

A Nano-skosh of Trust

By Jasmine Krotkov, Editor

Imagine the following scene: I. M. Wright, a middle-aged American, is watching the evening news. In the first segment, a small group of radicals is shown burning an American flag. As they do, one shouts through a bullhorn that whenever any government becomes oppressive, "it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it. . . . It is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government!" Angered, Mr. Wright mutters to his wife, "It's sickening to hear them spouting that Communist line." In the next segment, a presidential candidate speaking before an anti-tax rally declares, "Thrift should be the guiding principle in our government expenditure. It should be made clear to all government workers that corruption and waste are very great crimes." An obviously pleased Mr. Wright relaxes and smiles: "Now that's the kind of good sense we need. That's my kinda guy."

Now switch the scene. Imagine Mr. Wright hearing the same revolutionary line about "the Right of the People" at a July 4 oration of the Declaration of Independence (from which the line comes) and hearing a Communist speaker read the thrift sentence from Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong (from which it comes). Would he now react differently? Is the message or the messenger that convinces? What makes one communicator more persuasive than another?

Constancy would be a good starting point. When a speaker says first that the best way to save the postal service is by relieving it of the undue burden of retiree benefit pre-payments, then says that the best way is through eliminating one day of delivery, and then, when both of these alternatives have either panned or panned out (depending on whether you believe the GAO, the PRC, Postal Headquarters or Congress), goes on to say that the best way to save the postal service is by moving from the Federal Employee Health Benefits to a postal-only program... well, you wonder. Unlike I.M. Wright, who believes what is said because of who says it, you start disbelieving what is said because of who says it.

Personally, I get especially dubious when I hear statements like these from Postmaster General Pat Donahoe at the Bellevue convention: "Here's my five year plan. If you've got a better plan, show me." (Give me your salary and I'll be happy to show you, Mr. Donahoe.), "Every other company is doing this, so we should, too." (yeah, and then what, go jump off a bridge?), "We hate to do anything that will hurt the brand." (like reducing our service standards and chopping post offices and sortation facilities?), "These are good jobs. People want these jobs. You want these jobs." (Really? the \$11 per hour job, or the one where I have responsibilities galore and no authority?), and most frustratingly, "You don't know what FERs will look like by your retirement age. No one does." Well, duh. That's why I'd much rather be in FERs and FEHB, backed by the OPB, in my retirement than in any independent health insurance plan backed by managers who couldn't or wouldn't foresee the catastrophic decline in mail volume that accompanied the internet age, and failed to diversify in time. Like I want those people managing my health bennies.

Perhaps I'd trust Megan Brennan a skosh more. In her speech she said: "Service is our business, as is our name.", and that "...service has to be consistent, reliable. My business liaisons never ask me about EXFC scores." (Thank, you, Megan!! I've been waiting for someone to say that no one cares about EXFC out loud....). But then, she also said: "We are not moving toward centralized delivery as a forced move, but as a marketing challenge.", which sounds to me like a bit of hindsight bias, or the 'I-knew-it-all-along phenomenon.' but hey: just because you work in HQ doesn't necessarily mean that you're perfect, does it?

But then she said: "Its not inconsistent for me to talk about consolidations along with service.", and the skosh of trust I had put in her words shrunk to a mere nano-skosh. I don't really care how she goes about explaining how consolidating sortation facilities doesn't have to affect service, because it already has. It may not be

inconsistent to talk the way she talks, but only if the rest of her immense and often recalcitrant management team cares to put theory into practice. They haven't. Just look at the new service standards: it takes two days to get Priority Mail from Montana to Montana. We did better than that on the Pony Express. That just isn't the right way to do things.

Let's take a stand on what we know is right. Our primary purpose in the Postal Service, as stated by past PMG Jack Potter: "... that every person in the US - no matter who, no matter where - has the right to equal access to secure, efficient and affordable mail service." We won't get there through consolidations, outsourcing to a non-career workforce, reducing health benefits or marketing plans.



Jasmine wins the "Best Editorial" award for Montana