

‘Be the change you wish to see in the world’



Community and Membership Outreach Coordinator Pam Donato

I have a bumper sticker, fridge magnet and postcard bearing the famous quote by Mahatma Gandhi that I used as the title of this month’s column. But it’s more than just a catchy phrase. Its meaning, as Gandhi intended, is about *doing*, not merely reciting words.

We all have realized some influence we have had on others—sometimes intentional, other times not. Maybe you’ve heard a young child repeat a comical word or phrase that they’ve picked up from adults.

(Sometimes it’s not so much comical as it is horrifying!) Or in your workplace, you’ve likely seen the words or actions of a postmaster, manager or co-worker affect those around them—in good ways or bad ways. In our families, we may see our actions connect to a long thread of strongly held traditions. With or without teaching credentials, we are all still “teachers” by our actions.

So, what do *you* teach?

In our work as letter carriers and as NALC members, we have countless opportunities to promote values that we feel matter, such as honesty, hard work, compassion, charity, teamwork, solidarity and leadership. Each of us has a broad area of influence that includes children, new letter carriers, fellow NALC members, customers—really, all those we come into contact with.

As a Baby Boomer (defined by the Pew Research Center as someone born between 1946 and 1964), I had a few good influences associated with unions while I was growing up. Each new generation has its own unique influences. Later age groups of Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) and Millennials (born between 1981 and 2004) are working alongside us now, and given the history of falling union density over the last 35 years, it’s more likely that these younger people didn’t have as many experiences with, or direct knowledge about, unions or unionism. And as I write this, those in the still-being-defined generation born after Millennials (iGen? Gen Alpha? Generation Z?) are sponging up an education as they watch our every move. Kind of scary, when I think about all the negativity they’re exposed to. But we all can help make sure that a negative narrative is not the only one playing in their heads—or ours.

We have a chance, every day, to make decisions that influence the world to be the way we’d like it to be. The silver lining is that we can all still be teaching:

- Go to a union meeting and take a younger member along.
- Stand up for another member—because it’s the right thing to do, even if it’s unpopular.

- Join a community volunteer event.
- Respectfully participate in conversations about issues that are important to you. Listen.
- Suggest ways to improve situations in your workplace or community.
- Apologize when appropriate.
- Compliment when earned.
- Give in to a setback as temporary—and then move forward.
- Accept your role as an agent of change.

Through the years, I’ve gotten to know young children because their parents brought them to union activities—such as picnics, holiday parties, our “Stamp Out Hunger®” Food Drive, MDA events, meetings and rallies. They had fun, of course, while learning important life lessons at the same time.

Now, some of these “kids” are adults themselves. A few took jobs as letter carriers—and yes, a couple even became stewards. They now bring their children to union functions.

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We have many spheres of influence, at home and at work. As letter carriers and NALC members, we have a wonderful “classroom” that allows us to thoughtfully be the change we wish to see in the world. We begin by thinking of “unionism” more as a verb, not just a noun.

And in the spirit of *doing*, look for NALC to provide a special activity at our national convention in Detroit.

May the love of family and friends renew your spirits this holiday season

