



## If you build it, they will come

**T**hat line above from the 1989 movie “Field of Dreams” perfectly describes the overwhelming response of the thousands of delegates who arose early each morning and stayed late each afternoon to attend the more than 40 workshops offered before and after the convention business sessions in Anaheim. Your national officers and headquarters staff did a remarkable job of developing and presenting workshops on a wide variety of subjects of interest to letter carriers.

Many classes were filled to overflowing as delegates sought to obtain knowledge and skills that they could take back and share with their members at home. Unfortunately, some of the classes were so popular that there was no seating or standing room left, causing a few disappointed delegates to be turned away at the door. One class, already offered twice, had to add a third session to accommodate the demand, and I have no doubt other classes could have been repeated as well, had the time and space been available.

**I believe that this high demand for knowledge is a good problem to have.** It demonstrates that our membership is actively involved in finding ways to build their branches, enforce the contract and improve working conditions for themselves and their fellow carriers. We are already looking at ways to expand the offering and scheduling of classes for future national conventions and rap sessions.

This thirst for knowledge is not surprising. Many letter carriers feel powerless and find themselves at the mercy of unscrupulous supervisors on the workroom floor. They may be unsure of their rights as letter carriers, so they are afraid to assert them. Others may know what their rights are, but don’t possess the skills to enforce them.

The oft-quoted phrase “knowledge is power” aptly applies to union officers, stewards and the members they represent. As letter carriers learn and understand the limitations the contract places on management and what their rights as carriers are, they feel less exposed and vulnerable. As they develop the skills to assert these rights, they gain a feeling of empowerment and have a sense of some control over their work lives. As they observe their local union officials step in and rigorously enforce the contract, they feel protected in their work environment and safer and more secure in their jobs. It’s a beautiful thing to behold.

I’ve been on workroom floors where the carriers had little understanding of their rights and the local union offi-

cials did not seem to have the knowledge, the skills or the gumption to consistently enforce the contract. As a result, an “every one for themselves” kind of atmosphere had developed, where sweetheart deals were common and despotic managers were free to roam the floor and single out carriers for harassment and abuse.

I’ve also been in work units where the majority of the letter carriers had a fairly good understanding of the national agreement and had confidence that their union officials would eagerly enforce it. In these locations, management understood that if they violated the contract, it was going to cost them. They knew that the carriers would stick up for one another and would report any suspected violations to the steward, so abuse and harassment of individual carriers was virtually nonexistent.

Management was also aware that, at the very hint of a contract violation, the steward would be requesting time to investigate the situation and if a violation was found, more time would be needed to process the grievance that would assuredly follow. This served as a significant deterrent against contract violations and, in many of these locations, supervisors learned it was better to seek guidance and input from the union steward before making decisions on things like scheduling and overtime.

Obviously, the thousands of delegates who arrived early and stayed late for the convention workshops understood the power that knowledge brings. I hope that they take what they have learned and pass it on to their fellow carriers back home. This kind of empowering knowledge should be shared, not hoarded. Many branches recognize this and include an educational segment in their monthly branch meetings. This is a great way to disseminate useful information to the members and also helps to build up and strengthen the branch.

For those who were unable to come to the national convention or came but missed out on some of the classes, much of the material utilized in the workshops will be made available at [nalc.org](http://nalc.org). Additionally, your national business agent is a valuable resource for training materials and stands ready to supply branches with guidance, assistance and support for local training programs.

**In future articles, I will discuss some principles for educating adults, different techniques for teaching adults and some things that branches can do to make learning fun and productive.** As we certainly saw in Anaheim, if you build a good educational program, members will come. ☐