day. I want to remind everyone to do the right thing ... always. Across the country, Postmasters are cutting corners because of the pressures, lack of training or maybe even the *will*.

Remember, your integrity is all you have. Keep it intact. Get help from your fellow Postmasters. Seek and utilize the information the LEAGUE is sending out to assist Postmasters. There are few issues that can actually get you fired, with the exception of finance and falsification. If a corner has to be cut to get the job done, **NEVER** let it be in finance. Keep ALL your financial responsibilities current and without question. Remember that we put in for this job; we were not forced to take it, and it was not for an NPA report card. It is sometimes hard

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to swallow fairness and equity questions in our report cards, but we are Postmasters first. Remember that service is why we exist. The employees who work for us and the customers we serve deserve our best effort. This month's *Advocate* has a focus on retail revenue. Regardless of the issues with the perceived fairness in this goal, do what is right for the Postal Service and its employees.

Count on the fact that your National Executive Board is doing all it can to get the problems corrected with retail revenue and all else that is impacting us today. Stay focused on what you control.

Remember the quote from a former Pacific Area VP: "We can either peddle faster or make more money." I prefer making more money; my feet are peddling as fast as they can now. Keep your employees well-trained to handle the changes.

Last, but not least, enjoy your time away from work. Keep your family and friends first. They can calm a storm quicker than any program at work.

I am proud to be a Postmaster. I still take great pride in the community that I serve. I, too, am frustrated with some the direction or lack of direction today. However it is our office, our community and customers, and we must stay positive and make a commitment to do the very best we can during these stormy times. I am confident we will all make it through this storm as well. •