

## **An agent ponders life at American Family. NAAFA received this email 2/26/2011**

I have had some time to read a lot and think a lot about the current situation. The bottom line is the income and freedoms are the two things that keep most of us here.

Having said that here is what I observe between now and termination whether it be self imposed or forced.

We used to have a voice with a manager that would bring our concern to where it needed to be to be fixed. Now there are no concerns to be fixed, according to corporate, except for agents' performance. According to corporate, agents are the only problem. Somebody in corporate finally came forward and expressed their disgust at agents getting paid renewals. Now they are going to make sure that agents do some things that could be considered '*earning renewals.*' Corporate is not happy to see "freedom and independence" in the agency force. Now they want to enact "initiatives" that push the envelope of self employment as far as they can go. Depending on who you are, there are various "reports" that they expect to be completed on a monthly basis. What I read from IRS rulings is that this is counter-active to the independent contractor approach. They have even hired people (ASMs) to come out to each office and pick up those reports, go over them, and make suggestions as to how you can improve.

This new position is completely different from the very old role of DM. The DMs of the last 10 years are not the same *quality* people in the same position as 20 and 30 years ago. Back then I could consider them to really be my friend. As long as I worked hard, stayed honest, did not upset the apple cart, the DM would always do what he could for me. Today they march to the beat of corporate. They display no love for agents, and as a matter of fact, I have heard from the last 2 DMs at district meetings that "they are not here to be our friends." Whatever corporate says is what must be done.

The problem I see today is that those who are making the decisions have no experience in the field. Many are called in from outside the company only because they have a college degree and they present themselves well to the interviewer. The highest upper management is so far removed from the field that they don't get involved with every day decisions. All they want to see is results. I often wonder today about "wandering" into all the expansion states that corporate did. We may have more buildings, agents, employees, air planes, etc. but are we any better off? Even heads of divisions have hardly any product knowledge. It appears they are hired to keep peace in the ranks, make sure someone is at their desk once in a while, and are able to hand off questions when asked. No wonder morale among employees is so low. Their neighbor working at a different company has a much higher chance of getting that position than the employee who has worked here for many years.

Agents are expected to perform at the level of a 9 out of 10 point scale. Corporate has never come close yet, but they expect us to? Did anyone tell them that what *they* do affects *our* score? Our income is based on that, but not theirs? We are expected to sell, sell, and sell some more. It would help to have a fair rate based on loss history, driving factors, and, of course, other actuarial factors rather than a credit score. One agent told me their "secret sauce" does not taste very good. How true. After the changes to rate increases (especially homes and umbrella rates) and credit scoring, corporate has realized loss of income and market share as well as decline in rating..DUH!!!! What really frustrates us is that we agents are being blamed for this and now are expected to work miracles to *undo* what damage has already done. Although my energy level is pretty high for living over 6 decades, I really have a problem going out and door knocking begging for business. Again, that could be viable, but you have to have a decent rate to start. Once you have a customer, then rates may become secondary, but a new customer? I have never had a customer yet say to me "I don't care what you charge, I am just looking for great customer service." ***I wish corporate would understand that.***

Good Stuff. Regardless of the articles I read from customers and former customers across the country, I give our claims people a 10! And that is what I promote when it comes to customers questioning rates and why they should stay. They have me and they have fantastic claims support. Yes, they will be there when needed. We do pay what we owe.

Now corporate will say they really love and count on the agents. "They are our number one asset and method of distribution," they say. Okay, listen to the ads on TV.

#1 You can call us for a quote"

#2 you click on [www.amfam.com](http://www.amfam.com) , or

#3 you can call an agent

So why tell the rest of the country we are #3...dead last choice? If you call the main number 1-800-374-0008, the first thing you hear is "dial 1 for a quote"

You see there were some agents years ago and some presently, that have given the rest of the agency force a bad name, in general. Those agents were caught and terminated or yet to be caught and terminated. The problem there is that the perception in corporate is all agents are the same, so let's treat them all the same. Why do we feel that we are smiled at in person and stabbed in the back at every meeting a state director and ASMs attend? Imagine what they say at management conferences for 3 days a year?

I have heard every DM say that it's all about *team building* within a district. Why do they pit us against each other in reports? It is not a real team, never has been, and really never will be. Right now it is more like a military school. We are expected to stand at attention, keep our mouths shut, and cooperate in any way dictated or else face court martial.

Yes, I know about the agency council. All that is is one yes-man representing each state who is behaving well in front of "parents" at meetings several times a year at corporate. Now does anyone think any of them are going to really bitch about anything? I have heard that building bigger agencies is the goal of corporate?? Oka, so why are 7,000 policies handed off to a brand new agent in some area where there are a number of long time veteran agents? In another area where there are fewer than 2,000 policies, the need to replace that agent is dominating. There are 3 other agents in that same area with over 88 years of combined experience to give that "excellent customer service" to those policy holders. It's service, okay, lip service from corporate. I guess whoever is given that job in the state can do what they want with who they want.

Some of us are good quality people that will continue to deal with the issues. We will try to withstand the stress until they carry us out on a gurney. The freedom is there, the money is pretty good. At least until one pays payroll, taxes, health insurance, benefits, related business expenses, etc. That is another thing corporate employees have no concept of. Do they even know what their health insurance costs the company? Okay, we still have the freedom to come and go as we please. The only self discipline rule I have is that someone will be in my office during normal business hours 5 days a week to answer the phone, sell insurance, or service customers. Other than that I have a job to do and am responsible for its' results to corporate. If it were not for my fellow agents that I could vent with, no doubt I would be in therapy today.

Corporate wants a better American Family? My advice is let the agents handle that part, because all of those so-called '*new initiatives for a better future*' have seemingly failed. Corporate, look at your bottom line. Are you really better off today than you were 30 years ago? Really? One of my former clients who moved to Kentucky said this to me 7 years ago. He had heard that "American Family was headed for deep trouble, and that I should find a new outfit."

God be with us in the journey ahead. Keep the faith and stay healthy! Thank you, American Family, for the opportunity you have given me, as I have given you half my life in return. Someday I will have that life back and once again be in full control.