

Developing the future leaders of NALC



Letter carrier Lakeyia Terry (l) provides on-the-job training to newly hired CCA Robert Hessell in Warren, MI. Mentorship includes not only training about the job of being a letter carrier, but also involves developing leadership qualities.

During negotiations for the 2019-2023 National Agreement, which was ratified on March 8, NALC put forward a bargaining proposal that, if adopted, would have created a new employee mentoring program for city letter carriers. It is NALC's opinion that mentoring new letter carriers plays an important role in their professional development, which in turn benefits not only the new employee, but USPS and our customers as well. It also builds better relationships among co-workers and fosters a better work environment and culture.

A mentoring relationship between an experienced letter carrier and new employee can provide that new carrier with the necessary resource to ask questions, get feedback and begin his or her journey to becoming a professional letter carrier.

USPS did not agree to NALC's proposal as it was presented; however, the parties did reach agreement to pursue the idea under the new City Delivery and Workplace Improvement Task Force. A subcommittee of the task force was formed for the specific purpose of exploring ideas on how to improve city carrier assistant retention rates, as well as the possibility of jointly developing and discussing implementation options for a mentorship program for new employees with the aim of improving their onboarding experience. As a result, NALC and USPS already have agreed to and begun testing these ideas in several locations throughout the country.

As a union, across the board members also should be adopting and implementing the ideas and principles of mentorship for current and future NALC activists and leaders. A mentor generally is an experienced and trusted adviser, focused on the long-term growth of the mentee. Mentors can teach, provide wisdom, advise and support. For local NALC representatives, this can begin by simply teaching new carriers about the union and the various things NALC members do. This can include getting them involved with the annual food drive, telling them about legislative issues, or teaching them how the National Agreement is organized so they can learn more about their rights and how to enforce them. Even simple things, like making sure they understand their right to union representation while being questioned during a disciplinary investigation by management or helping them learn how to consult with the shop steward when there are possible violations to the National Agreement, can be invaluable for new members.

Mentoring also focuses on the growth and development of a person, and a good mentor identifies the specific talent that each person has and helps him or her excel in it. How does this happen? A good first step to identifying talents of potential mentees might be meeting one-on-one for lunch to get to know them a little better. Informal get-togethers as a group with other NALC activists are another good way for experienced branch leaders to learn how potential future leaders might best fit into the organization. The idea is to find out the potential mentee's likes and dislikes. Once a person's qualities and interests are understood, a next step might be to discuss with them their thoughts on the



best ways for them to get involved with the union. It's likely that they have never used their skills and abilities for the betterment of a labor organization such as NALC, so identifying how they fit in and how their skills can best be used is of the utmost importance.

Good mentors are an integral part of leadership development. A good mentor should not only have knowledge, but also should be able to impart that knowledge in an effective manner. Mentors should show enthusiasm and sincerity to help others succeed. Even though experienced NALC activists are knowledgeable in union issues, they should respect their mentees and be patient as they assist them with developing their own skills.

Mentorship gives potential future NALC activists a firsthand experience of what leadership should look like. Mentors display leadership qualities such as effective communication, responsibility and the ability to guide other people. Good mentors design activities for the mentees and provide the tools to perform them. A good mentor can help a person come out of his or her comfort zone by creating different leadership scenarios. Mentors help people gain more confidence and improve their skills.

If you are an experienced NALC activist, you should consider whether you

can be a mentor to any of your current or future brothers and sisters. Take the opportunity to pass on your knowledge and skills—just as, perhaps, another activist at one time did for you.

If, instead, you are a potential mentee, try to take an active role in seeking out a mentor. To get the most from a mentor and become a potential future leader in your branch, you should try to learn from all of your branch activists and glean some of their wisdom. Engage with other carriers, ask questions and listen. Ask a local branch representative how you can get involved and ask if there is someone whom you can work with. For additional assistance on getting involved, reach out to the NALC national business agent who covers the state where you work. The contact information can be found on the NALC website at nalc.org/union-administration/nalc-regions or on page 2 of this magazine.

Leadership is a quality that does not develop overnight. It takes years to hone the knowledge and skills needed to become an effective leader. It requires mentorship, role models, and making mistakes and learning from them. Many organizations invest substantially in developing future leaders, and local NALC branches should be no different. **PR**