

# Respect



**James D. Henry**

**T**he NALC has long been regarded as an excellent organization and one of the leading labor unions in the country. When the name “NALC” was heard, both members and management alike knew that the best labor has to offer was present and was about the business of its craft. In fact, when it comes to addressing conflict or tensions in the workplace, none was better. Why? Because the very existence of the NALC commands respect! It is one of the main reasons we’ve been successful in our representation over the decades. That simple seven-letter word: respect. Sure, it is recognized that we must cooperate when we can, but we must not capitulate.

A little respect goes a long way! It is understood that treating people with respect on a daily basis is one of the most helpful things an individual leader can do. And organizations must intentionally build a culture of respect if they want to attract, retain and leverage the contributions of all their talent, and the NALC has an abundance of talent waiting to be mined. Yet, at work at our respective offices or hall, we are often faced with uncertainty or tension around our differences.

It can be a challenge for leaders to establish and nurture respectful relationships among many different viewpoints, but effectively collaborating across diverse opinions is a key leadership skill. It’s important that we continue to work together and build each other up by emphasizing a culture of respect, and that we create a climate where all can thrive. That same mentality must carry over into the dealings with management, i.e., a relationship of respect for what the NALC and its leaders represent, despite competing interests.

Giving and getting respect seems obvious, but it may not be as intuitive as you think. There are multiple factors that indicate when respect is given to one another. Let’s begin with:

**1. Respect is about listening.** People feel respected when they’ve been heard and understood. Being genuinely interested in and open to others strengthens relationships and builds trust. You do not need to agree with or like the other’s viewpoint; just listen to it closely.

**2. Respect isn’t just the absence of disrespect.** Eliminating active disrespect, such as rude, insulting, or devaluing words or behaviors, doesn’t create respect.

Respect is an action: We show respect; we act respectfully; we speak with respect. We expect and demand respect.

Leaders need to know that the absence of disrespect doesn’t have the same positive impact in resolving disagreement, conflict or tension as does the presence of respect.

**3. Respect is shown in many ways.** The perception of respect is influenced by culture and family, peers, and social relationships. Status, power and role all create the context in which respect is interpreted. Leaders need to take the time to understand how respect is given and received in cultures working with others. You may not need to make huge changes in your behavior to be more effective. Just understanding and acknowledging as valid what others expect from you will make a difference.

**As a leader in the NALC, I believe that respect is accorded in the following ways:**

- Exhibit an interest in, and appreciation for, others’ perspectives, knowledge, skills and abilities. Express recognition and show sincere gratitude for the efforts and contributions of others.
- Openly communicate information about policies and procedures so everyone has access to and is operating with similar information.
- Clarify decision-making processes, and when appropriate, seek input into those processes, erring on the side of inclusive leadership.
- Consider whether you are in a position to serve as an ally on behalf of others. Make sure you understand and focus on advocating with, not just for, others, because advocacy should be done in close partnership with those we intend to serve.
- Take concerns seriously; if someone or a group shares that they feel wronged, show sincere empathy as you seek to better understand that perspective and offer genuine apology. Recognize that empathy and inclusion are imperatives for diversity initiatives to be successful.

At its core, creating a culture of respect is a continuous process of paying attention to people. Leaders must avoid making assumptions that, if unchecked, can lead to misunderstandings and ineffective behaviors. Developing a culture of respect requires intentional actions from every leader and the organization itself. Moreover, leaders must lead by example in their efforts to maintain an atmosphere of respect.

**The NALC historically has demanded in the performance of its duties respect by, for and of its representatives to be an organization.** To be taken seriously at all times by management, respect is an essential element of good-faith dealing. Make management remember that! Be proud to be an NALC member and tell management and anyone else to “put some respect on our name.”