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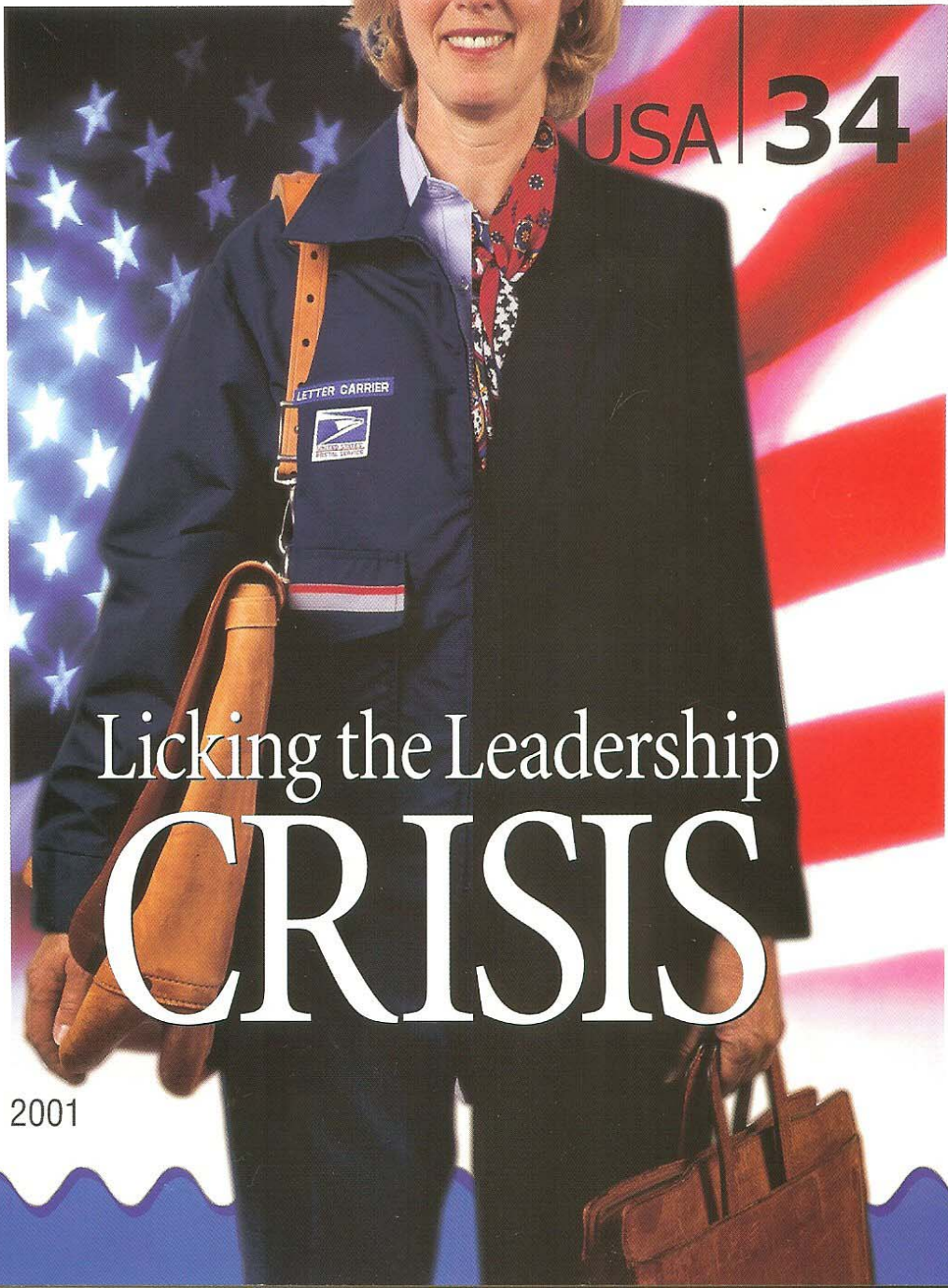
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Licking the Leadership

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Hands-On Leadership

"Workforce development is so important to me as a fundamental means of doing business that I'm constantly changing the corporation so I can have a hands-on approach," says Reginald Daniel, president and CEO, Scientific & Engineering Solutions (SES), Baltimore.

"Hands-on" for Daniel means staying current with the development objectives of each of the more than 100 SES employees. It's not as daunting as it may sound. Daniel has achieved his own success by systematic planning, and that's what he expects from his employees. Employees are required to complete a five-year life plan, called the individual development plan (IDP), which becomes the basis for their training.

"Most people don't make decisions consistent with their objectives because they don't have objectives. And I think most employee turnover occurs because the employee's direction is different than the direction of the corporation. If you somehow bring the two together, you ultimately do a good job for the corporation and the individual," Daniel says.

By going through the IDP process, SES employees clarify real-life goals, such as putting three children through college without breaking the bank, preparing for a comfortable retirement, or buying a home. Then employees can plan how their work can help them get there.

"I read the development plans when the employees have their annual reviews. It's not unusual for me to call up an entry-level employee and talk to him or her about their plans to buy a house," Daniel says. "That's what energizes me to do my job."

Daniel's passion for developing people stems from his own struggle growing up poor and being encouraged to set his sights low. Despite the lack of support, Daniel decided he wanted to go into industrial sales. On his way, he sold retail, Amway and real estate. "It took me 10 years to get into industrial sales, but I became one of the best salespeople in the region once I finally got the opportunity," he says. "And I just don't think getting an opportunity should be so hard."

In addition to developing the SES workforce, Daniel is committed to giving people without job skills a leg up through Assimilate Into Mainstream Society Economically (AIMSE), a foundation he set up last year. AIMSE has already helped fund computer-literacy centers in two Maryland churches. Daniel's goals for AIMSE are much bigger however. "Our broad mission is to deal with bigger issues than the digital divide. That is just one piece of a growing economic gap," he says.

Daniel spends about 10 percent of his time on AIMSE, and about 5 percent of SES's profits go to the foundation. He's quick to point out that his approach to the foundation is no different than his approach to SES. "The foundation is about helping people understand how to achieve the American dream, and one of the reasons SES performs at a high level is because we develop our employees systematically," Daniel says. "It's the same thing." —K.E.

On the Techie Track

When his job as inside sales rep for Scientific & Engineering Solutions (SES) was phased out a couple of years ago, Sean Gant didn't hesitate to upgrade his skills and move to the technical side of the business by becoming a Microsoft Certified Software Engineer. In fact, he completed the training in six weeks. He then took it upon himself to become a Cisco Certified Network Administrator as well, after learning that SES was going to implement the Cisco router and ISDN in house. In the meantime, he continued taking classes at the University of Maryland with his eye on earning a degree in computer management/information technology by the end of next year. SES has paid for all of his training.

Today, Gant is a systems administrator for SES, working onsite at the Naval Research Laboratory in Washington, D.C. "I came here to help with switching all of the PCs to Windows 2000. A month later, they created a position for me to administer the 2000 infrastructure, the Windows NT infrastructure and some additional Windows 95 and 98 clients as well," he says.

Gant's transition from nontechnical to technical work was mapped out using the goals he specified in his individual development plan. "If you're trying to plot a direction for your career, it's definitely a great tool," Gant says.

—K.E.

Workforce Investment Act Hinges on Funding

Many of the public/private partnerships working at the local level on workforce development receive funding through the 1998 Workforce Investment Act. The centerpiece of WIA is the establishment of customer-focused, one-stop service centers where "customers" can receive skills assessment, training and information on an array of employment-related services such as local education opportunities and traditional services such as job placement and assistance in filing unemployment claims.

Overseeing these centers are local business-led Workforce Investment Boards. Board members work with their center administrator to improve local workforce quality by assessing local needs and building partnerships with area community members such as public agencies, schools and support services providers.

"The spirit of WIA—to create more discretion at the local level—is good, but the resources have been few," says Paul Osterman, professor of

human resource and management, MIT Sloan School of Management. Osterman participated in the task force that developed the 1996 report, "No One Left Behind: the Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Retraining America's Workforce." "This may change now, but up until [last September] the amount of federal resources going into job training has remained very low."

WIA is funded through 2003. Last fall, it appeared as though the Bush Administration would cut WIA funding; however, with the thousands of dislocated workers and layoffs in the fourth quarter of 2001, it's likely there will be pressure to at least continue funding at present levels. —K.E.