

A New Year's resolution to change our working relationships



Manuel L. Peralta Jr.

Every year, we receive and review many grievances involving the manner in which our letter carriers are treated at work. Many of these grievances cite violations of the Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace (JSOV) as a bargained and enforceable rule. These JSOV grievances irk many in management. Why? Don't they respect the agreements that we make? The simple answer is that management wants NALC to leave management to police its own managers. We know that is not happening.

As I read many of the employee statements, it is clear that too many managers do not care enough about you to control their behavior when they are "displeased" with your performance. They know that they, in turn, will get chewed out because more hours were used than the almighty computers approved. No matter how many times we address these issues through the grievance procedure, it always comes back to respecting our labor agreements.

In 1935, Congress enacted the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which included the following observations in its introduction:

...[P]rotection by law of the right of employees to organize and bargain collectively safeguards commerce from injury, impairment, or interruption, and promotes the flow of commerce by removing certain recognized sources of industrial strife and unrest, by encouraging practices fundamental to the friendly adjustment of industrial disputes arising out of differences as to wages, hours, or other working conditions...It is declared to be the policy of the United States to eliminate the causes of certain substantial obstructions to the free flow of commerce and to mitigate and eliminate these obstructions when they have occurred by encouraging the practice and procedure of collective bargaining...for the purpose of negotiating the terms and conditions of their employment or other mutual aid or protection...

In 1992, the national parties jointly developed and signed off on the JSOV. Its closing passage reads:

Our intention is to make the workroom floor a safer, more harmonious, as well as a more productive workplace. We pledge our efforts to these objectives.

Is your work environment safer and more harmonious? If so, thank your managers, supervisors and all the parties that have worked toward making it the environment that

you deserve. If it is not, then maybe it's time to make a New Year's resolution.

In late 2014 (FY 15), USPS notified NALC that it was re-tooling the Voice of the Employee surveys and partnering with Gallup "to acquire best practices in employee engagement." The first survey results indicated that "At the nationwide level, no engagement items reached above the bottom quartile." Materials published by Gallup identified a number of strategies believed to improve overall employee engagement.

The internet contains volumes of information relating to the importance of employee engagement and its impact on performance and discretionary efforts, so it was well understood that management had to do something to change the culture and achieve better scores. The problem, however, is that the same operations managers who created the problem are defining the solutions. DOIS will not let them see past their computer monitors. Over the last few years, USPS has developed and rolled out a number of projects that were intended to improve employee engagement but fell short of the obvious.

We are a service company, with employees who interact with our customers each and every day. How you are treated affects your level of engagement, your interaction with our customers, and every other measurable contribution to the mission of USPS and your attention to doing your job safely.

"Our intention is to make the workroom floor a safer, more harmonious, as well as a more productive workplace. We pledge our efforts to these objectives."

So, finally, here is my suggested New Year's resolution for USPS: As recommended by Gallup, USPS should select the right managers and hold them accountable for their employee engagement. Their first task should be to meet the objectives of the closing paragraph of the Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace by treating all employees with dignity and respect at all times.

My second suggested New Year's resolution is for you: Contribute to improving your workplace by taking note of what is happening at work, observing and noting information that needs to be brought to the attention of the union to help achieve the above resolution. Pledge that you will provide a statement so that the truth is known and the abusers do not get away with their inappropriate behavior.

Keep an eye on each other.