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Introduction

By Dr. Erich Longie

This month's newsletter will consist of two short articles instead of one long article. The first article, *Don't Let Your Ethics be Defined by Other People, Circumstances, or Your Character Weaknesses*, is actually the introduction to all my ethics courses, but I want its message to reach more people than just the ones who take my course.



The second article, *Lies, Liars and Tribal Leaders*, is also one of my blogs, but I also thought its message pertinent enough that it warranted a spot in my newsletter. Each piece is a good example how our ethics courses differ from other ethics courses. The content is tribal specific, and we do not sugar coat the problems. Finally, we offer simple, viable, very clear solutions to ethical issues on Indian reservations, not a pie in the sky solution like some consultants do. Δ

Don't Let Your Ethics be Defined by Other People, Circumstances, or Your Character Weaknesses

By Dr. Erich Longie



There is no doubt that Indians have been victimized throughout history. Our treaties were broken, our land was stolen, and culture and customs suppressed until 90% was forgotten. Forced onto lands that even a good "White" farmer could hardly have eked out a living on and sent to schools that did more harm than good, it is small wonder we fell victim to alcoholism and laziness. With little or no resources, we fought over what little we had, and soon we lost our core values of courage, honesty, perseverance, and generosity. In their place, we developed characteristics like cowardice, dishonesty, apathy, and greed. When resources finally did start flowing into the reservations, instead of sharing evenly amongst all tribal members, our dishonesty and greed soon led to two different classes, the haves and



have nots. Instead of prospering, we remained mired in poverty. This has been the case for the past 30 – 40 years. All the while, we continue to blame our problems on everyone but ourselves.



We have reached a point where we no longer can blame our problems on **anyone but ourselves**. Simply put, our lack of ethical behavior is holding us back from forming the reservation into a prosperous place to live and raise a family. We say that it is time for all Indians to stand up and do something about the problems on the reservation today that are caused by unethical workers, unethical supervisors, unethical CEO's, unethical board members, and unethical tribal council members.

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That isn't to say we fail to recognize the real disadvantages we as Indian people face. Yes,

most tribal members don't have a lot of money and did not attend the best schools. BUT - is that a reason to give up? Does that justify lying, working fewer hours than you are paid for (which is just stealing money from the tribe), taking tribal equipment and vehicles for your



own use (again, just stealing from the tribe), hiring unqualified relatives while people who have degrees and experience but no connections are unemployed or must move off the reservation for work? Of course, we all know the answers to those questions.

Sometimes, when I am talking to a person about ethics, they will begin to indulge in "victimhood." "Well, Erich, our land was taken away; we don't have the training programs we need here...."



I want to interrupt at this point and say,

"And do you think hiring your relative who has a GED to be the tribal planner who is supposed to write grants for us HELPED the situation? So, given all of these disadvantages, you decided to add to it by taking home computers from our program for you and your relatives to use?"

Let's take YOU as an example. If you are like most people on the reservation, you have some

disadvantages in your life to overcome. Maybe you had an alcoholic parent, were raised in a home with very little income, did not have the preparation or money to go to college right out of high school, or had a child or two when you were young, which made it necessary for you to put off your education. Given all these other disadvantages you have to overcome, why would you ADD to it by being an unethical person? You have the choice of deciding what you want to be as a person. When your name is brought up will everyone say:



"Oh, that is a very irresponsible lying no good stingy person who always comes to work late, does a very poor job, is too cowardly to face up to any tribulations, and always gives in or quits too easily, which is why they never succeed in anything they do."



Or this,

"Oh, that is a very responsible honest good-hearted person who always comes to work, does a good job, has the courage to face any challenges, and has the perseverance to find ways to succeed."

You decide what type of person you want to be known as. Δ

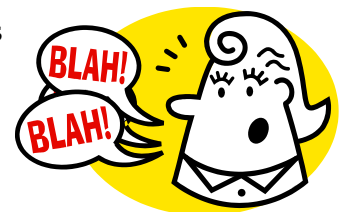


Lies, Liars and Tribal Leaders

By Dr. Erich Longie

If you are in a leadership position, whether on a tribal council, serving on a tribal board, or serving as a CEO, you will always have to be aware of liars and the lies they will tell you. It is very easy to be fooled by their cowardly lying tactics because they are so good at them.

In tribal politics, liars have an advantage over honest tribal members. Liars are better



politicians because they have no shame or pride as opposed to honest tribal members. Liars are able to schmooze tribal leaders (CEOs, tribal board members, and tribal council members or members of their family) without batting an eye; even though they may not like the tribal leaders they are schmoozing. On the other hand, honest tribal members have a hard time schmoozing anyone - well, because they are honest. They can't bring themselves to act insincerely.

Ask any former tribal council member or former tribal board member and they will tell you, they don't have as many friends (schmoozers) and not nearly as many people coming up to them and telling them how terrific they are as they did when they were elected/appointed to a tribal official position.



*Schmooze - to chat in a friendly and persuasive manner especially so as to **gain favor, business, or connections.** (schmooze, 2010)*

So let's say you are a tribal leader, and there is a big fight in one of the tribal organizations. At a social event, one individual (let's call her Ann) who is on the losing side of the fight makes it a point to say hi to you and your spouse. Ann has never made any attempt to talk to you or your spouse before.



Is it a form of lying when a liar schmoozes a tribal leader? I think so. First, he or she is not sincere when they are schmoozing a tribal leader. Insincerity is a form of lying. A schmoozer will probably make a lot of flattering comments that they don't mean to a tribal leader. They will laugh at jokes that they don't think are funny and give the impression they really admire the person, when they really don't. In addition to lying, this type of behavior is also called deceitfulness, false pretenses, and hypocrisy.



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At first, you may think it is no big deal because this has happened many times ever since you became a leader. However, half way through the event, Ann walks over to your table and strikes up a lively conversation with you. She is very animated. She hangs on your every word. She laughs at all your bad jokes. She constantly praises you, tells you that you are doing a good job, and she agrees with everything you say. During the course of the conversation, she hints at the problem she and her cronies are having with other tribal members. When you remain noncommittal, she moves on to your spouse and visits at length with her. When you and your spouse return home that night, your spouse

immediately begins to tell you about Ann and the problems she is having with some no good, crooked, mean tribal members who she works with and could you help her out?



What would you do? After all, Ann is your constituent, and she has every right to come to you for help.

Before you answer the question, let me tell you a true story. A few years ago, a friend of mine told me Duke (not his real name) told her that I



was not as good of a politician as I thought I was. Duke was referring to a couple of issues that did not go the way I

wanted them to. Unknown to Duke, I was pleased that he viewed me as an unskilled politician.

Here is why...

Although the correct definition of “a *politician* or *political leader* (from Greek “polis”) is an individual who is involved in influencing public decision making” (Politician, 2010, para. 1), in Indian Country, the title of politician immediately conjures up an image of someone like my fictional characters, Joe, The Tribal Worker, or John, the Tribal Board member. Both Joe and John are unethical, cowardly, and have no loyalty to anyone except to themselves, and

they will make up any lie to get their way. This is how many tribal members view many of their politicians. So, I was glad I was not identified as a good politician.



Let me get back to my question: What would you do if a tribal member who had never made any attempt to make small talk or to socialize with you in any way all of a sudden treated you like you were his or her long lost friend, simply because you were in a leadership position and he or she wanted your help?

Here is what I would do - nothing. Why? Because I do not like to be taken for a fool! If that person thought I was dumb enough or gullible enough to fall for insincere flattery, then they do not know me very well, or they have a rather low opinion of me. On the other hand, if a person came into my office or approached me in a sincere honest respectful manner and told me of his or her concerns, I would take the time to listen closely to his or her concerns.



Unfortunately, many tribal leaders are too cowardly and/or unethical to worry about doing the right thing when a liar comes to them and tells them nothing but lies. Instead, they weigh the liar's political clout against the political clout of the individual(s) the liar is complaining about. If the liar has more clout, tribal leaders often audaciously promise to support the liar without regards to fairness or worry that they might be taking action against someone who is innocent, or that a leader's support for a liar might not be what is best for the organization and/or tribe.

So tell me, are you the kind of leader who will listen to and support a liar? Δ



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Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc.

P.O. Box 663

314 Circle Drive

Fort Totten, North Dakota 58335

<http://www.spiritleakeconsulting.com/>