

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF LOCAL 13

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The past two weeks have been very difficult for me and my family. Not so much because of the incident that occurred at the last Executive Board meeting, but because of its aftermath. What happened during that meeting was bad enough, but the way it has been handled since is downright deplorable. I am ashamed of this board and I resent many of you because you have become so desensitized by "the way things are down here" that you will stand by in silence while a fellow sister is insulted - for no reason - and then you will later deny it, lie about it, and try to downplay it. Shame on you.

I walked into my very first Executive Board meeting last April with a head full of ideas and a heart full of hope. I gave each and every one of you the benefit of the doubt in spite of questionable things I'd heard over the years. I respected you and I trusted you. I ignored the hurtful things that I was told some of you said about me. I took my job as an Executive Board member very seriously and right away I made meaningful contributions and volunteered significantly as much as I could to truly serve the membership.

It bothered me that members of this board arrived late, left early, casually walked in and out of the room during important discussions, carried on side conversations while the meeting was in session, and were inconsistent about attendance. During our second meeting I made a comment about the excessive use of profanity in the room. Two brothers on the board made fun of me and teased me, by throwing profane words in my direction throughout the remainder of the meeting. During another meeting I looked over to my right and was appalled to see another brother's bare feet (which he had been rubbing throughout most of the meeting) pressed against the edge of the table. This is a table where many of us also eat during meetings, mind you. I often wondered why so many of you signed up for ad hoc committees that you had no interest in serving, as evidenced by your failure to attend scheduled meetings. If you truly love this union, and if you genuinely want to give to this local, perhaps you should consider your personal behavior during Executive Board meetings. After all, this is the governing body of the local, and the membership has cast its vote of confidence in your ability to lead, which should be, by example.

By the time the unfortunate incident between Brother Mark Williams and me occurred, I had somewhat become accustomed to the less than apropos atmosphere in the room. The occasional barbaric exchanges - I admit, at times humorous - were not as surprising. However, I had never seen any sexual gestures directed toward anyone, neither had I heard anyone be told to get the "eff" of the board, until the day those insults were directed toward me. Add to the sting of that tirade, the absolute shock that no one, NO ONE in the room appeared bothered by it. What kind of bubble have you cultivated around this local to accept such behavior as normal? That behavior is unacceptable.

I can assure you that if my husband or my sons (who are still boys), or any other man in my family would have witnessed such offense toward ANYONE (not just a lady), they would have spoken up and against it IMMEDIATELY. Imagine my disappointment that no one, male or female, took to my defense. Do you dislike me so much that you will allow my honor to be violated so undeservedly? Have I ever done anything to any of you to warrant such callousness?

Back in June when I traveled to the Pacific Northwest to support our locked out brothers and sisters with Brother Angel Blanco, and sisters Monique Anglada and Melon Cesar, I immediately went to Sister Cesar's defense against a rude hotel front desk clerk even though she had been extremely rude toward me the entire trip. I did not hesitate to question and chastise the clerk about his poor choice of words when speaking to Sister Cesar, neither did I falter when demanding that he apologize to "my sister." Without any doubt, it was the right thing to do, again, regardless of how she had been behaving toward me. I never got a thank you for that from her.

please see the reverse →

I also did not hesitate on Monday of last week when Sister Sunshine Garcia asked me to proofread her biography for the HBI award she will be receiving next month, which I had previously congratulated her on getting and which I told her was well-deserved and long overdue. In fact, I offered to write a feature about her in a local community publication. Within one hour, her corrected biography was returned via email. I have yet to receive a thank you for that, either. I felt betrayed when Sister Garcia took the microphone during the last membership meeting and told everyone that she did not "take my side" because she's "used to men talking to her like that."

Well, I'm not. I conduct myself in such a way that deserves respect, just like Brother Mondo Porras shared shortly after I was verbally attacked, that his wife does, too, while she is at her work as an OCU clerk. Several of you reached out to me after the meeting via phone calls or messages expressing your sorrow on behalf of Brother Williams. Imagine my disappointment when I learned that you were only saying those kind words to me, but were actually badmouthing me to others. I reached out to Sister Julie Brady the day after the incident asking her what she would do if she were in my situation. I never received a response from her. This is a sister whom I had previously looked up to and admired for being one of the groundbreakers for women within our local.

I've heard that members of this board say that "I" think I'm smarter than everyone else, or that "I" think I'm better than everyone else. Those are YOUR insecurities, not mine. In the six months I've been here I've openly admitted, asked candid questions about, and humbly solicited help because I'm so new and unfamiliar with the process. Again, what have I ever done to any of you but offer help and support and encouragement?

The process that allows a union brother to freely and quite publicly harass his union sister for no reason, and then be subjected to absolutely no repercussion, because, alas, no rule was broken, is systematically FLAWED and must be addressed by the leadership of the local. To think that there is nothing that can be done (especially since no one supposedly saw any obscene gestures), and that the verbal assault was not directed at me personally (after hearing the tape again) is WRONG. Thank God for the tape. Otherwise you would probably be changing the story to say that I harassed Brother Williams. For which I would probably be removed from the board, sent to trial committee, given a year off, deregistered, or worse...

Indeed brothers and sisters, I am very disappointed in you and your lack of ethics. How do you sleep at night knowing all the wrongs you refuse to right? What's right is right, and what's wrong is wrong. PERIOD. Your collective moral compass needs to be checked and fine-tuned because this blatant disregard for "an injury to one, is an injury to all" is disturbing and would make Harry Bridges cringe.

I thought about asking for the opportunity to pray for this board when the term began a few months ago, but I hesitated because I was so new. Now I regret it. Perhaps if we had committed our tenure to a being greater and higher than ourselves back then, your egos would not have prevented you from doing the right thing in this situation.

Today, I ask that we seriously consider implementing a more tactful approach to the way we conduct business in this room. As representatives of our membership, we should all be held above reproach and our behavior should be professional and respectful, as stated (but often ignored) in our Executive Board Rules as well as various other documents this local commits to uphold, but ultimately does not. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Respectfully and in Solidarity,

Sister Vivian J. Malauulu
#133397

thru October 9, 2014