

# If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail



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**A**s union activists, we spend much of our time reacting to things: reacting to actions taken by the Postal Service, reacting to legislative issues, reacting to economic and other matters affecting the NALC specifically or the labor movement as a whole. Sometimes it feels like we are constantly on the defensive, waiting for the next gambit, the next move, the other shoe to drop. And when we win a battle, there's little time for rest. At times it feels like a never-ending game of whack-a-mole.

And those battles must be fought, those grievances must be filed, those rallies must be attended and those phone calls and letters must be written—but if that's all we do, if we are always on the defensive, we

will tire quickly and our union will suffer. If we are going to survive and remain strong, we need to go on the offensive. We need to have goals, positive things we want to achieve, and a plan to achieve them.

Successful NALC leaders set goals for their branches, identifying specifically what they want to accomplish in a set period of time, and they have a plan to get there. Without a plan, you will just end up reacting to situations as they arise rather than working toward goals set by the members and the branch leaders. Successful branches set goals that help the branch grow in strength and stature while raising the level of membership involvement and participation.

**Setting goals provides direction for the branch and helps** it to make decisions, prioritize and focus its energies. Goals help to motivate members to participate and when the members are involved in setting goals, their commitment to reaching those goals is high. If they have a part in setting the branch's goals, they have a sense of ownership and a stake in the outcome. So, the more people involved in setting goals, the more involvement the branch will get. Larger branches may want to create committees for this, while smaller branches may decide to hold special meetings open to all members. Setting goals also helps the branch evaluate what it has accomplished. It's like the old saying, "If you don't know where you are going, how do you know when you get there?" Therefore, branches should set very concrete, tangible goals.

Branches can begin the process of setting goals by meeting and discussing what they would like to see the branch involved in over the next year. For example, your branch might decide that it wants to increase the number of members contributing to COLCPE by payroll deduction. Once you decide on a general goal, it's important to figure out what concrete things you actually want to accomplish and how.

For example, to increase the percentage contributing from the current 15 percent to 25 percent by the end of the year. If you don't set specific goals, at the end of the year you'll never really know if you accomplished them or not.

One way to get a handle on this is to set what are known as "SMART" goals—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and have a Timetable. For example, one of the ways you might increase the level of participation in COLCPE to 25 percent is to conduct a campaign having those who already are contributing contact the non-contributors in their work unit and try to get them to sign up for payroll deduction.

This goal is: Specific—Contact the members. Measurable—How many signed up? Achievable—100 percent would be great, but 25 percent by the end of the year is realistic. Relevant—Given the recent elections, we have important battles ahead. Timetable—Within one year.

Should the branch achieve these goals, you will know it. If you increase your percentage to 30 percent instead of the 25 percent you predicted, you will only feel more accomplished. If you don't reach your goal of 25 percent, you can discuss more effective ways of achieving it.

The branch's executive board should establish realistic goals in several areas of interest, for example: labor-management issues, the legislative arena, organizing of CCAs, involvement of more members, community relations. Again, you will want to set goals that make sense for your branch and that have enough support from the members to get accomplished. If you set your goals unrealistically high, you may reap only discouragement at the end of the year. A branch needs to set goals, succeed and then build on these goals one step at a time. It takes time to move an entire branch forward.

**Because of limited resources—money, people and time—**branch leaders must set priorities. They must choose goals that most directly serve the mission of the local union over other objectives that are of only indirect significance. One tool in the process of setting priorities is for the executive board to develop a budget. An annual budget, indicating anticipated revenues and projected expenses, can be helpful as a guideline to ensure that you stick to your priorities and don't overreach.

When setting priorities, some questions to ask are: Does this directly serve the mission of the branch to grow in strength and stature while raising the level of membership involvement and participation? How soon does it need to be done; can it wait? Do we currently have the funds, time, people and resources to accomplish it, or do we need to wait a while?

In the next *Postal Record*, I'll discuss the steps in making plans to achieve your goals and how to implement them. In the meantime, be thinking about these things: How does your branch differ from what it was five years ago? What positive changes have occurred? How were they achieved? What developments contributed to these changes? What other opportunities, if any, did your branch take advantage of?

**Happy holidays.**