

The solution to toxic leadership is the truth



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Aaniin Anishnaabek, As a result of my article last month, I have received numerous communications of support and for that I wish to say “miigwech.” It was remarkable to me that many of you asked the same question, “What’s going on up there?” The answer is simple: “Toxic leadership.” Our people are being

manipulated, mistreated and undermined by those elected to serve. How do you recognize a “toxic leader?”

According to Jean Liman-Blumen, and her book, *The Allure of Toxic Leaders and How We can Survive Them*, here are a few things to look for:

- Consciously feeding their followers illusions that enhance the leader’s power — persuading followers that they are the ONLY one who can save them, or the organization (aka TRIBE);
- Playing to the fears and needs of the followers;
- Stifling constructive criticism and issuing threats to those who question the leader’s judgment and actions;
- Misleading through deliberate untruths and misdiagnoses of issues and problems;
- Failure to nurture other leaders — or otherwise improperly clinging to power;
- Maliciously setting constitu-

ents against one another.

So, what is the solution? The answer is simple — TRUTH. But speaking the truth takes courage, a willingness to take risks, integrity, sense of responsibility and service, and especially compassion.

The struggle that keeps our tribe from moving forward as it could, is clearly seen in the monthly unit reports, or in social media (Facebook). Over just the last three years, nearly every month you can see examples of this toxic leadership in our chairman’s report. You will read how wonderful he is and what he has accomplished. You will read attacks against board members who disagree with him and warnings to tribal members about the terrible things that will happen to the tribe without his leadership. There have been deliberate untruths published (such as issuing statements that the tribal school was closing due to the lack

of a lease!). This toxic leadership has also prevented other board members from pursuing nominations to national committees (in one instance, the chairman refused to write a nomination letter because of a board member’s “adversarial position” to his leadership).

We deserve better. The chairman can do better — I’ve seen it. In outside political arenas, he is an entirely different person. I wish we could have “THAT guy.” I’ve stated before that he does a good job on the outside, however, back home is a different story. As brilliant as he may be, toxic brilliance is still toxic. I feel some compassion for him, but much more so for our tribe. I think about how much better our tribe would be if our board meetings were conducted in a professional, impartial and fair manner. We occasionally have workshops that are conducted by the vice-chair, the secretary or our treasurer and

they do such a good job. On those rare occasions, our meetings tend to be productive, on time and relevant! To me, it is clear evidence that the person conducting the meeting determines (and even creates) the level of conflict and dysfunction that occurs. It is always a refreshing change when our other officers conduct our workshops, and I am grateful to them.

I am confident there will be considerable backlash against me for speaking out (especially from the chairman’s ardent followers), but that is a risk I am willing to take for calling it as I see it. For our members who are tired of the political games and the lack of significant progress for our tribe, there are practical ways to deal with the issue of “toxic leadership,” but none are for the faint of heart. Confront the toxic leader, explain what you do not approve of and help them to change. If

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McLeod to speak at Mackinaw Island Tribal Leadership Summit Sept. 15 —

From McLeod, page 22 — you choose to do something, please remember to be compassionate — kindness is the way of our people. But also remember our children are watching and the cost of doing nothing may be too great.

The greatness of our youth — Speaking of “great,” I met recently with some truly GREAT young people! They came to my office at Big Bear and shared their thoughts about issues they face. Their opinions were straightforward, honest and without political agendas. We made plans for changes and I am helping guide their actions (just as I

did when I was still in the classroom!). I am so proud of them. I believe in “growing our leaders,” and am committed to helping our young people dream BIG DREAMS and reach their goals.

More good news — The gymnasium at our tribal school continues to move forward! Ground is being cleared in preparation for the big equipment and construction to begin! Despite political tug-of-wars, eventually we get back to the goal of “doing what’s best for kids.” School resumes on Sept. 8 and snow won’t be far behind, but hopefully the shell of the building will go up before the costs do!

Our casino operations are improving in profitability and in other areas as well. I have actually had customers contact me with POSITIVE feedback, as they are noticing the improvements. BIG shout out to every team member who is contributing to making the Kewadin experience a memorable one. Please know that all of your hard work and dedication is noticed and appreciated. We couldn’t do it without you.

I also want to give an additional SHOUT OUT to all of the staff, employees and volunteers who make our tribe great. There is so much hard work done

providing health services, food, emergency needs, elder services, housing, substance abuse counseling, education of children, cultural activities, law enforcement, environmental protection, judicial work, plus all the support that is required just to keep the tribe operational! There are so many hardworking people and many unsung heroes working diligently with little to no recognition or thanks. Please accept my heartfelt “thank you” to each and every one of you.

I have been invited to speak at the Tribal Leadership Summit on Mackinaw Island on Sept. 15 and 16. I will provide a short

(5-10 minute) “welcome to the community” speech to the participants. I am honored by their request.

At the close of this summer season, I am grateful for all of the blessings I have received. I am looking forward to good things for our people in the coming months. As always, if there is something on your mind or if there is anything I can do for you, please contact me.

Anishinaabe gagige
(Anishinaabe for always)

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