

Good, better, best



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My father used to say, “Live your life by two standards—the one you will not go below, and the one you’re trying to obtain.” I’ve taken that to heart throughout my lifetime and have applied that philosophy to my occupation, always striving to work with a goal of excelling and leading by example. Doing a good job has never been good enough for me. I’ve strived to be better every day until I was the best at whatever I engaged in. Working for the NALC has been no exception.

One of the attractions to becoming an NALC activist was my observation of the high standards of representation exhibited by my local branch. I later realized that the NALC expected nothing less than to provide the best representation possible to its membership. Therefore, I’ve always tried to teach during trainings on NALC’s best practices that “good” is the baseline. “Better” is what the majority of our “best practices” are framed around. Practices identified as “best” are practices that exceed expectations. When our best practices really are the best practices, we ensure the continuance of excellence.

In my view, the reason we’ve been successful in our negotiations for collective-bargaining agreements that benefit current letter carriers and those yet to be hired, is because of good, better, best.

What do I mean by that? Although we already had good contracts, our leadership has always sought to do better until we’ve achieved the best possible contract. There is simply no substitute for the best—whether it is a meal, a friend or, in this case, representation. The best is the standard we should always strive to obtain.

All NALC representatives, whether at the national or regional levels, or your local shop steward, have a duty to not only be good at what we do, but to seek to get better every day and to be the best we can be. If not, how can we meet our obligation to provide letter carriers the best workroom floor representation and best collective-bargaining agreement? How can we inspire others to join the union? How can we inspire others to become union activists? How can we inspire others to remain in the union? How can we train new and effective leaders? We can’t! Because we can’t teach what we don’t know, and we can’t lead where we don’t go!

The NALC is the gold standard for representing its members. The accomplishments gained through collective bargaining are the envy of many other unions and should not be taken for granted. We can never become complacent. Had we done so in the past, letter carriers’ level of living wages, benefits and employment stability would have been non-existent if left up to the benevolence of those negotiating on the other side of the table.

Next year our current National Agreement will expire. I presume the Postal Service will approach contract negotiations with a different standard than that of the NALC. It’s not unreasonable to think the Service’s approach will be that of, “What more does the NALC want? It already has a good contract. Letter carriers’ pay is better than in the past.”

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Well, I assure you, having a good contract and pay being better than what it was is not, and will not, be the standard the NALC uses to approach contract negotiations. Our attitude and approach are, “Good, better, best. We will not rest until our good is better and our better is best!” As it should be.

My area of responsibilities includes, but is not limited to, dispute resolution team training, Advance Formal A and Beyond training and arbitration advocacy training. This education aids in providing the best representation for letter carriers. It is paramount to the successful outcome of any grievance resolution that competent, knowledgeable representatives be committed to the highest standards of quality work and commitment. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

Therefore, I believe that in the capacity I serve letter carriers and this union, it is also my responsibility to exhibit best practices. I also work to recognize and cultivate future union activists who embrace and demonstrate best practices. To achieve the best, you must always be at your best. That is why it is imperative, as leaders in labor, that we remain dedicated to the standards of not only being a good union, or a better union, but the best union. If we continue to do that, we will have a lasting impact.