

Brothers and sisters in a common cause



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OK, everybody, take your seats and quiet down. I have some questions for my NALC sisters, especially those active in branches and state associations. Don't worry, brothers, you're next. But, first, the sisters:

1) Do you consider yourself (a) assertive; (b) aggressive; or (c) accommodating to a fault, even passive?

2) At branch and other NALC meetings, do you (a) speak up even when not called on; or (b) keep quiet and let the brothers do the talking?

3) If you're active in the branch, do you volunteer for particular activities that interest you or wait to be asked to assume a task or be appointed to a position?

4) If you're active in the branch, are you involved in work floor representation, or are you more "administrative," such as taking notes at meetings, handling finances or engaged in "community action" activities, such as the food drive?

OK, brothers, as I said, I have some questions for you, too—especially those holding leadership positions in branches and state associations:

1) If a woman is particularly outspoken at a branch or state association meeting, do you judge her differently than a man who's equally outspoken?

2) If you're choosing someone to go toe-to-toe with postal management, do you take into account gender or do you look for the most knowledgeable, savviest member?

3) Are you more comfortable with women handling "administrative" and "social" functions in the branch or state association, rather than handling grievances?

You say, my questions are loaded! No kidding. Still, I have a point to make—several, really.

First, many women—whether as NALC activists or working in any job requiring them to speak up and voice their opinions—avoid being "assertive" because they're fearful they'll be regarded as "aggressive." Too often, women sit back and wait to be called on, concerned that they'll be looked at critically if they take a stand, especially if they disagree with the majority. I'm not pointing my finger only at men for preferring women to sit back and wait until called on; there are women who frown on other women who are "aggressive."

Second, we women *sometimes* are our worst enemy. Too often, we *do* sit back and wait to be called on. Sometimes we're fearful others will regard us as—yes, "aggressive."

Sometimes, we believe we're not qualified, that everybody else is smarter, wiser, more articulate. *Hey, he's even memorized both the M-39 and the M-41. He must be a genius, so I'd better keep my mouth shut.*

Third, too many sisters—certainly not all, but too many—are willing to be stereotyped as, "She takes great notes, runs our social activities really well, can even use an adding machine, but oh no, doesn't know the contract, and certainly could never go toe-to-toe with postal management." This is why too many—obviously not all, but too many—of our sisters graciously accept the "women's" roles within the branch or state association.

Now, let me step back a bit and put this into perspective. If we look at the American workplace in general, including the management side of the Postal Service, the NALC is a leader in bending, if not breaking, gender stereotypes. Women hold demanding positions at every level of the NALC—from steward to branch president to state association president to NBA to, yes, national secretary-treasurer. And, to steal from *Lean In*, the provocative book on women in the workplace by Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's chief operating officer, women in the NALC *are* sitting at the table and not along the side of the room. They are raising their hands, speaking up and, yes, going toe-to-toe with postal management to the delight of their brothers and sisters on the workroom floor and, of course, to the consternation of their USPS counterparts. And some of them have been doing so for years.

Still, more sisters should *lean in*, sit at the table, and raise their hands—and not worry if there's a brother in the room who's squirming a bit because he wants them to know their place.

And more brothers have to cast aside gender and ask, "Who's the best for the job? Who has the skills, the temperament, the smarts to get the job done?"

Let's remember that as much progress as this union has made over the last quarter-century, there's much more to be done if we are to succeed in protecting the rights and benefits of *all* letter carriers—and ensure the survival of the United States Postal Service for years to come.

Brothers and sisters *together* in a common cause—that's the answer.

An important note

In many states, NALC branches and state associations are required to pay for workers' compensation insurance and unemployment insurance. More information can be found on your state's tax website and in Chapter 4 of the *NALC Branch Officers Guide to Finance and Administration*. Do not delay in doing so, as fines may ensue.