



THE NAAFA REPORT

Winter 2011-2012

The National Association of American Family Agents

IN THIS ISSUE:

LOYALTY-Where does Yours Lie?

What was I Thinking when I Signed my Contract?

Surviving the Cuts!

Rumors almost Always have an Element of Truth

OMG, You Can't Miss this One!

The CBS Money Watch Report

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**NAAFA,
Inc.**
The National
Association of
American Family
Agents

The New NAAFA Report

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The book to read is not the one which thinks for you, but the one which makes you think. ~ James McCosh



The NAAFA Report.....

Who We Are

The **National Association of American Family Agents (NAAFA)** is a professional organization established to promote *education* and *communication* for and between both active and non-active American Family agents. NAAFA is the vehicle whereby agents can express their opinions openly and without judgment. Our desire is to be a vital active group who is interested in sharing experiences, knowledge, and recommendations with other agents, always encouraging, listening, and growing in ways that not only profit the agents, but their businesses and customers as well.

Our Mission Statement

The Association shall strive to provide professional fellowship by dedicating its activities to encouraging the highest degree of ethical service both to our members and to the insuring public. The Association will support the strictest adherence to the integrity of its members as professional insurance agents. We will promote professional conduct, protect confidentiality, and protect the legislative interests of our members through awareness and understanding of the issues facing the independent contractor insurance agent in the American society.



SUPPORT NAAFA PAINLESSLY

The most painless way you can pay NAAFA membership dues is by the monthly EFT method. Most people do not miss the \$20 a month that NAAFA deducts from the account of your choice around the 20th of the month. Some agents add an extra \$5 or \$10 a month to be donated to the Legal Defense Fund. It's all so easy. Open your account now by sending your check for \$20 to NAAFA, PO Box 578, Circle Pines, MN 55014.

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SECA KITS ARE AVAILABLE IMMEDIATELY FOR \$240 TO NEW MEMBERS WHO JOIN **AFTER** RETIREMENT. OR, THE KIT BECOMES AVAILABLE **AFTER THE SECOND YEAR'S RETIRED RENEWALS DUES ARE RECEIVED.**

You must have a personal email to receive a SECA Kit.

The Agents Bulletin Board at www.naafa.com is your channel for expression. Tell us your thoughts and opinions. Our website gets an extreme amount of hits from Madison so if you want your message heard, send it anonymously to www.naafawest@comcast.net.

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Articles, opinions, viewpoints, and advertisements contained in The NAAFA Report are not necessarily the opinions and viewpoints of NAAFA. The opinions expressed herein, are not those of American Family Insurance Company or any of its subsidiaries. The NAAFA Report's express purpose is to provide a medium whereby people can express their opinions in written form for any interested parties to view. Therefore, NAAFA disclaims any liability for any harm that may be done as a result of these opinions being expressed herein. The NAAFA Report does not guarantee accuracy and correctness of such articles. No part of the NAAFA Report can be reproduced or copied **without prior written permission.**

From the desk of the~~

**NAAFA
PRESIDENT**



Dear NAAFA Members and Friends:

This is a New Year and to start it off right, I feel I must give credit where credit is due, so here goes!

American Family appears to be making an attempt to reduce expenses. Well, to be specific, they call it "managing expenses." They tell us the company is continuing to "reduce its number of employee positions." Now as much as I hate to see that happen, at least I can say I am glad to see they're cutting some place in addition to cutting the agency force. Yes, cutting agents has been the company's method of "reducing expenses" for quite some time. The company claims the 700 reduction in workforce in the past 4 years is "primarily through attrition." We've heard that before about how they're reducing the agent count, too, but I believe reduction by attrition made up for just a small percentage of agents who have left in the past four years.

As usual, the cuts are starting with the agency force and that's what causes a lot of the disgust, hard feelings, and low morale. Why shouldn't the cuts start at the corporate level? The corporate officers should set the example. Oh, I know....losing your country club membership is really a sacrifice, isn't it? But I'm talking about losing your bonus or cutting your salary by 20-30%. That's what would say to the rest of the company, "Hey, I'm willing to make a sacrifice and you should be willing, too." But when you ask the rest of the company to make the sacrifice alone....well, respect for corporate just goes right out the window.

It really hasn't been too long ago that our expense ratio was in the low 30s. I remember when agents were asked to take a commission cut to bring that number down. Well, we took the cut and guess what? Somebody in Madison miss-managed the savings and now look at it...42%.

When it comes to insurance company accounting, wouldn't it seem reasonable to try tightening the belt

before throwing away sagging pants? In other words, cut the waste (that's MONEY OUT) before cutting workers. Next, wouldn't it seem reasonable to find out where the biggest area of "MONEY IN" is coming from? It would seem to me that policyholder premiums make up the largest source of revenue for the company. Well, then you do all you can to sell, sell, sell. And you don't do that by firing agents. You do that by giving them something to sell at a competitive price. You do that by encouraging, praising, and not by piling on more required reports and required meetings. You do that by stopping the distractions. But I dare say that most of the non-productivity by both agents and employees is *caused* by company management themselves. Promoting productivity must include creating a good working environment. A company laden with problems is distracting to workers. And then when you pile threats on top of these problems, whamo....you have a slump waiting to happen.

Well, I've spent this precious time writing an article that might be more appropriate for management than agents, but I believe I speak for the agents. Please won't you listen?

There was a time years ago when I personally met our present CEO. At that time, he was gracious and appeared genuinely concerned for the welfare of the American Family agents. He seemed very warm and receptive to my concerns at that time. I would like to believe that he still maintains that compassion.

Agents, if you feel you agree with what I've said, then get busy and send your membership dues off to NAAFA. The application is in the back of this magazine. NAAFA is here for you, so join today! ♡

Your NAAFA President

MEMBERSHIP SPECIAL

NAAFA is offering a chance for new members to join at a reduced rate. These opportunities only come along every few years. Any person who has not been a member of NAAFA for the past two years can join now at the reduced ANNUAL rate of \$199. This reduced rate will run until June 1, 2012. Don't put it off. You need NAAFA and WE NEED YOU! The membership application can be found in the back cover of this magazine. Or you can visit our website (www.NAAFA.com) and pay \$199 through PayPal. JOIN US TODAY!!

NAAFA PLANS A WEBSITE SURVEY SOON

We'd like to ask our readers to check the www.NAAFA.com website and take part in the survey NAAFA has planned. We'd like to hear from all of you. Sometimes agents are a bit apprehensive about expressing their opinions, but this will be an opportunity for you to express what you feel, help us with statistics, and still remain anonymous. We will publish the results when the survey is completed. VISIT WWW.NAAFA.COM OFTEN.

LOYALTYWhere Does Yours Lie?

[Co-authored anonymously]

Farmers Mutual Automobile Insurance Company started on 10/3/1927 and changed its name to *American Family Mutual Insurance Company* in 1963. If the question is LOYALTY, let's take a look at both company names. The heart of the name is MUTUAL. The new name places emphasis on the word FAMILY!

MUTUAL indicates the company is owned by the policyholders for the benefit of the policyholders. It is impossible to have a thriving company without being profitable but profit was not the driving motivation. Profit was not in the mission statement. Executive officer pay and benefits and perquisites were not among the reasons for starting a MUTUAL company. If that had been the intent, a group of investors would have bought shares (stock) with the intent of sharing the profits and they would have started a STOCK, not a MUTUAL company. I was not among the people who started the MUTUAL Company, but I can imagine that it was their intent to have the best company possible to provide the best coverage and claim service possible at the lowest possible rates, by a group of people who always put the policyholder first.

FAMILY in the name indicates that family is *important* to the mutual company. All of the policyholders form the family. The Family is also defined by its parts. Part of the family is formed by the employees of the company who run the company and its various divisions such as sales, underwriting, service and claims. Part of the family is formed by the self-employed agents who represent the Mutual company exclusively with respect to the sales and service of the products offered by the MUTUAL company.

The agents have a dual role when it comes to loyalty. They are the *liaison* between the company and the policyholder. It is the agents' job to make sure that the company treats the policyholder fairly and the policyholder is honest with the company when determining the appropriate premiums and getting properly paid when submitting a claim.

AMERICAN is a word that makes me think of what a great country we have. Why is it so great? Contrary to what most people think, America is not a democracy. America is a republic, a government in which supreme power resides in a body of citizens entitled to vote and is exercised by elected officers and representatives responsible to them and governing according to law. Doesn't that sound very similar to MUTUAL?

If the American Family Mutual Insurance Company is run for the benefit of the policyholders, and the agents are treated as the self-employed exclusive representatives of the policyholders, there is no need to question where loyalty fits in. Loyalty will not be questioned or wondered about. Loyalty is a key ingredient of a successful MUTUAL company. Long live American Family Mutual Insurance Company.

Well, American Family Mutual has continued these many years, but now it is time to take a look at what kind of a company it has morphed into? Can we truthfully say that the company's present intent is "to have the best company possible, to provide the best coverage and claim service possible at the lowest possible rates, by a group of people who always put the policyholder first?" And if it is their intent, have they been able to maintain it?

Let's take "the best company possible" first: A good company, I believe, is one that exhibits a high level of morality, ethics, and responsible decision making. We have seen a great decline in American society's viewpoints in such areas of behavior over the past 50 years. Without a chairman and a board that are brave enough to stand up against these changes, we will see a company's direction begin to falter, goals that are not quite clear, exceptions that are made to basic and sound principals, and risks that are taken even knowing that consequences, if any, will be less prohibitive than the cost (in their own warped minds) of adhering to the what once were basic Christian principals.

Judges of what make a company "the best" usually don't consider anything but profit. Nor do they consider the real "cost" in achieving that profit. As a result many 'good' companies have gone bad.

I believe that American Family Insurance is being transformed as we speak. It is no longer that mutual company with a "family" orientation. It has morphed into a weak-minded monster with legs each going in different directions. No leg feels much responsibility to the body and so the monster flounders.

So as a part of one of the company's legs, how much *loyalty* do I have toward a company that seems to have left its roots? And how much loyalty does a company have toward the 'legs' it feels aren't really supporting its body?

In his book, "The Loyalty Effect," author Fred Reichheld defines loyalty as the "**willingness to make an investment or personal sacrifice to strengthen a relationship.**" It would appear that if there were no sacrifice, one might actually question one's loyalty. It is easy to "stick with" an employer if one is paid well, work is easy, and the work environment is perfect. But in our imperfect world, this seldom happens. It is when the work is difficult, the pay is less than great, and relationships are strained that real loyalty falls into place. Are we, as employees/independent contractors making the sacrifice needed to maintain our positions in a company that perhaps isn't showing much loyalty toward us? Have we been asked to make sacrifices and given the reasons for these sacrifices?

Many companies these days have been known to tell their workers about the problems they're currently facing because of the bad economy. Sometimes they ask everyone to take a cut in pay, including management themselves. Sometimes the company asks their workers to produce more. And when these cuts and requests affect EVERYBODY, usually workers have a better attitude. But when only a certain segment of the company (i.e. the workers) is asked to make the sacrifice, that's when workers get discouraged. (Remember the "family" concept? One member doesn't like to make the sacrifice alone.) This scenario has occurred many times at American Family. Top management has often taken huge bonuses while agents take cuts. Such action does not endear the company to those taking the hit!

Recently, at a large corporation in America, the CEO told his many employees that their company needed to cut expenses. He said that adjustments needed to be made that would affect everyone in some way or other. But he said that cutting expenses were going to start with him and he was taking only \$1.00 in salary for the next year. Imagine how we who work for AmFam would feel towards our CEO if he made such an announcement? Wow, what an example! He would be showing his loyalty to the *American Family* in a great way and I can predict that his workers would, in turn, show great loyalty to him *and* the company.

Aaron Green, in his 2007 article "What is loyalty and how do you develop it?" says you can't have loyal customers without loyal employees. Customers know real soon whether a worker's heart is in his work or not. Customers become very leery about a company if they detect that the worker isn't loyal. And as most people know, new employees often don't have credibility with customers. Their inexperience becomes evident very quickly. Yes, longevity and loyalty often go hand in hand.

Mr. Green goes on to point out that long-time loyal workers represent a cost saving over hiring and training of new workers. He also says that "loyal customers are simply more profitable than customers who are not loyal and it is easier to grow your company when you retain your loyal customers. And it is easier to have loyal customers when you have loyal employees."

One wonders what top management at American Family is thinking because lately it seems they are not only terminating "funded" (ACP) agents, but also agents with many years of experience. One does have to consider the amount of money "saved" by the company each time an agent is terminated because no renewals are paid on transferred policies for at least a year. Plus, if the company fires an agent BEFORE he qualifies for Termination Benefits (usually the 12th year after the agent is off ACP), the company has another great windfall. Yes, getting rid of agents helps off set the losses, but at what real cost to the company? **Consider how the customers feel when they're told they have been assigned to a new agent. It's not good, but what does the company care how the customers' feel, one wonders. It's the agents who take the flack because they are the liaison between the company and the customers....remember? It's the agents who hurt when they're fired after putting years of their time and thousands of their dollars into an agency that is so easily swiped away from them.**

It's terminated employees who talk about it to their friends and ultimately destroy American Family's reputation.

So here we have a company that is idealistic in its belief that it can have faithful customers, loyal workers, and maintain a profit when its actions produce dissatisfied customers, discontent workers and losses that seem to be getting out of hand. Can't the company see that it needs to begin making some changes and these changes need to start from within? Here's a suggestion:

1) Begin building a trusting and loyal relationship with everyone who works for American Family. Encourage, assure, and let workers know that no matter what, their jobs are secure. Begin to build that feeling of trust between management and workers that has literally been destroyed the past few years.

2) Trusted workers will portray a feeling of loyalty to AmFam customers who will in turn remain loyal to the company because "their" agent is there, and they will begin once again to recommend this company to others.

3) With both of these problems starting to mend, the company will naturally begin to see profits return. But they will only return when management returns to these very basic principles.....trust and loyalty.

Yes, trust and loyalty are words that today seem foreign to many people. But considering American Family's history, we aren't really so far removed from that wonderful, warm feeling of security we had here in our early days. Let's all make an effort to bring it back. This could be the year! 🕊

"The number one reason people leave an organization isn't inadequate pay or benefits," says business writer John Putzier.

"It's the day-to-day relationship with their immediate superior."

Leaders seeking to secure employees' loyalty must work to create a positive bond.



RUMORS ALMOST ALWAYS HAVE AN ELEMENT OF TRUTH

The NAAFA office has had numerous calls lately regarding a couple of issues we need to tell you about. As is often the case, when American Family plans big changes affecting the agents, they tend to drop hints here and there in an effort, we believe, to slightly diffuse the bomb. Well, they appear to be doing it again.

We have heard from several sources that the company plans to terminate a large group of agents again soon. Evidently, the terminology they use is the dismissal of "disengaged agents." So far, we've heard several guesses as to what "disengaged agents" are. Some say they are agents with the lowest 30% in production. Others say it's the Tier 3 agents. Still others say it's just the agents on ACP. And again, others say it's the poor producers in the 5 to 15 year bracket. But it has also been reported to us that you might be terminated if you are under 25 years with the company. Someone estimated AmFam may want to fire as many as 20% of the agency force.

So you see, we are hearing lots of rumors. There's almost always some truth to rumors so we believe you should perk up your ears and listen carefully. If you have never considered earning a living any place other than with American Family, we believe it's time you re-thought that strategy. If you have family responsibilities, you need to know what's available in the area where you have expertise.....the business of selling insurance. Give NAAFA a call if you think you might be one of the "disengaged agents."

Another rumor we are hearing is that AmFam intends to change the commission schedule. There has been talk of this for quite some time. What we don't know is whether this new commission schedule will be presented with a new agent contract or not. Will all agents be forced (or will the company at least make an attempt to "force?") to sign a new contract? We know what Nationwide did recently to their agents and now they're being sued by the Nationwide Agents Association.

[Continued on Page 11]



TO BE OR NOT TO BE?

By Jeff Wilson

The question that most agents in the captive world seem to be asking themselves is whether or not being a captive agent makes sense for them in the insurance world today.

Captive carriers appear to be changing the rules at an extraordinary pace. Volume, pricing, carrier appetite, financial services and compensation programs, among other crucial topics are seemingly in a period of being redefined by the captive carriers. What “was” apparently “is” no more! Commitments, agreements and understandings between agents and the carriers, who the agents once trusted, are now being frayed at an alarming pace. What an agent could write yesterday can no longer be written today. Changing the rules is difficult to deal with, particularly in an economic environment as challenging as the one we find ourselves in today. While changing the rules is not always a bad thing, it appears that when a captive carrier changes the rules it is always to their benefit and never the agents’.

Clients, having no ability to understand the relationship between carrier and agent, are feeling the brunt of the changes. Non-competitive products and pricing are causing them to search for alternatives. Traditional long-serving relationships between client and agent are disappearing. Captive agents are losing clients at an alarming rate while pressure from the carriers to produce more is creating an unrelenting dichotomy----- can producers survive within the captive model or should they consider the alternative of becoming an independent agent?

While going the independent agent route certainly has its challenges, the opportunities can far outweigh the problems of staying in the captive environment. For independents, obtaining and then maintaining carrier contracts is the most difficult challenge and, in some cases, hard to overcome. Identifying, defining and researching agency management systems, software support needs, and acquiring the knowledge and training necessary to competently run an independent agency can be just as daunting as how to market the agency and gain visibility in a crowded marketplace. Most of these issues

can be resolved with a resource that provides professional assistance.

Aggregators, consolidators, and franchisors have become a popular and valuable answer for agents looking to move into the independent environment. These entities supply the carrier contracts that in most cases provide the agent and the consumer with multiple product and pricing choices, a luxury not available to most captive agents. Many of these entities can also provide agency management systems, software support, training, and assistance with placing commercial risks. Some also allow participation in the carriers’ bonus plans and overrides, as well as branding opportunities that help create visibility for marketing purposes. And perhaps most significant, these entities can also eliminate the issue of an agent having to meet minimum production goals in order to maintain carrier contracts.

The independent insurance agency world isn’t for everyone. It requires savvy agents with good business sense who desire to control their own destiny and are willing to take the time to learn the independent agency model’s intricacies – because it is a different world than that of the captive agent. Captive companies are very restrictive in what they can offer to both agents and consumers, but they do provide agents a basic framework for individuals who don’t have insurance experience or who don’t have the financial means to start a business on their own. The independent world can be more productive, enjoyable, and financially rewarding than a world where mandatory quotas and other control issues get in the way of productivity and personal happiness.

In today’s environment, the types of entities described above may be the best solution for the right agent who is looking for long-term solutions in the insurance business. ✂



(Jeffrey L. Wilson is Executive Vice President of Global Green Insurance Agencies & Equity One Franchisors. You can reach him at (877) 452-5476 or jwilson@ggiausa.com)

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DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MANAGERS AND LEADERS

http://www.appleseeds.org/Manager-Leader_Bennis.htm

By Warren Bennis

The manager administers; the leader innovates.
The manager is a copy; the leader is an original.
The manager maintains; the leader develops.
The manager focuses on systems and structure; the leader focuses on people.
The manager relies on control; the leader inspires trust.
The manager has a short-range view; the leader has a long-range perspective.
The manager asks how and when; the leader asks what and why.
Managers have their eyes on the bottom line; leaders have their eyes on the horizon.
The manager imitates; the leader originates.
The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it.
The manager is the classic good soldier; the leader is his own person.
The manager does things right; the leader does the right thing.

(Ever notice how agents seem to fit the leader characteristics? And yet managers try to tell us what to do. Perhaps this helps us understand why there is often friction between managers and agents. Leaders don't like to be managed!)

You can't lead anyone else further than you have gone yourself.

~Gene Mauch

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A NAAFA MEMBER

Being a NAAFA member is an honor and a privilege. NAAFA is an association which dedicates its activities to furthering the highest degree of ethical service to the insuring public. As members we agree to always act with every ounce of professional integrity possible toward other members and associates. As members we agree to foster and encourage fellowship among agents and their families. If a prospective member feels such behavior is impossible, NAAFA encourages that person not to join.

No organization can function in harmony without *trust* among the group members. It takes a long time to build trust. Improving *communication* is an important aspect in building trust. Talking behind one's back, being overly critical, not being 'part of the team,' being unable to compromise, harassing others---all of these personality characteristics contribute to a member being labeled "troublesome." In the case of board members, such a personality can actually destroy the effectiveness of the organization simply by the distraction involved in dealing with such a person. Ordinarily, members quickly sense whether they are compatible with NAAFA's mission and soon go away without much bother.

NAAFA is very fortunate to have faithful, loyal and supportive members. We function because of our team work. NAAFA members base our success on trust, and in so doing, we encourage all members to express their opinions, varying views, and questions. Members are expected to make a conscious effort to always be honest, respectful and to listen to the other members' points of view. Members are encouraged and expected to contribute to the welfare and success of NAAFA. Together we can teach and educate. Together we can contribute to a better working environment for the insurance agent of America.

TOGETHER WE WILL SUCCEED. ♪

Rumors, Continued from Page 6

Here is one of the complaints by the agents regarding their new contract:

Agents who sign the addendum would have better commission rates on certain products and services than agents who do not sign; would have a lower servicing fee; and other benefits, although they would have to forfeit any further DCIC (retirement) benefits, according to the report. Agents who refuse to sign can continue to accumulate DCIC benefits, but would not have access to better rates and other benefits.

[*You may read about this lawsuit by signing in on the member side of www.NAAFA.com and look under "In the Courts."*]

So you see, if a Nationwide agent signs the addendum in the new contract, he gets better commissions, but he loses his Termination Benefits! Could this happen over here at American Family? Of course it could. We have heard rumors that go something like this: Unless you are producing at 70% of your state average, you will

get only 6% new business commission on mutual auto. This is going to hurt a lot of you if this is true.

NAAFA is asking you to document anything you can regarding any of these issues. You all know by now what documentation means. Then, get it to the NAAFA office as quickly as possible. A lot of our information comes anonymously and that is fine if it shows proper company identification. Agents, you need to join NAAFA if you want any assistance from us. Oh, we've heard it a million times.... "I thought I'd be fired if I joined NAAFA." Has all your loyalty to the company protected you so far? For many, it doesn't look like it has because you might get fired anyway.

So join NAAFA today.

Then be sure to document it when someone tells you you'll be fired if you do join!!

**www.NAAFA.com
1-800-567-9668**

Email: NAAFAwest@comcast.net ✉



NAAFA

MAILBOX

[Letter #1 Received in December 2011 from a "drop-out" Amfam agent gone independent!]

Dear NAAFA:

It would seem this is their sneaky way of implementing a commission cut. They knew what a commotion a flat out commission cut would cause, so they (AmFam) are being their usual sneaky selves.

I was talking to several of my reps from my various companies regarding bonuses. This year because of storms, bonuses are mostly non-existent. But, one of my reps said had it not been for the storms, my bonus would have been around \$7,000. A rep from one of my larger companies, said my bonus with them would have been in the neighborhood of \$14,000; another of my major companies said around \$9,000. Then, there are about 9 other companies that I have. The point I'm trying to make is that with AF I never could have achieved bonus numbers like that even with my current total premium volume. I think the largest bonus I ever got with AF was just under \$5,000. Now, they are making it almost impossible to get a bonus based on profit because of all the other terms of qualification. I guess it just leaves more for the greedy ones in the ivory tower.

I remember when poor Harvey Pearce wrote an article in the All-American blaming agents because he failed to make his growth and profit bonus. Now, he sits in his mansion on Green Lake by Spicer collecting his non-deserved retirement at the expense of agents. I get ill whenever I hear his name or see his face for what he did to the agency force and detriment of AF. I would rate him right up there with Obama. I figure God must like stupid people when he made those two.

There aren't many days that go by that I don't praise the Lord for raising me up and giving me the courage to leave AF. My wife and I did a lot of praying and the Lord answered by opening doors and leading us. I only regret not doing it 10 years sooner than I did. God is faithful and good!

A contented and successful *former* AmFam agent! ✉

O.M.G. You Can't Miss This One!

If this was a reality show or a movie it would be entitled, "Bean Counter Gone Wild!" My definition of a bean counter was *someone who minimized expenses to maximize profit*. Needless to say, my definition does not apply to Chairman and C.E.O., David Anderson. With a 92% increase in compensation totaling \$5,505,596 he has not minimized expenses nor has he been able to maximize profits. To be fair, Dave does not have control over the weather nor can he regulate return on investments. However, as Chairman of the board and C.E.O. he can do a lot to minimize expenses especially when it comes to officer and management compensation.

It is true Dave is retiring, but what happened to the gold watch as a farewell gift? Even with the elevated price of gold think how many gold watches he could have received in lieu of a 92% salary increase? Obviously, he has no moral conscience when it comes to raping policyholder money to pad his retirement nest. Greed is not a strong enough word to express how anyone can accept that kind of salary while a large portion of agents are struggling just to meet their monthly expenses,

I have read about recent dictators such as Saddam Hussein and Moammar Gaddafi and how they accumulated their wealth. It was all at the expense of others. If anyone defied them they were killed. If you did not pay your dues you were imprisoned and the only way to survive was to abide by the rules of their regime. I see a very close similarity between the way current AmFam management treats agents and how these dictators treated their "kingdoms".

If you defy the way American Family management operates you will not be killed, but you will be terminated. If you do not pay your dues (produce some imaginary production goal), you will receive a 6- month probationary letter. The only way to survive as an agent in American Family is to abide by the rules the American Family regime gives you.

I contend there is no difference between the mind set of American Family management in their greed, raping policyholder money, and the treatment of agents than what we see in other dictators throughout the world. They want complete control, power and wealth and do not care who they have to destroy, intimidate, humiliate or walk over to reach their personal goals, which includes policyholders and agents.

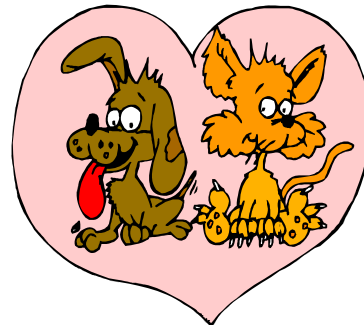
On the assumption American Family has a total of 3,380 agents, taking the increase in salary of just the top 6 company officers (\$3,904,052) and dividing it by the number of agents, each agent would have had an increase in income of \$11,543.62.

Fortunately, the arena of the "bean counter" will soon come to an end, but the regime of greed, power, wealth and abuse of agents will continue as long as the "good old boy" dictator mentality prevails within American Family management....O.M.G!!!! ☹

"Don't let your worries get the best of you. Remember, Moses started out as a basket case."

POEM ABOUT LIFE'S EXPERIENCES

*Happiness keeps you Sweet,
Trials keep you Strong,
Sorrows keep you Human,
Failures keep you Humble,
Success keeps you Glowing,
But Only Friends
Keep You Going !!!*





The CBS MoneyWatch Report: Insurance: Worst in Customer Satisfaction

Surveys....just what are they good for? If the survey report makes you look good, you like that survey. If the survey makes you look bad (usually because you are!!) you don't like that survey. As a consumer, I hate taking surveys. And I especially hate it when I get paid to take a survey. One store offered a 10% discount if I'd go on line and take their survey. I hate that. I'd rather pay the stupid 10%.

Businesses pay thousands of dollars hiring companies to take surveys for them. And then they spend more dollars making sure people fill out the surveys in a complimentary way.....know what I mean? Yes, surveys are often skewed. However, I've noticed that surveys are usually considered skewed only by the companies that got the bad rating. Sound familiar?

CBS Money Watch recently did a program on insurance companies with the **worst customer satisfaction**. (http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505144_162-57357193/insurance-worst-in-customer-satisfaction/) They cited a comprehensive study done by www.insure.com ranking customer satisfaction. They ranked the nation's 20 biggest insurers in life, health, auto and homeowners coverage.

CBS pointed out that USAA won first place in satisfaction by a large margin. But (to our horror) they stated that **American Family rated poorly in both auto and homeowner's coverage and scored among the bottom five in customer satisfaction**. They noted that only 62% of AmFam's auto customers and 64% of its homeowner's customers were willing to recommend the company to a friend----the customer satisfaction litmus test, they said.

American Family responded immediately with an article to the agents defending themselves and discrediting the CBS report. It is good that the company gave the agents a few ideas about what to say when confronted by customers. It hurts to hear that a national network has publicized the fact that the company you work and slave for has such poor customer satisfaction. News like that really travels....much faster than the surveys done by JD Powers.

But what is the real truth? Was the Insure.com survey right? What are the agents hearing? Well, I think you know the truth. Customers aren't happy. If they were, they wouldn't be leaving in droves. It's not to be taken lightly that American Family is losing approximately 70,000 policies a month. Why do customers leave like that? Most agents will tell you it is because of rates. But sometimes it's claims service. Either way, they leave because they aren't happy.

American Family has had a big push in the past to increase its customer satisfaction. Has this all been for naught? Agents say that no matter how loyal the customer has been (and this is because the agent has been much more than an agent to them) they finally reach a point when they have to say, "I just can't pay those rates any more. Sorry. Bye."

There are those who say what's happening here at AmFam is not an accident, it's a strategy. But why? Why would the company purposely try to get rid of customers? One agent speculated that the company needed to thin out customers in the tornado areas. Could be. But why weren't actuaries and advisors warning about over saturation years ago? No wonder customers don't feel much loyalty.

This brings to mind the question of why the company is trying to get rid of agents. As most of you know, a lot of notices just went out. Some are getting 3-month warning letters. Many of the agents are in the 10 to 20 year bracket, but NAAFA has heard of older agents getting letters, too. It would seem cutting agents is also part of their strategy. Why? Well, because it's terribly profitable to transfer policies to these new agents....the Company never pays commissions under the new contract, we're told. Wow! Ever hear of older, retirement age agents getting transfers? It isn't happening, is it? Could this be considered age discrimination?

Another problem of transfers is also reflected in the dissatisfaction of customers who find themselves assigned to an agent they don't know way over on the other side of town. And when the customer finds out their new agent is naive and totally inexperienced, they are really mad. Here's another reason customer satisfaction is so low.

The company really needs to deal with these issues and do it quickly. We've been told it costs a minimum of \$200,000 to train in a new agent. It takes years to build relationships and gain experience that deserves respect. Why would a company risk their reputation and revenue by getting rid of the best selling/service people they have and replacing them with inexperienced beginners? It just doesn't make sense and our bottom line is showing it. ☹

[Just in case you're interested, CBS reported on the "Best Insurance Companies" as evidenced by research at Insure.com and American Family didn't make that list at all.] http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505144_162-57356880/survey-best-insurance-companies/?tag=contentMain;contentBody

**The good sense of the people will always be found to be the best army.
They may be led astray for a moment, but will soon correct themselves."-----Thomas Jefferson**



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SURVIVING THE CUTS (The Journey from Captive to Independent)



Whether you're forced out or you've made an elective decision to become an independent agent, there is a definite learning curve.

Having been a captive, terminated agent, I know very well what it's like when the transition is not a planned move. When an agent is terminated and needs to make a decision immediately, the agent is at great disadvantage. Unexpected termination creates a lot of negative emotions that must be overcome quickly in order to concentrate and focus on a new beginning. I was a top producer in my district, as well as in the captive company's top 100 many times in 12 years. Since 1998, I had qualified as one of the top life producers every year and qualified for every "award" trip. When you're a top producer, an agent would expect some respect. Anger, betrayal, fear of what the captive company could and would do...these are all natural emotions in this situation. Captive companies are no longer concerned for their agents. And, with the future certain to hold more online quoting for the public, elimination of agency force is inevitable.

As soon as my captive contract was terminated, I made phone calls to other agents who had gone independent. I knew I had to make a move and fast. My husband had joined my agency in 1997 and so the commissions from the captive company, our only source of income, disappeared in less than 24 hours notice. I contacted Ray Petrocelli and Joe Kobel, the masterminds of the Agent Support Network of America, ASNOA. I had met Ray and Joe several times over the years at the many captive award trips. I knew both of them were highly motivated, caring and ethical individuals. That, combined with their experiences with a captive company, made it a simple choice to begin our independent agency with ASNOA.

Ray and Joe met with me and my husband immediately and we started developing a plan. We were writing business as an independent agency by the end of January, 2009. This was a huge undertaking by ASNOA, since my captive contract was terminated on December 1, 2008. ASNOA contracted us with top-rated carriers, provided the systems needed for quoting and maintaining records, provided training and education. We received, and continue to receive, helpful advice and direction.

For any agent making the elective decision to go independent, or possibly in the "thinking about it stage", there are several things to be done and the more planning that can be done, the more seamless transition it will be. Being that most captive agents cannot sell their book of business, it is wise to plan for the purchase of new computers, a possible change of location, and to strategize for economic stability while waiting for new commissions to develop. Unfortunately (at the time), we did not have the opportunity to plan. ASNOA worked with us to be certain we would succeed. Of course, it takes hard work. But, if you are a captive agent, I would say you are working harder now.

It's very interesting that as a captive agent, the company takes all control over your business and income. When the captive company's rates make it impossible to compete in the

marketplace, income continues to spiral downward. On the other hand, as an independent agent, carriers are knocking on the doors of their agents to see how they can help them, what they can do for them. If one carrier's rates increase, the independent agent has several other carriers with whom to re-quote the business and thus, keep it in your agency. It's refreshing.

If you are not involved in your community now, you will want to join the local Chamber of Commerce and other organizations. I have been a member of and served 6 years as a board member for the Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce. I was a member of and served on the boards of two local home builders associations. I currently serve as a State Director for the Home Builders Association of Northwest Indiana and am active in their Remodelers Council. I am also a board member for a local non-profit, Housing Opportunities, and serve on the Volunteer committee for United Way. Throughout the years, association with these organizations has helped me establish many lasting relationships. This has proven to be a great benefit to our agency as those relationships have given us support and have helped us succeed.

When making the transition from captive to independent, it's imperative to abide by the captive's non-solicit/non-compete contract verbiage. As in our case, we suspect there were several times during our one year non-solicit term, when we would get a phone call of questionable nature. We found by answering the caller with current facts and maintaining our professionalism, peace of mind prevailed. Our years as a captive agency was a wonderful training ground preparing us for the future.

During the non-solicit time period, the new independent agent may decide to do some direct marketing. Preparing a simple post card addressed "to the residents of" and mailing them to subdivisions in the area is wise. You could also mail postcards to businesses by targeting specific classes and looking them up online.

We have used billboards for many years as a marketing strategy. This was important at the time of separation from the captive company as it let people know the Masterson Insurance Agency was still operating, in the same location, with the same phone number.

We have just ended our third year as an independent agency. Our commissions are double the commissions we earned at the 5-year mark with the captive company. I no longer work six or seven days a week and I no longer feel the pressure of mandated meetings and other demands.

I hope this article has given you some insight and things to think about. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or would like more information. 🍀

Marti Masterson, independent agent and managing member, Masterson Insurance Agency/Masterson Alliance LLC, Valparaiso IN, an affiliate of the Agent Support Network of America (ASNOA)

Email: mmasterson@mastersonalliance.com

You can tell how big a person is by what it takes to discourage her.

IS YOUR PROBLEM PROCRASTINATION?

“Procrastination is opportunity's assassin.” ~Victor Kiam

We have all, at one time or another, procrastinated. The dictionary describes *procrastinating* as “deferring action, delaying, procrastinating until an opportunity is lost.” Procrastinating can be dangerous. Opportunities can be lost. Procrastinating could cost you lots of money. It could cost you the race!

Some will argue, however, that sometimes a person could be glad he did procrastinate or he would have really been hurt. Deciding to rebook on a later flight could be the reason you didn't die in the crash. Or neglecting to invest in a certain stock could have saved you thousands when the company went bankrupt. But more often than not, the habit of procrastinating is detrimental to your success.

Procrastinating almost always ends in feelings of stress and low self-esteem. How often do you put things off until the last minute? Have you noticed that quality suffers when you cram organizational tasks in at the last minute? You put off getting your presentation ready until the night before and find you can't get it all together till at least 3 o'clock in the morning, which then leaves you with about 3 hours sleep. Several strong cups of coffee later, you drag yourself into the hall to give your presentation and find you've not only forgotten some of your program notes, but you also find your mind just isn't as clear as it should be. Obviously, procrastinating has cost you and you begin feeling inadequate and anxious. Think your audience doesn't see this? Of course they do. And before you know it, you have lost a great opportunity, lost the chance to develop leads, relationships, networking, which in turn, suddenly causes you to feel guilty. “I shouldn't have procrastinated,” you think. It's the old shoulda/shouldn't syndrome.

Captive agents are at a point in their careers where they should not be procrastinating. Most captive companies are making huge changes and these changes are most certainly going to affect you. You need to quit procrastinating and start planning. You need to decide how you will make a living if the company gives you the boot. You need to investigate job options. Call the advertisers in this magazine. Contact NAAFA. Talk to other independent agents. Talk to the captive agents who seem to have it all together (if you can find one!!) And SAVE every penny you can. It takes a bank account to make a job change. If you don't have one, you need to check out loans, or check with a rich relative. Where can you borrow money to help you get started again? Oh, I know....that sounds impossible. But it's not, unless you procrastinate.

How do you know if you are procrastinating?

- Do you make lists and plans, but never put these goals into action?
- Are you staying with a job that is boring or not rewarding?
- Do you blame other people or ‘circumstances beyond your control’ for your lack of success or contentment?
- Do you avoid thinking about your work situation, praying it will go away or change if you wait long enough?
- Are you apt to be negative or always criticizing in order to avoid doing something?
- Do you put off doing routine or unimportant tasks? Is your desk a mess or your files cluttered?
- Do you try to avoid confrontation, especially with supervisors, when you know you have a good reason or grievance?
- Have you neglected your health by refusing to get a physical? Or are you often getting sick or having minor accidents when you are faced with some task you really don't want to do?
- Do you tend to do the minor, unimportant things and never get around to the vitally important things? Do you find little ways of interrupting yourself?
- Are you simply afraid to confront your job situation?

If you find you fall in to any of these categories, then it's time to do something about it. Procrastination is a habit. How do you break any habit? Well, it's tough, but if you have been an insurance agent very long, you most certainly have learned how to break bad habits. It's pure self-determination that has allowed you to sell. It's the setting of goals. Set a deadline for doing the most important thing on your list and be determined to get that task done before your deadline. Find a buddy to keep you accountable and rejoice with you when you meet that deadline. It could be your spouse because after all, your spouse has a lot to lose if you lose your source of income. She (he) has a vested interest in your success. Take steps today to protect your tomorrow. Remember these two rules of procrastination: 1. Do it today. 2. Tomorrow will be today tomorrow. Perhaps Gerald Vaughn has it right when he said, “Procrastination is something best put off until tomorrow.”

So GO FOR IT! Let NAAFA be your cheering section! ☘

AMFAM AGENT'S LICENSED ASSISTANT JAILED

[Anonymously submitted]

Truthfulness and loyalty go hand in hand, don't they? Or do they? Can someone be loyal but still not be entirely truthful? Yes, I think that can happen. Imagine, if you will, the faithful assistant who comes to work regularly and on time every day, who completes her (his) work in a timely manner, is friendly and outgoing, and is so loyal that you feel you would trust this person with your bank account. Ever had anybody working for you that you felt like that toward? Yes, we've all probably had people in our lives we had this kind of an attachment for.

But a very wise person once said, "The one you trust the most is the one you should investigate first when things come up missing." These are the people who have access to the valuables. These are the clever/smart ones because after all, that's why you hired them in the first place, isn't it?

From time to time we read about agents who are taken advantage of by unscrupulous staff members. Recently, a North Dakota agent found himself the victim of the clever thief he had hired by the name of Lisa Sue Johnston. Johnston made only minimum payments to clients' accounts and pocketed the rest which totaled some \$27,000+. Although I haven't spoken to the agent himself, I would have to assume he trusted her explicitly or he wouldn't have been allowing her to accept money from customers, right? Thankfully, Lisa Sue will be spending the next 16 months behind bars. But one has to ask...how did this happen?

In the case of the licensed assistant in any AmFam agency office, background checks are always run and background history is studied closely before the company approves any assistant's employment. There are some people, however, who when financially pressed, become extremely clever and creative. It always pays to listen closely to those who work for you. If they appear to be having financial problems, it might be a good idea to move them into a job where they don't handle money. And it seems very reasonable that every agent would develop checks and balances within his agency to make sure money isn't stolen. Spot checking with customers from time to time to make sure they have been credited with the amount they paid might not be a bad idea. Balancing your own checkbook is also a good idea. Keep a handle on your finances.

And by the way...who signs the checks for your agency? Many agents seem to feel "important" and "trusting" when they have a staff person they have allowed access and control of their agency checkbook. Don't be fooled by this "status symbol." It's not as wise as you might think. If every check has to be signed by you, you'll have a better idea where the money goes. Certainly, most AmFam agencies aren't so large that the agent doesn't have time to sign his own checks.

So don't mistake loyalty for truthfulness. An employee might *appear* to be loyal but might be picking your back pocket from behind. Do surprise checks. Never let employees take you for granted. You're in charge. Act it!! ☘

Three groups spend other people's money: children, thieves, politicians. All three need supervision. ---Dick Amery

So, What's Going on with this Guild/Union Thing?

From the UFAA *Voice* (Farmers)

Let's Begin with reviewing what was said in the Fall VOICE.

A GUILD is an organization of persons with related interests and goals . . . especially an organization formed for mutual aid or protection. A GUILD is usually limited to those independent tradesmen who have developed great skill in their field of endeavor. GUILD members are usually white collared type workers working within larger labor organizations to maximize political and related power.

A UNION is an organization of salaried, "blue collared employees" formed to negotiate wages, benefits and working conditions collectively with "employers."

UFAA is an ASSOCIATION of persons having a common interest with little political power on a state or national level.

Recent conversations by UFAA board members with NAPAA (Allstate) officers and OPEIU (Guild) has provided information in regard to the first six months of that relationship.

NAPAA had been working in New York for some years trying unsuccessfully to get hearings to solve problems their agents have had with the state. OPEIU stepped into the batter's box and had 6 insurance commissioners in attendance and working on the problem within weeks. While NAPAA Executive Director, Jim Fish, indicated that while he doesn't impress easily, he is very impressed with

the results that OPEIU has been able to provide. Michael Goodwin, (OPEIU) also referred to the New York trip and mentioned that while NAPAA is only a small percentage of voices; OPEIU has 108,000 and is backed by the THIRTEEN MILLION members of the AFL-CIO. The implications of ten thousand times as many voices can be "heard" in the halls of our state houses with a little bit more force.

Bottom line . . . NAPAA hadn't been able to get through the red tape door for years, OPEIU was not only able to open the door, but quickly entered the room and made progress with the problem.

The report from Michael indicated the two of the greatest advantages of the guild are dealing with the courts and the legislatures. They have lobbyists at their disposal in every state that will go to bat for the guild if and when they need it . . . not only to pass good bills, but to defeat bad ones. While unions have clout with courts, legislatures and across the bargaining tables for benefits; guilds and associations do their "negotiating" through the courts and the legislatures. As independent tradesmen guild members have no benefits to bargain for . . . just rights to defend vigorously and with power.

Strength through member numbers and powerful allies at our back . . . where do you stand?

[NAAFA is keeping an eye on the Guild situation over at the Allstate agent association (NAPAA). The above article was recently written by UFAA (Farmers association) and reprinted here by permission.]

Stupidity is also a gift of God, but one mustn't misuse it. ~Pope John Paul II

WHAT WAS I THINKING WHEN I SIGNED MY CONTRACT?

It seems amazing to me that I would have signed a contract where I agreed to use my own money to build a business, advertise, hire employees, pay my own taxes and then not realize that the company I signed with could, at any time, take it all away from me. What was I thinking?

But I remember when I signed that contract many years ago that I trusted the company. I believed in it. Never did I ever believe the company would do wrong by me. Which of us has changed? Am I not as hard a worker as I was back then? Has the company changed its requirements? Did the contract change? Am I asking too much of the company when I want them to treat me with respect? Do they want me to remain loyal when they treat me and a lot of other agents with disrespect? It's hard to believe I'm working for the same company as I signed with many years ago.

District managers are told nowadays that they are not to socialize with agents. What a change that is. Years ago DMs and agents went fishing, hunting, golfing, had family parties....we were one close-knit family and we enjoyed one another. Now we're not to be friends anymore. Why is this? I think I know....it's so that when my DM has to look me in the eye to fire me, he won't be remembering all the fun times we've had. He won't remember the time he caught that big walleye up at

(Submitted anonymously)

my cabin. He won't remember when our spouses all came to his house for a Christmas party. He won't remember that nice rod and reel the district gave him on his birthday. No, there'll be no personal obligations.....no personal feelings....just a cold "you're fired!"

When groups of people are unhappy with how things are, they often organize. American Family agents existed for many years without an organization that represented them. They didn't need to be "represented" because they were happy. They worked hard and they were rewarded fairly. But in the mid-eighties, things began to change. A selfish attitude in the Home Office began to develop....a selfish need for more profit. A desire for greater salaries for officers (to put them in line with officers from other companies!!), a desire for airplanes and luxury cars, and for an extravagant home office. Overhead grew and grew. Somebody had to pay for it. And that somebody turned out to be the agents. First came a new contract that tightened the noose around agents' necks. Then came commission cuts and new products were introduced with lower commissions. Agents became disgruntled and of course, organized. NAAFA was born out of a need and desire to try to "make things better for the agents." Membership grew to nearly 50% of the agency force. Indeed, with numbers like that, NAAFA was becoming a threat.

Retaliation soon occurred Agents were warned not to join NAAFA or in some cases, they were told they would be fired. Membership dropped and the NAAFA board went underground. The company purred in satisfaction.

But agent determination doesn't die easily. American Family agents are a strong and persistent group who are in great demand by other insurance companies. No agent who has left AmFam has ever had a hard time finding work. Independent brokers compete for the terminated/resigned agents' attention. Everyone knows the American Family agent is an agent skilled in marketing, knowledgeable in how to grow an agency, and an expert in how to treat customers with kindness and

respect. AmFam agents are truthful and loyal and greatly to be admired One has to wonder why a company would spend its time and money training agents and then push them out the door, all fully trained, to another insurance company. Well, perhaps we'll never know why they do this, but this we do know. I've given this company my best. I can't be loyal when I'm seeing my agency slowly being eradicated. Perhaps I'm a slow learner. Perhaps I didn't read my contract well when I signed it. But I understand it now. And I'm awfully glad I have been a member of NAAFA all these years because that's how I've been informed.

..... Thanks NAAFA
✂

HE WHO ANGERS YOU CONTROLS YOU.

FEAR, COURAGE, HONESTY

By Larry Smith, CPCU,CLU,NASFA Sec/Treas.

Several weeks ago I had the misfortune of reading a letter written to Ed Rust, Jr. and then made public through the internet. The author, who supposedly had just retired as an agent, first praised Ed Rust, Sr. then blasted Jr. in contrast. The accusations in the letter do not concern me for the purposes of this article. What appalled me was the way the author ended the letter:

"I would normally sign this but honestly feel I would somehow be persecuted in some way..." What! You've got to be kidding! NO signature! Spineless doesn't begin to describe this person.

I can unqualifiedly state that I have never signed anything "Anonymous," not a donation, not a letter to the editor, not a complaint to State Farm, nothing.

So then I began to think about this poor sorry excuse of a human being. What makes him/ her so different from most other people generally or State Farm agents specifically? Sadly, I have to report that my reflections on, the human condition have drawn me to this inevitable conclusion; there is very little difference from this invertebrate and the great majority of humanity (read State Farm agents).

Through innuendo and outright threats, State Farm management over the years and now probably decades has instilled unreasonable fear in many if not most of its agents. Fear of what? The unspeakable "T" word. Never utter "shank" on the golf course or "termination" in an AFE meeting. I just recently spoke with a President Club qualifier and challenged him to volunteer to run for an office on the NASFA Executive Board. This successful agent should have sufficient self confidence to muster a modicum of courage in such matters; but, oh no. So it seems that State Farm, unlike the Wizard of Oz, may give out President Club "medals" but withholds the "Courage Medal" that the Cowardly Lion received. Okay, I get it: no one wants to be terminated against their will; but is this a legitimate concern? I don't think so. I purposefully used the phrase "unreasonable fear" previously because that is the definition of phobia. I contend that State Farm agency force is full of "terminatiophobes." Sorry it's not in the dictionary; I made it up, but I think you get the idea.

Exactly how many agents do you know who were terminated? Let's narrow the playing field by asking, how many agents do you know who were terminated for no reason at all? I know I can come up with a few, but out of 44 years and 15,000 plus agents, it is a very, very small number. So are we going to let this phobia control our lives? I hope not.

In the early 1970s, I was invited to a "Look At Management" meeting at which the regional vice president said there was no question that would not be answered. So after an uncomfortable silence in the room, I asked him in the presence of other young agents "What did you earn last year." He didn't answer. I then asked him why it seemed like a lot of the executives in Bloomington seem to be related? I didn't get an answer to that either. Of all those in the room I was the only one who did not go into management.

Sometime in the late 1980s I organized, with the help of a handful of other agents, a meeting of about 50 agents to meet the president and a few officers of NASFA to explain the benefits of joining NASFA. I did get a call from the regional vice president about that one.

In the early 1990s, I volunteered to run for office on the NASFA Executive Board. I later became treasurer then president elect and ultimately president.

More recently in a dispute with State Farm I flat-out asked my agency vice president if this was something he would recommend terminating my agreement over. Life is too short to let little people worry you. Guess what after 44 years? No termination. Not even an angry word from any of State Farm management. Why do you think this was so?

I'll tell you why. This is all a perverse game State Farm management is playing. It's a psychological equivalent to playing "Chicken" on an abandoned road with two cars racing toward each other. Who swerves first? With State Farm management it is who blinks first.

Oh I'm sure there were times when I blinked; but never on the big issues. Remember only the psychologically disturbed feel no fear; they call it psychopathy. Untold numbers of national heroes have admitted to experiencing fear. It was how they dealt with or confronted their fear that determined how they ultimately were labeled heroic. How do you handle your fear?

Don't get me wrong, I understand that among the ranks of State Farm agents there are thousands if not tens of thousands of heroes who have faced or are now facing unbelievably huge crises in their lives. I have been fortunate that my crises have mostly been limited to infrequent run-ins with State Farm management. But I don't always see that same heroic spirit in agents when they are faced with State Farm management run awry.

As much as I would like to back off the stage as "Braveheart" I must confess that I believe I received much of my bravado from an exterior source. But then maybe others have been inspired before their acts of courage. Nonetheless, I must give credit where I know credit is due. And now I will share it with you so that you may also enjoy the satisfaction of a special type of self confidence. Remember when I wrote, "In the early 1990s I volunteered to run for office on the NASFA Executive Board..." That's when I really began to appreciate what being an "independent contractor" meant. The fine men and women who served on the Executive Board slowly demonstrated to me what being a State Farm agent was all about.

But once again I will add a caveat. It is true that I received untold confidence by rubbing shoulders with NASFA pioneers. But there is more to the equation than that. I submit that the very fact that you openly serve on the NASFA board provides a type of shield. The little people don't want to mess with you. They have so many other submissive subjects, why should they bother with someone that is willing to stand up to them? It reminds me of the variation on the old saying, "give a man an inch and he will take a mile," which was cleverly changed to "give a man an inch and he'll think he's the ruler." I confidently state that unless you, too, experience serving on the NASFA board you will have missed out. Don't miss out! ☘

RESPONSE TO "FEAR, COURAGE & HONESTY"

OK, I'm not anonymous, I've simply gone **underground!** You know how it was back in the days of Hitler....in order to live the Jews had to go underground. But they were brave, brave souls, certainly not to be degraded. And that's how I would describe the NAAFA board and its members. Brave, brave souls who are fighting for a cause. That cause is the honest and fair treatment of insurance agents.

Let's talk a bit about anonymity. People remain anonymous for various reasons. Often generous benefactors remain anonymous out of a humble heart. They prefer to do their kindnesses without drawing attention to themselves.

Often victims choose to remain anonymous out of shame. Why would anyone deny them that privilege of privacy? And would you destroy the whole concept of Alcoholics Anonymous? If so, you're really a scrooge.

Often people wisely choose to remain anonymous when filing a complaint. They do it for their own protection. Fear of revenge is real. It's hard to argue that fear is not real. But revenge is real, too. There's an old saying something to the effect that "The mafia will always get its revenge." Some people hold grudges forever. They don't get mad, they get even.

And so, recognizing that several NAAFA board members were fired over the years by American Family and also recognizing that company officials are still telling agents not to join NAAFA and doing it with somewhat of a threat, and recognizing that the company seems to be on another firing tirade, our board's decision to protect their identity and that of NAAFA's members must remain in place. I can imagine that for the proud, it would be hard not to get recognition for work you have done, for articles you have written, hours that you've spent helping agents, for money you've donated, but our board isn't that way. We look at our work as a *cause* that needs to be fought. We feel it is a *privilege* to help agents in need. We very seldom get praised or thanked because of our anonymity. That's just how it is. But if we are fired, then the mission of the terminated agent is jeopardized.

It's difficult to encourage agents to join NAAFA when circumstances are as they are. But NAAFA needs to continue and so we plead with you to support us. We know our magazine gets to the home office in one way or another. We know the upper echelons don't like us because we tell the truth as we see it. Sometimes truth hurts and when it does, we've hit our mark.

I must remain **ANONYMOUS**. Sorry!! ☘

Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous. ~~Albert Einstein



NAAFA MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

I, the undersigned, hereby apply for membership in the National Association of American Family Agents, and I certify that I will always *uphold* and *support* the mission and goals of the organization to the best of my ability.

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