

Am I my brother's keeper?



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Am I my brother's keeper? This is a question one year older than dirt and two years younger than water. As far back as the earliest recorded history, we as people have struggled with the answer.

There are those of us who sincerely believe that anything that doesn't directly affect me is not my concern. Conversely, there are those of us who subscribe to the idea of "one for all, and all for one." Then, how can it be that two diametrically opposed philosophies coexist without a constant state of turmoil? Moreover, which of the two philosophies is right?

After all, both sides do believe in self-preservation. It's just a matter of the method by which one preserves themselves.

As letter carriers employed by the U.S. Postal Service, there probably isn't a workday that goes by that we are not faced with the decision of, do I or do I not get involved? Either through observation, notification or request, we all at some point in time make the decision to address contractual and moral violations or to simply ignore them. How often have we been asked, or know about someone who has been asked, to provide a statement for something that they witnessed or have direct knowledge of? Yet, they decline or refuse to provide any information or a statement. Ironically, the very ones who decline or refuse to assist their colleagues, more often than not expect assistance when they need help. Could that be you?

Sure, there are a host of reasons for someone not to feel an obligation to get involved or come to the aid of a colleague. Perhaps it's not an issue that you personally consider all that important. Perhaps you believe in the issue but are afraid to get involved because of managerial retribution. Perhaps you are not afraid of anything, believe in the issue, but feel the person in need of help is not worthy of your cooperation. The aforementioned may be good reasons, but hardly justifiable reasons not to aid in a valid issue or righteous cause. Never allow your emotions to supersede your intellect. For if you do, you will lose sight of the fact

that helping one another is the same as helping yourself.

The very essence of a union is to unify, i.e., join together, become one force. In order to achieve that end, its members must be willing and able to see each other as one. When one is hurt, the other bleeds. This sometimes necessitates validating your convictions by fighting for your rights and each other even if unsuccessful, fight still.

Theodore Roosevelt once said, "The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again, who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who at best, knows the triumph of achievement; and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat."

The NALC as an organization has epitomized being the "keepers of its brothers and sisters." Every negotiated contract, every political endorsement and every executive decision has been made with the fundamental principle of ensuring that there is a worthwhile job for not only letter carriers currently employed, but for those yet to be born. It's simple, because we are in the "arena" fighting and standing up for one another; we have known victory. In the rare instances where we have known defeat, we failed "while daring greatly." Without the defeats you learn little and cannot appreciate the victories.

If we expect to have a work environment that is aligned with the philosophy of "one for all and all for one" at our worksites, we as individuals must be in the "arena," or we'll know neither victory nor defeat. The profile of a courageous person is doing the right thing because it is right, even if it unpopular, and even under a difficult atmosphere or circumstance. It may be unpopular sometimes to provide a statement for people considered undesirable, or in an adversarial atmosphere between labor and management. I challenge all to be a courageous person, trustworthy and reliable. We are all we've got. We must be able to rely on each other. If we can't depend on one another, then on whom can we depend?

Therefore, I submit to you all my union brothers and sisters, "I am, you are, we are our brother's keeper."