

Protecting your right to dignity and respect



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In June, my column was on the subject of the Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace (JSOV).

In 2015, at the request of President Rolando, I was tasked with developing a guide for shop stewards to preserve carriers' rights to be treated with dignity and respect. The booklet is available for your use in the Members Only section of the NALC website. Go to nalc.org, then click on the Members Only section. If it's your first visit, you will have to sign up and then sign in. You can print out the booklet or save the text for future use. Read it and apply it to your life.

To those of you who are fed up with the way things are, we need your eyes, your ears, your mind and your support. You are the most important part of the solution. You are a witness and what you see, hear and sense is extremely important. But it helps no one if you keep it to yourself.

We need you to observe and report so that NALC at every level has the necessary information to help effect change. The information necessary is to provide proof (witness statements) regarding what was observed at work.

In the *Dignity and Respect* booklet, we share the following:

Statements from witnesses or individuals being harassed, intimidated, or treated poorly should always describe activity. In order to describe what happened, the author of the statement should pretend that a movie camera was hovering over their shoulder and capture exactly what management did. The statement should describe what the camera would have captured both in image and sound, identifying with precision the words that were actually used by the parties.

...[A] proper statement might describe what the letter carrier was doing and what the supervisor was doing. The description would allow the reader to picture himself in the middle of the event, fully understanding what took place. If the reader needs to ask questions, then the description may not be sufficient...

When somebody reads [a well phrased statement], it gives sufficient description to understand exactly what happened. That statement also points out potential witnesses

a steward would need to interview to find out what they saw and heard. Properly and fully documenting what took place is of the utmost importance to filing a successful grievance challenging the behavior of a supervisor who is threatening or intimidating letter carriers or who is creating an environment which is hostile or toxic. For more tips on gaining proper statements which describe such situations or to gain a further understanding of properly documenting these situations, stewards should reference the "Tips for Writing Statements" section in the *NALC Shop Steward's Guide*.

The statements of the witnesses need to be gathered and then evaluated. The goal is to be able to show what actually happened, and in so doing, to show what part of our contract was violated. If it is a violation of the JSOV, we should identify what section was violated and how it was violated. If the behavior is in violation of another rule, we need to identify that rule (such as Section 115.4 of the *M-39*) and then show how that rule was violated.

In my 41 years as a steward/officer of NALC, I have read thousands of grievances, many with hundreds of pages of statements, diagrams, grievance settlements and the like. Reading the files is a challenge, especially if the presentation is not logical. Sometimes, a summary of what happened can be useful. Article 15, Section 2, Formal Step A at Paragraph (d) provides that our initial burden in the Formal Step A Meeting is to identify: 1) what happened, 2) what rule was violated and 3) what is the appropriate remedy?

Can we effectively summarize what happened, what rule was violated and what remedy we seek? If so, add a briefing sheet to the record for those complicated cases.

The next step is to determine what we do with the gathered information. In most cases, we need to process a grievance seeking an appropriate remedy (see the *Dignity and Respect* booklet). In other cases, we need to do more.

In situations where we are seriously concerned about the way our employees are treated, we might want to process the grievance as referenced above and then also bring this to the attention of your national business agent, requesting that your work location be addressed with their counterparts at the area level. In such a case, your briefing sheet (see above) would be helpful.

We have to do more, and your help is always needed. Keep an eye on each other and act on what you see.