

# Winning today's communications battle—and tomorrow's



**Philip  
Dine**

**W**hen we get our voice into the public sphere through our commentaries or by influencing the work of news reporters, we engage on two fronts—one obvious, the other less so.

In the first instance, we help with the battle at hand, which may involve defeating a legislative effort to eliminate Saturday mail delivery, or countering the myth that the Internet spells doom for the Postal Service.

But even as we try to win the current fight, we also must be cognizant of doing so in a way that will help us win tomorrow's battle as well, and those that follow.

That's what makes *how* we wage the effort we're engaged in at the moment so critical—lest we win the battle but eventually lose the war. We have to make the present argument in a way—both in content and in tone—that will not only carry the day but also pave the way for success in the days and months to come.

Why? Because the public, politicians and media are constantly judging two things as they evaluate our—or anyone's—message. Does the specific message make sense, is the argument coherent, does it rely on facts or invective, does it address all the salient points or just cherry pick the convenient ones? And, more broadly, does the messenger impart a sense of credibility and trustworthiness, of understanding and caring about the bigger picture and the public good, or instead is there a narrow focus on winning the immediate argument at all costs, saying and doing anything necessary to fulfill self-interested motives?

If an organization focuses solely on the short term, it risks accomplishing the dubious feat of winning today's battle while setting itself up for failure moving forward.

**This is why, at NALC, we base our arguments on facts and not sweeping claims, on reason and not rants. It's why we stick to what we know and can document. It's why we remain positive and upbeat, stressing the value of what we do rather than the flaws of our foes. It's why we talk about the importance to the public and small businesses of protecting postal services, not about how we and our jobs would be affected by reductions.**

We begin with a built-in edge—letter carriers are liked and trusted—and by building on these advantages, we not only succeed in the short term on a given issue but position ourselves for future success on whatever issues arrive.

One of the delights of this job is watching how you—from

rank-and-file letter carriers to national officers—instinctively grasp this. Almost invariably, you get out the message in ways that are optimistic, substantive and focused on the greater good.

It's worth remembering these dual goals every time we seek to influence others—making the point forcefully and clearly while doing so in a manner that breeds a confidence and credibility that carries over to the next time. *The message is greatly strengthened when the messenger is respected.*

Small practical gestures can be helpful. A reporter captures your comments accurately, an editorial page editor runs your letter or op-ed piece—consider dropping them an actual note (as in, envelope, stamp, etc.), or sending an e-mail. Trust me, journalists get so many angry responses and so few positive ones, that you will make their day—and you will be remembered the next time you interact with them.

**Let's close with a brief look at some highlights of your communications efforts this past month.**

City Delivery Director Brian Renfro was quoted in a Bloomberg Business story and Region 11 NBA Dan Toth was included throughout a *Knoxville News Sentinel* (TN) story, while Idaho State President John Paige had four letters published in Idaho newspapers.

President Rolando was quoted by Bloomberg Politics and had commentaries in WI's *Green Bay Press-Gazette*, the *Washington (D.C.) Examiner*, NY's *Journal News*, IA's *Gazette*, MO's *Joplin Globe*, NH's *Concord Monitor* and MN's *Morris Sun Tribune*.

And when the USPS released its quarterly report in August, the person quoted more than anyone else in nationwide news coverage was NALC's president—from the *Wall Street Journal* to NBC, Associated Press to *The Hill*, *Federal Times* to *USA Today*.

Moreover, every communications effort you undertook met both goals mentioned above.

Not a bad month's work.

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