

We must stick together



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In my first article for *The Postal Record*, I wrote about the philosophy of “aggressive representation” that we employ in my home branch in Chicago. I’m not surprised, but I did receive a few letters and emails from members who could relate to the kind of passion that is needed to successfully represent our members. After all, we all work for the same company, and dumb ideas like the golden hour, late start times and these hostile work environments don’t exist in a vacuum. I realized early on as a steward that the best defense against bad management was a relentless offense. This meant the more time

we spent meeting on grievances that addressed their contractual violations, the less time they had to issue disciplinary action or harass our members!

Now, this may sound good in theory, but it involves more than just a knowledgeable hell-raiser as a union representative. It also requires letter carriers who understand the importance of unity. “United we stand and divided we fall” is more than just a cliché or a famous quote; it is a fact of life for letter carriers. I don’t know how many times I have heard management actively try to convince carriers that their union has sold them out. Everything from the DPS to working in the dark, they would have the members believe that it was something that the union agreed to at the letter carriers’ expense. They would never explain that their right to manage under Article 3 also gives them the right to mismanage. Where their mismanagement comes in conflict with other provisions of the contract is where we must hold them accountable. So, this is why I repeatedly told my members as a steward and branch president, “*We must stick together.*” Our willingness to stick together is the ultimate form of unionism.

If we have problems with each other, they must be settled internally. We never want management to get involved in our business, because that’s when things tend to go bad. Being union means we are family—sometimes a bit dysfunctional, but family all the same. Family squabbles get resolved within the family. We don’t write statements or bear witness against other carriers, because our union is formed on the principle of “Wrong no

member or see no member wronged if we can prevent it.” There is nothing more frustrating for me as a union rep than to deal with issues that involve carrier versus carrier. As branch president, I would go out to offices to mediate disagreements among members just to prevent someone from losing their job. We don’t take sides in these situations because the main objective is to preserve the union, and our strength is our unity.

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I told my co-workers when I became steward that we could accomplish anything if we were united. I warned them that if we wanted a better workplace, we would have to hold management accountable. This implies that as their steward I was going to push, and of course management was going to push back. For letter carriers, this requires us to follow the rules too: wearing the proper shoes and uniform as well as being regular in attendance. We couldn’t give them anything to compromise our positions. We wanted a safe and hostile-free work environment, and we would not be working off the clock or cutting deals to get the mail delivered. Overtime goes to the people on the list and, if we were forced, you would pay. Eight hours means eight hours. Those are principles that we can stand on, but only if we stand together. Management likes to see us divided and wants us to blame each other when the offices are not properly staffed. We break down when we are overworked. There is no longevity in working more than 60 hours a week carrying mail.

I always encourage our members to be knowledgeable about their contract and to know their rights. If they expect more from their union, then they need to get involved. A person getting out of the union for any reason is only someone looking for an excuse to take a free ride. We should take pride in a scab-free workplace. That sends a message to management *and* the union. So, for those who say they want more aggressive representation, I say that’s going to require more unity. All hands on deck. Make it a priority to go to union meetings and involve yourself in the issues that affect letter carriers. If you expect more from your job, and your union, then that will require you to do more as a member.