

A Communication from the National Association of State Farm Agents, Inc.

Improving Customer Experience ... They Must be Joking!

After reading the e-mail announcement from the State Farm Agency Department entitled "Improving customer experience," it appears a couple of our current State Farm agency management persons have even a lesser opinion of the intelligence, insight and trustworthiness of the average State Farm agent than we thought possible.

You're the State Farm agents, so let us ask you. Have you ever heard a State Farm policyholder express a desire for an "improved level of service ... during a change of address?" Well, neither have we! Certainly, from time to time, we have all experienced a policyholder express a desire for an improved level of service for one reason or another, but hardly regarding a change of address. What we have seen, unfortunately (our agency agreement wording against raiding notwithstanding), are examples of greed, as opposed to a desire to serve. This comes from a few of our fellow agents who attempt to steal accounts of policyholders who move into their area and happen to come into their office to pay a premium. We seriously doubt there has ever been any "customer feedback" addressing the issue of an "improved level of service" when changing an address! Maybe there have been complaints due to the customer's sensitivity about the attempt to steal their account from their current agent.

Although the State Farm agency agreement (AA3/4) allows for the company to take out of your agency any policyholder who moves more than 25 miles from your office, they have rarely done so. Somebody up there was smart enough to realize it would disrupt the agent/client relationship we agents work so hard to establish in order to create the trust necessary to put forth policy solutions to the customer's needs.

We see the use of the 75-mile criteria as something to lull us into pacification. "Out of Book Search" (OBS), in reality, is an invitation to those few greedy among us to use an avenue created by the company to steal each other's customers. Sorry, but that's the way we see it. It is more of the management technique of pitting one State Farm agent against another in a dog-eat-dog fashion.

Aside from the fact that this is absolutely unnecessary because there already exists a very simple method available to any policyholder who feels they want, not only an "improved level of service...during a change of address," or a change to an agent whose location they feel will be more convenient for them to obtain service from, and that is the 4521, or any other signed request made by the policyholder. And, that method has served us well because the policyholder becomes fully cognizant of what is happening to them, as well as to their agent.

There is currently no absence of "seamless transitions" because State Farm has created the impression that all State Farm agents are employees of State Farm and it does not matter which State Farm agent they go to for any service, including their change of address. This OBS system will simply aid and abet the impulse to steal.

What State Farm is not aware of, but NASFA members are, is NASFA long ago addressed the concerns of agents wanting to continue their usual Good Neighbor level of service when policyholders are moving out of their area, and that is "NASFA's Member-to Member Referral Program." Under this referral program NASFA member agents can refer a policyholder to another NASFA member agent in the location where the policyholder is moving. This referral program initiating form appears in every issue of the Mirror publication. Ask any member agent who has used it how well it works.

To even mention "safeguards" to protect privacy when the OBS system is going to give computer access to the records of the moving policyholder of one agent to many agents, gives the immediate impression of being contrary to laws dealing with the policyholder's Rights of Privacy. It is ludicrous. And what, pray tell, would the notification to the current servicing agent that their clients records have been viewed (we prefer the word exposed) by other State Farm agents by State Farm, do except to tick off the client about this invasion of privacy when the current agent contacts them in an attempt to explain what was going on?

This is a clear indication of the kind of things that happen when an historically "agency-oriented company" becomes an "operations driven enterprise."

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