

# Delivering the message...with a smile



**Philip  
Dine**

**D**ealing with the media is less a science than an art, for reasons too numerous to enumerate here. Let's just say that it has to do with the rather idiosyncratic nature of many of those who practice journalism, as well as the delicate task of public persuasion.

As part of an artful approach, I often encourage those of you who want to help get the message out to remain positive and constructive in stating our positions, and to avoid disparaging anyone, be it politicians, the postmaster general or others who seek to dismantle the invaluable postal networks that serve the country so well.

There are reasons beyond courtesy for taking this approach; the main

one being that it serves us well.

You may have heard the old lawyer's saw: If you have the law on your side, pound the law. If you have the facts on your side, pound the facts. If you have neither on your side, pound the table.

Well, we have the facts, we have logic, and we have something else—the public's trust—on our side, so we have every reason to avoid the typical cacophony of noise and shouting and emotion. A calm, reasoned approach serves us best, one where we simply present people with the information they too often lack, information that punctures the conventional wisdom.

Letter carriers are liked and respected; before you say a word, you're already believable and have folks' attention. We can leave the hollering and name-calling to those whose only resort is to confuse and mislead people; our goal is to get people to rethink the issues.

Truth be told, you're doing great on this score. Even though we now have multitudes of letter carriers at all levels of this union taking the initiative to get the message out, it's overwhelmingly done in a fact-based, upbeat manner. At the same time, I sometimes get questions as to whether we really should adopt a "nice-guy tone" in this battle. My answer: We do what serves us best, which involves clearly and concisely presenting our case. That can, and does, include speaking out in a firm, no-nonsense manner when our foes tell lies in their misbegotten attempts to dismantle and privatize.

**An episode just after our convention brought home in a practical way why we have the luxury of staying positive. On Saturday, the day after the Philadelphia convention ended, I was walking back to the hotel from breakfast when I ran into a local letter carrier, from host Branch 157,**

heading the same way. As we proceeded, he told me about a dinner he'd been fortunate enough to be invited to the night before, because he'd assisted a top NALC officer during the convention.

It was a small gathering of the union's national leaders, Ed Ditzel recounted, adding that he felt he didn't belong (wrong, Ed). So he did a lot of listening. Hearing the conversations, absorbing the sense of commitment to the wellbeing of letter carriers and to the providing of universal service to all Americans, realizing the combined experience and knowledge present in that room, he told me, simply, "I was in awe."

His story clarified why we benefit from delivering our message in upbeat fashion, whether in print or on the airways or talking one-on-one with a reporter or customer.

We have a union full of members at all levels with a big-picture view of the import of what they do, members who radiate gravitas in how they think about the challenges, members who combine a deep grasp of the issues with the ability to clearly explain the way forward, members who know that the public values the Postal Service because letter carriers take their public service to heart.

This is why we can do something that's unusual these days—raise the level of public discussion by talking to people, not at them.

What Ed Ditzel said moved me, as did a subsequent experience: driving out-of-state through small towns and rural areas, stopping to talk to letter carriers whenever I saw them on their routes—and hearing each and every one express positive sentiments about their union.

**So, in sum, we have truth on our side, dedicated leaders, an engaged membership confident in one another and in their union, and the public's trust. All this gives us a built-in edge when we approach the media to get the message out—good-naturedly, of course.**

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