

To: NBLSA National, Regional, and Chapter Executive Boards
From: Mark A. Dunham, Jr., NBLSA National Chair
Cc: Jordan A. Green, NBLSA National Vice Chair
Date: August 20, 2017
Re: NBLSA at 50: Our Way Forward This Year – Guidance for NBLSA Leaders

To the National and Regional NBLSA Leadership Teams:

One of the most important parts of the culture of NBLSA that our members rely upon year after year is that we are a family. Our organization, amid the struggles of law school and life, provides a sense of comfort and the strength that comes in numbers. We are a refuge, a kickback, a turn-up crew, and a community of brilliant Black and minority leaders. NBLSA is, indeed, a unique and special organization.

In my years as a chapter member, chapter president, Sub-Regional Director, Regional Chair, and now as your National Chair, I have seen that it is through the work of our leaders on every level that our great organization is sustained and made great, so let me first thank you on behalf of all our members for your past, present, and future work to develop and grow this family of ours. I am blessed and honored to serve alongside every one of you.

NBLSA, in addition to being a family, is also a professional organization that conducts business with law firms, corporations, attorneys, judges, corporate counsel, and political entities. Our alumni, part of the very talented few who are attorneys of color in the United States, look to NBLSA to be the exemplar of the work they invested and the professionalism that they gleaned from our organization.

To that end, I am providing this policy guidance to NBLSA leadership that will be the basis for our work and interactions with each other, our members, and the outside legal, business, and political community.¹

Tenets of a NBLSA Leader

Being a NBLSA Leader – on any level, in any position – is a position of trust, high esteem, and humility. You, wherever you may go, represent Black and minority law students, you embody the mission of our organization, and are the realization of the dream of our Founder, A.J. Cooper. Every NBLSA Leader has a stake in seeing this organization succeed and held in high regard. Thus, I am setting forth the following tenets of a NBLSA Leader to better outline our collective role and mission:

- I. A NBLSA Leader believes in and is a champion of the mission, purposes, and aims of the National Black Law Students Association and works, always, to advance their fulfillment.
- II. A NBLSA Leader is a servant leader, adhering faithfully to the policies, directives, and tenets of the organization and its leadership, while being a zealous advocate for improvement, innovation, and a better NBLSA.
- III. A NBLSA Leader is responsive to and works always in the interests of the members of the organization, seeking their feedback, their suggestions, and their help in achieving organizational goals.
- IV. A NBLSA Leader is a credit to the organization, safeguarding its reputation through conscientious personal and professional conduct, and doesn't engage in personal or professional behaviors that would bring NBLSA into ill repute.

¹ Pursuant to Article I, Section 2, Subsection A, the National Chair exercises general authority over the business and activities of NBLSA, as well as provides direction for the organization.

- V. A NBLSA Leader is professional, working with National, Regional, and Local leaders in a manner that is respectful, collaborative, and reflective of the ethical and collegial standards of the legal profession.

NBLSA Professionalism Standards

As future attorneys, professionalism is both a feature of our trade, as well as our most precious commodity. An unprofessional attorney is one that is not called upon by anyone. Likewise, NBLSA Leaders must adhere to a standard of professionalism to have the faith and trust of our members. The following seven standards are both a reiteration of common sense ideas, as well as a reaffirmation of our need to be sensitive to how we engage with each other, our members, and our partners:

1. NBLSA is a professional organization, and our members expect professional conduct in our communications, both oral and written, with fellow leaders, with members, with alumni, and with external partners. All communications should align with the best in professional tone, tenor, and content. Think carefully on whether what you will say or write (before you say or write it) will be communicated in a manner that is conducive to conducting NBLSA business.
2. Timeliness in communications is key to maintaining professional trust. Respond to emails or other communications regarding NBLSA business within a reasonable timeframe (approximately 24 hours, depending on the mode of communication). Different circumstances or impending events may require more urgent responses. Be flexible and be understanding of the moment you're in.
3. National, Regional, and Chapter Policies, where applicable, are not optional. Our policies protect us legally, mitigate risk and liability, and ensure that a national organization with regional components can function as efficiently as possible. Compliance with policies is a duty of every NBLSA Leader, and we should expect compliance of each other. Questions on policy interpretation or applicability should be directed to the Local, Regional, or, as a final resort, the National Parliamentarian. Violations of policy should be addressed by senior leadership or, if those methods fail, addressed through the NBLSA Code of Conduct or the NBLSA Grievance Process.

Note: asking for forgiveness, as opposed to asking for permission, is not an acceptable manner by which to execute NBLSA business.

4. The National, Regional, and Chapter Boards are partners in executing NBLSA's mission, in that we collectively form one unified organization, bound by common policy and purpose. While our various Boards are a point of pride and demonstrate the growth of our Founder's vision and our own engagement, our organization is designed for us to work together, rather than against each other, to achieve the greatest heights of that vision. National Board members should be thought leaders, cheerleaders, and monitors of National priorities and policies and help Regional leaders execute effectively. Regional Board members are experts on the ground and close to our Chapters and should be given necessary deference on needed programs, initiatives, and feedback from our members. Chapters are where our collective efforts are most tangibly realized and support is most needed to serve our members and their interests effectively. Collaboration and cooperation are what NBLSA is about and our officers on all levels must lead the way.
5. Disagreement and conflict are inevitable and sometimes necessary features of group dynamics, particularly among leaders. As adult professionals, however, we can disagree without being disagreeable, and it is often through differences in opinion that we come to great solutions and outcomes. Avoid personal attacks, unprofessional conduct, or

- disparaging language amid conflict with a fellow NBLSA Leader, including in emails, phone calls, and in-person conversations. Note that these behaviors are subjective elements of interpersonal dynamics. A “direct” statement to one, may be “sharp” and “rude” to someone else. Check yourself as you engage to ensure you are being professional and respectful, even as you take an opposing position. If the situation cannot be amicably resolved between the parties, contact your senior Board leadership for guidance and help on how to move forward.
6. Professionally written communications are the hallmark of a good lawyer. As leaders, it is evidence of attention to detail, thoughtful construction of ideas, and an ability to effectively convey necessary information to achieve NBLSA’s goals. Emails, documents, and other publications by chapters, regions, and the National organization should be professional in their language, word choice, and appearance, including freedom from errors and accuracy of information. Senior leadership on each level should be responsible for reviewing major communications, posts, and other publications prior to their dissemination.
 7. Fiscal responsibility and good financial management is a major duty of NBLSA leaders on every level. NBLSA funds and financial instruments do not belong to us. They are instruments entrusted to our care by the members of the organization. It is incumbent on every officer to be good stewards of NBLSA funds on the chapter, regional, and National level. Voting on funding and spending of said funds should be prudent, reflect sound judgment, and be authorized by the chapter general body, Regional Board, or National Executive Board, where applicable. **Mismanagement or embezzlement of NBLSA funds is strictly prohibited and will be investigated vigorously.**

These standards do not replace the NBLSA Code of Conduct, as revised and passed by the 50th National Executive Board. This is layered with them to guide conduct to not approach running afoul of the Code.

NBLSA Mission Statement

Our mission is “to increase the number of culturally responsible Black and minority attorneys who excel academically, succeed professionally, and positively impact the community.” Everything we do should advance that mission and the purposes laid out by our Founder. Keep that in mind as we learn, lead, laugh, and enjoy our service together.

Conclusion

While I lead NBLSA, my first and foremost task is to serve you. I welcome your questions, your comments, your concerns, and your help as we celebrate our 50th year. You are part of a half-century legacy of service, and I am proud to be a part of it with you.

Yours in NBLSA Service,



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