

Faith and Superstars



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You gotta have faith—true long before George Michael said so. There we were—more than 150 young women with a purpose—vying to be selected for a limited number of spots to play basketball for the Redbirds of Illinois State University, which was, at the time, one of the better women’s college basketball teams in the country. I was a sophomore and, having spent my freshman year at Danville Junior College, wasn’t sure I could compete with the juniors and seniors vying for a spot on the team. The competition was fierce. Having already played for DJC and another team at the same time, I had a good pair of basketball shoes. Mine were Adidas

Superstars, which back then were the rage, even though they still were produced only in men’s sizes. They weren’t pretty by today’s standards—just white with the trademark three black stripes, which I’m pretty sure was the only way Superstars came at the time.

In junior college, we had used green shoelaces, as green and white were DJC’s colors and we thought we looked pretty sharp. (OK, the bar was set low in those days.) But by the time I arrived at Illinois State, you could buy Adidas Superstars with stripes in various colors! I had my eyes on the ones with red stripes—ISU’s colors—but I just couldn’t make myself buy them. I mean, why buy a pair of shoes with red stripes when I might not make the team? Besides, I didn’t really need them—the black-and-white ones were in decent shape—and new Superstars were \$35 to \$45, a lot of money back then. And again, I might not make the team.

But this is where faith comes in. You see, I didn’t have as much faith in my ability to make the team as I should have, but my mom did. When Mom presented me with a pair of those Adidas Superstars with the red stripes one weekend, my first words were, “What if I don’t make it?” My Mom shot back, “You will.”

It would be a number of weeks before the 150-plus were whittled down to 36, but I made it. But I know I wouldn’t have without that extra bit of confidence inspired by my mother’s belief in my abilities.

Of course, maybe the shoes helped—but just a bit.

What does this have to do with me now—years past my playing days and just days away from retiring as an NALC national officer? On the surface, not much really, but when I think about it, everything. You see, my parents’ faith in

me as a child and young adult, coupled with the support that letter carriers on the workroom floor in Davenport, IA; my fellow Branch 506 officers; the late Charlie Coyle, my NBA; and, of course, the late NALC President Emeritus Vincent Sombrotto; as well as President Emeritus Bill Young, gave me the confidence to pursue the next task and, once I became a member of the Executive Council almost 20 years ago, made fulfilling my duties as a national officer much easier than it otherwise would have been. I was extremely fortunate to have as role models the small number of women already serving as presidents of large branches. Still, I’ll be up front—as “the first woman” on the Executive Council, it wasn’t always easy. Yet the faith others expressed to me kept me going through tough personal situations as well as in learning new skills, especially when I became national secretary-treasurer in 2002. After all, filing grievances is one thing—dealing with auditors, investment bankers, real estate agents, Labor Department compliance officers and the like is another. But as was true on the basketball court many years ago, I gave my best effort to justify the faith NALC officers and members had placed in me.

It has been an honor and pleasure to serve you as a member of the NALC Executive Council these past 19-plus years. I’ve enjoyed meeting so many of you at conventions, during training or discussing union issues when you called my office (well, most of you!). But most of all, I appreciate the faith you’ve had in me, for it is when one feels the belief that others have in you—the support, the encouragement—that you push yourself to succeed.

But faith goes both ways: I have faith that the membership will succeed in meeting all of the challenges confronting the NALC. You have done it in the past, and you will continue to do so. It won’t be easy—for you, or for your national officers who will be installed Dec. 13. Nonetheless, as long as the membership sticks together, works together, the union will succeed. I have faith in that.

In case you wondered, I don’t have those Adidas Superstars anymore, but if I did, I’d put them on a shelf as a reminder of the importance of having faith in oneself and others.



Broendel in her college years, playing basketball for Illinois State University