Where Is Your Place?

Javier E. Najera

A wise man, and agent, told me being a captive agency owner is very much like riding a fast-moving train. The train has various levels of accommodations, which one can choose, but at the end of the day, everyone on that train is on the same track, so to speak. The gist of the conversation was regardless of where one is on that train, and whether one chooses to jump off at a stop, the train will continue to move quickly and forcefully.

I make sense of many things in business by comparing them to sports. As a lifetime fan, I’ve played sports all my life and have had the opportunity to call sports over airwaves the last few years. Drew Brees has been a favorite player of my time. Retired a couple years ago from the New Orleans Saints, he’s sure to make the NFL Hall of Fame as a first ballot candidate. His journey in football, though, was not always as certain. Drafted originally by the Chargers, they terminated his services in favor of a new draft pick. The New Orleans Saints signed him just after Hurricane Katrina, and the rest is glorious history. Not only was it a match made in heaven for sports, but Drew and his family would do great things off the field in rebuilding that city to what it should be.

There are people highly critical of plan B’s. Recently, on a podcast, Steve Harvey said he did not have a “plan B” for his career. Comedy is the only thing he ever wanted and though those first years saw him living in his car (his words), eventually he did find his place in the world of entertainment. It’s arguable there actually have been some plan B’s in his journey, as he has done much more than comedy. The point is, life is not such that the journey is always well defined and without challenges.

The Allstate Exclusive Agent (EA) has changed drastically since 2019. So much so, in a recent interview with Insurance Journal, the Allstate CEO said, “...he added, there was more to the story of why Allstate hasn’t grown market share as fast as others. Essentially, he said, the ‘old Allstate’ in the pre-2019 period had a different model, something he personally didn’t appreciate until later.” Most of the change introduced to the exclusive agency force has caused many to either thrive or question their future with the company. Agencies are directed by way of business objectives and compensation almost exclusively for new business. Today’s Allstate Exclusive Agent is not the neighborhood agent it was before 2019 when service and retention for tenured clients were regarded as highly as new business.

The new model favors a new generation of agents, who come to the business with technological acumen to digitize and modernize processes for speed and efficiency. Rarely do any clients visit offices anymore, except certain markets such as those with many Hispanic clients who still prefer to conduct business face-to-face. It doesn’t mean those of us past 40 or 50 can’t learn and apply the ways of the new world. But therein lies the conundrum: Do you want to? Does it fit the vision of what you thought this was? Is it sustainable for you and your team?

One of the reasons I feel so strongly about NAPAA is it really and truly does offer support for agents, even if they decide to step off the train, so to speak. Recently, a Facebook group with the sole intention of giving agents a way to connect with those who have moved on to other models in the industry was formed by NAPAA: Plan B-planning for Life after Captive Agent. In it are captive agents, current and past, as well as independent groups, who can connect in a space that lends itself to conversations and advice. The disclosure has always been the same: NAPAA does not intend to encourage any captive agent from stepping off the train, but many have since 2019.

It can be argued that Drew Brees did not have a plan B, necessarily. After all, whether in California or Louisiana football is football. Steve Harvey says he never had a plan B, either. However, he’s morphed into many areas of entertainment I don’t think he anticipated. Much in the same way a captive company (even five years ago) may not have anticipated the turmoil in the markets or changes they felt necessary to stay competitive, it is a new direction. One such new direction of some captive carriers is to purchase and/or transform the exclusive agency force to independent agents. Many agents want to stay in the business, though they cannot or will not sustain the demands of a captive company.

What is your place in the insurance business? The captive world is offering incredible earning opportunities if you follow their blueprint. At the moment, there are so many opportunities to buy and/or merge existing captive agencies in many markets. The choice is yours. What do I know from that original piece of advice regarding the train is that, though it will move on, will you if that is your choice.

Javier E. Najera is a native of El Paso, TX, and longtime resident of Arlington, TX, where he attended UT-Arlington from 1992 to 1994. In 1994, he became a licensed insurance agent and was a general agent for a small funeral home in Fort Worth, upon which he enrolled in Dallas Institute of Funeral Service, graduating in 1997. While there, he earned the Bill Pierce Award and served as president of his class. That was the beginning of a 20-year career in funeral service as a funeral director, embalmer and crematory operator.

In 2015, Javier had the opportunity to become an Allstate agent in Arlington. The goal and desire was to serve customers, which has always been at the heart of his work. He was drawn to become an Allstate agent because it gave him an opportunity to be a small business owner. And, as a longtime Allstate customer (since 1992), he wanted to follow in the footsteps of his former Allstate agent, who is a perennial conference winner and is now a member of the Allstate Hall of Fame. Javier’s agency is committed to helping Arlington residents and Texas all over the state with their immediate and long-term insurance needs. We’re eager to establish long-lasting relationships and provide the best customer service we can. Contact Javier at texasmortician@gmail.com.