

Editorial —

Dealing with bureaucrats

Immediately prior to assuming this job, your editor spent some time working for a non-profit Native corporation trying to do business with a government agency which was supposed to provide services to Natives. Just before that job, he worked for that same agency where his chief responsibility was to apologize to non-profit Native corporations for the government. Therefore, your editor feels confident to offer helpful hints in this space about how to deal with bureaucrats:

1. **NEVER ADMIT THAT YOU ARE MAKING A REQUEST FOR THE FIRST TIME.** Your average bureaucrat will hardly pay attention to a request for service unless it begins something like this — “In spite of repeated letters, telegrams and telephone calls to your office, I have received no response to my request for aid for Volatile Village. By copy of this letter I am requesting a congressional investigation of your office.” And send the letter certified mail, return receipt requested. Keep the receipt for reference during follow-up phone calls, telegrams, etc.

2. **OBTAIN A COPY OF THE LATEST ORGANIZATIONAL CHART.** You can't tell the players without the line-up. A favorite bureaucratic trick is to change responsibilities enough times so that you can't tell who is supposed to be doing what. One might be writing a letter to the Deputy Assistant Area Director for Plant Management for years before one begins to realize that he is the agency's gardener.

3. **LEARN TO DECIPHER KEY PHRASES IN BUREAUCRATIC CODES.** “I have given your request to J. S. in the contracting branch for analysis” means “Darn if I can remember what I did with the darn thing.” “I just sent you a letter on that this morning” means “I'll try to get to it next week.” “Can you get me that in writing” means “Forget about anything happening this year.” “I appreciate you calling and letting me know about this” means “Better get off my back if you want any action at all.” Last but not least, “We are reviewing your proposal to see how we might go about responding to it” means “We are stalling until we can figure some way to get out of doing anything about it.”

4. **PRAY FOR AIRLINE STRIKES.** One can appreciate the value of a major airline strike after calling an agency office for the hundredth time, and for the hundredth time the receptionist says, “Mr. Snudley is out of town until Monday.”

5. **HOPE THE AGENCY IS CONTRACTED OUT TO A NATIVE ORGANIZATION.** Tribes are eligible to contract for the operation of federal programs designed to provide services to their members, thereby providing accountability to users of those services for the operation of those programs. Only problem here is that the agencies which are given the responsibility to establish these contractual arrangements would be out of a job if they gave the programs to the Natives (See 1 through 4 above).

—T. R. j.