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Heroic Leadership vs. Non-Heroic Leadership

By: Dr. Erich Longie, SLC President



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“Heroic Leadership is having the honesty to admit what is happening on our reservation and having the courage to do something about it.”

When I was finishing my Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at the University of North Dakota, I met with the Department professors and one of the questions they asked me went something like this: “Erich, you and the other Native Americans in our Leadership program were always commenting that our curriculum is not relevant to the issues faced by Native American leaders on Indian Reservations. How can we change that”? After thinking for a moment about all the issues on the reservation I replied, “You could place more emphasis on the traditional Indian values of courage, honesty, and generosity”.

This response should not be a surprise to a tribal member working and living on an Indian reservation. We (Spirit Lake Consulting Inc.) conducted an ethics survey on Turtle Mountain Reservation and Spirit Lake Reservation in the Fall of 2006. Based on the responses to our survey I emphatically say we definitely need to return to the practice of requiring traditional Indian values of courage, honesty, and generosity in our current leaders.

The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, also known as the Wheeler-Howard Act gave tribes the option to adopt a constitution. Most tribes did and tribal councils as we know them today came into existence. At that time, tribal council members had little or no education and received little or business training. This situation permeates most tribal councils and tribal administrators today.

At first, because the tribes had little or no resources there were few, if any problems, administering what little resources they had. This changed with President Johnson’s war on poverty; reservations were inundated with federal programs and the management of these programs soon began to experience moral issues. Putting individuals in charge of thousand of dollars does not automatically improve their moral reasoning skills.

On the contrary, many of these individuals are catapulted by their election, their hiring, or by appointment from poverty to a position of prestige, power, and relative wealth. Nothing is stated in theories of human development (e.g., Kohlberg, 1981; Maslow, 1998) that provides for great leaps from one level of moral reasoning or needs to the highest level. In fact, there are a couple of reasons that the exact opposite would occur and

Heroic Leadership continued



administrators might remain at a lower level of ethical behavior. First, once elected or hired to a position, many tribal leaders frequently develop a sense of entitlement, are not encouraged to think for themselves, and rarely face consequences for acting irresponsibly. Second, even those who have a relatively high level of moral reasoning often believe they can get away with anything. When tribal members have to pay for their mistakes, they often blame other people for causing them to get caught. To say that this is an outgrowth of a century of dependency and learned helplessness may explain the behavior, but the need for widespread behavioral change is not lessened, regardless of cause. At Kohlberg's lowest levels, people do things out of fear of consequences. If there will probably be negative consequences, the likelihood of unethical behavior is decreased. One may have good moral reasoning, but they need moral courage to go along with moral reasoning.

I was born and raised on the Spirit Lake Nation and having spent my entire professional career in one type of leadership position or another on Spirit Lake, I've had extensive opportunities to observe individuals in different leadership positions. In addition to my professional and personal experiences and observations, my research for my Masters Thesis and Doctoral Dissertation was about leadership. I have come to the conclusion that the most successful, effective leaders had certain characteristics in common: courage, or specifically (moral) courage, (self) honesty, and the ability to be generous.

Moral courage vs. physical courage.

I believe there is a critical distinction between moral courage and physical courage. Most of us have physical courage and are willing to display that courage at any given time. Physical courage often brings us personal glory (and sometime bumps and bruises). We need to demand more than physical courage from our leaders. I don't mean the kind of courage that enables a person to blatantly ignore policies or embezzle large amounts of money without losing a wink of sleep at night. We need to demand moral courage. Moral courage often brings us ridicule and the animosity of friends, relatives, and fellow tribal members when standing up for what is right. Moral courage is standing up for one's beliefs, standing up to your friends, relative, co-workers, and tribal leaders when they are petty, dishonest, or just plain wrong.

Why is courage an important component of leadership?

Courage is the first of all human qualities. Sir Winston Churchill said, "Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities... because it is the quality which guarantees all others (Elliott-Lee, 2006). **Leaders may process the excellent technical skills that leadership requires; education, work experience, good communication skills, political savvy, and organizational skills, but because they lack moral courage they are mediocre leaders at best.** I call these individuals non-heroic leaders. (The term "Heroic Leadership" is from *The Genius of Sitting Bull*, which is referenced below.) Leaders who do not possess courage are constantly faced with crisis in all areas of responsibility: hiring, firing, unethical behavior, anger, jealousy. They are constantly fearful, which makes them weak, hesitant, timid, and self-doubting; these characteristics often paralyze leaders from making critical recommendations, observations, and decisions. Courage is so critical that we admire and follow those who exhibit it. Courageous

"Courageous leaders inspire those around them; they build teamwork and instill a sense of worth and self-respect into their employees."

leaders inspire those around them; they build teamwork and instill a sense of worth and self-respect into their employees. Courage is a learned trait, it could be developed and strengthened; courageous leadership is what is needed to address the ills in Indian Country (Elliott-Lee, 2006). Cowardly leaders define the great opposite of courageous leadership; instead of building, they tear down, fear starts in their gut and infects their organization and families. It leads to unethical (cowardly) behavior. Cowardly leadership is not leadership at all (Elliott-Lee, 2006).

The effects of non-heroic leadership

Traditionally, stealing, dishonesty, and disrespect toward elders were not socially acceptable among tribes. According to surveys collected by Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc. in 2006, an unusually large amount of ethical violations are being tolerated in an atmosphere of intimidation, as well as apathy, which prevents anyone from coming forward to complain. I attribute these social ills to non-heroic leadership, which leads to dysfunctional communities as explained in the following paragraph.

Psychological research documents higher incidence of anti-social behavior in high-risk communities (reservations) as a direct result of the frustration of basic needs common in a poverty-stricken environment (McLloyd, 1990; Staub, 1999). Over the past 100 years traditional values have been distorted in dysfunctional ways, e.g., while non-confrontation prevents embarrassment that a less able member of the group might feel in an interpersonal relationship (Kelso & Attneave, 1981), non-confrontation is also misapplied to overlook ethical violations that should rightly be challenged. Largely because of non-heroic leadership we allow, encourage and participate in unethical behavior, ignoring policy and procedures, tolerating excessive absenteeism, abusing travel and hiring policies, participate in, or condone thinly veiled stealing or fraud from program... the list goes on and on and exists at every level. For example, it is not uncommon for a board chair to use his authority to assist family members but what is just as insidious is other board member stand by and let it happen. On the other hand, when an individual enforces policies, the individual is often well respected by most employees, however she is often at odds with individuals who don't possess heroic leadership because they expose some unpleasant truths, and unfortunately is often attacked on a variety of levels. We sorely need more individuals like the aforementioned to turn things around on the reservation.

The old saying, "don't wish for something, you may get it" can be applied to Native American Tribes. For years, we blamed the BIA for all the problems on our reservations, and then we finally got what we wanted - The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (Public Law 93-638). This Act gave Indians the authority to govern themselves and direct oversight of a variety of Federal programs. It provided hope of promoting the development of the human resources of the Indian people so they would become self-sufficient. Because of PL 93-638, many tribal members occupied the majority of leadership positions on the reservations. According to the results of our survey, our ability to govern ourselves has been mired down due to unethical behavior and the lack of courage to do something about it. One longtime tribal leader I know said, "We often succeed in spite of ourselves". I am not saying we need to go back to pre Public Law 93-638 (quite the opposite, this is a good bill) we simply need courageous leaders to maximize its potential. Here is SLC's partial solution to this situation:

Leadership Curriculum

Spirit Lake Consulting is attempting to address the non-heroic leadership that is common on Indian reservations by developing a Heroic Leadership Training Program. This training will contain all the elements of the most commonly accepted leadership programs with a strong emphasis on courage. We will apply these elements to reservation specific issues.

Traits of Heroic Leadership

In the Introduction to Leadership Training, we remind participants that traditionally you could not be a leader in any tribe if you didn't possess courage. We discuss how that changed and why the current situation calls for a return to electing, hiring, appointing leaders with strong moral courage. We discuss the traits of a heroic leader and ways to evolve into a heroic leader. Two of the traditional values we include are humility, or what the white man calls "self-honesty", and generosity. By generosity, I mean putting the needs of other tribal member, especially the youth and elder, ahead of any personal gain.

Is heroic leadership the answer to all the ills on the reservation? Of course not. There will be non-heroic leaders who manage to get elected, hired or appointed to their position. Nevertheless, our Heroic Leadership Training is a start. We hope it will help reduce, or prevent some of the non-heroic leadership

practices. We also realize that to become a heroic leader, a person must have certain personal values (honesty, integrity, courage, perseverance), therefore SLC is developing an Ethics Curriculum for Indian Country to enhance our Heroic Leadership training.

No one has all the answers. However, we all have a responsibility to work to make life better for our nation. We owe nothing less to our ancestors, our children and our grandchildren.

Heroic Leadership References:

Lee, G. & Lee, D. (2006). *Courage: The Backbone of Leadership*. S.F., CA: Jossey-Bass

Murphy, E. & Snell, M. (1993). *The Genius of Sitting Bull: Thirteen heroic strategies for today's business leader*. Englewood Cliff: Prentice-Hall, Inc.



Why Don't You Have a Job? Results of the Labor Force Survey on the Spirit Lake Nation

By: Dr. AnnMaria DeMars, Vice-President, Dr. Erich Longie, SLC President, and Angela Longie- Young

As part of the needs assessment for two USDA-funded research projects, Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc. conducted a Labor Force Participation on the Spirit Lake Nation in December 2006. At the risk of sounding too much like someone's grandmother, the questions focused on why people weren't working. Beyond that, though, we attempted to look at what could be done to increase employment on the reservation. Fifty surveys were distributed to tribal members during a two-week period. Participants were sampled during normal business hours at the tribal administration building and through door-to-door invitations to participate. Criteria for invitation to participate was age 16 or older and residence on or near the Spirit Lake reservation. An enrolled member of the Spirit Lake Nation who resides on the reservation distributed and collected all surveys. To increase participation, subjects were paid \$5 for a completed survey. Of 50 surveys, 47 were returned, for a return rate of 94%.

By sampling at both a place of business and homes during normal business hours, the project intended to maximize the variation of employment status, including both those currently employed and unemployed respondents. As such, these results cannot be used as an estimate of unemployment statistics. However, the data does provide a useful indication of desired occupations and working conditions of both those currently employed and those not working. The two oldest participants in our survey were 71 and 72; dropping these two surveys was considered, however, with one employed and one retired, they actually had a higher employment rate than the subjects under 55. The average age of the participants was 34, with an age range from 16 to 72. A majority (79%) of those surveyed were aged 21-55, with 15% under age 21 and 6% over age 55. All subjects identified their race as "Native American", "American Indian" or "Indian".

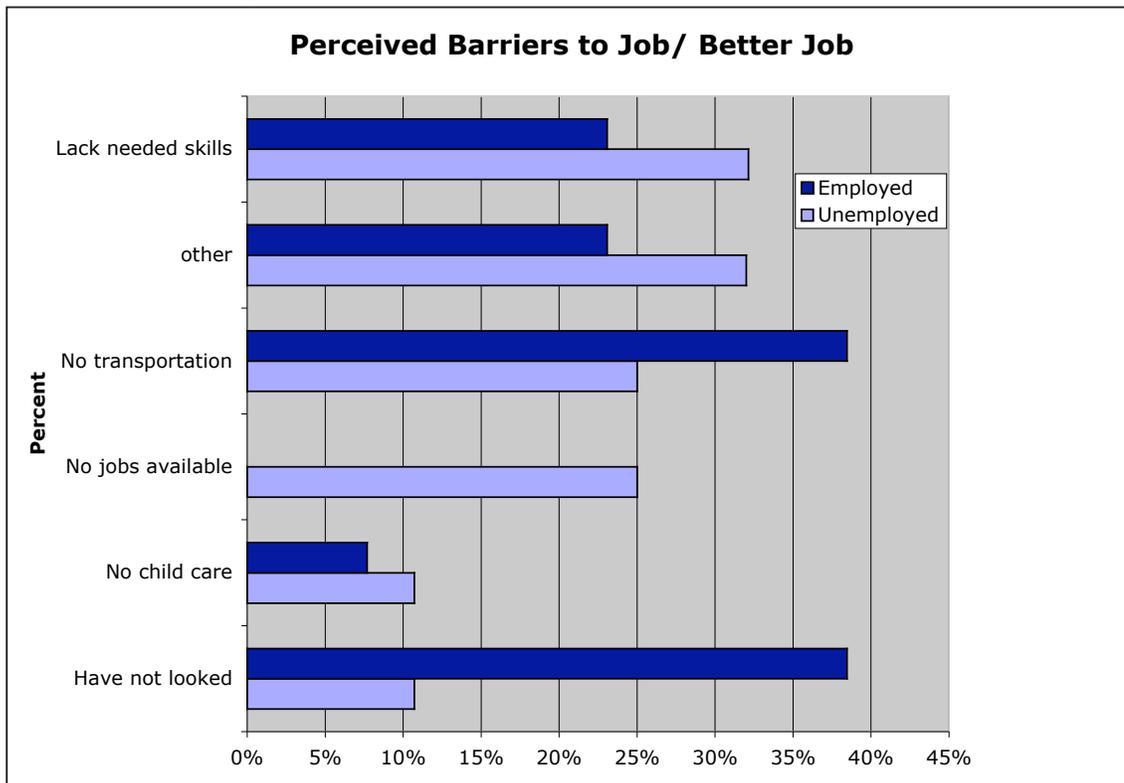
The majority (61%) of respondents were unemployed; nearly half of the participants gave more than one reason for not having a job, so results below sum to more than 100%. Reasons for unemployment given by those without a job are shown on the next page.

Labor Skills Survey cont.

	N	%
Reasons for Unemployment	29	61%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do not have skills/training needed ▪ No jobs available ▪ No transportation ▪ No child care ▪ Have not looked for a job ▪ Other 	<p>9 7 7 3 3 9</p>	<p>32% 25% 25% 11% 11% 32%</p>

Of the employed subjects, thirteen (72%) responded that they were satisfied with their current position, two said it was “okay”, two did not respond and only one said that he was not satisfied in his current job. When asked why, if the current job was not their ideal position, they did not have another job, thirteen of those employed responded. The two most common answers, at five respondents each, were “Have not looked for a job” and “No transportation”. Interestingly, none of the employed subjects picked “no jobs available” as the reason for not having a better position. “Do not have the required skills/training or education” was identified by three respondents (23%) as the reason for not having a better position.

Reasons given by unemployed versus employed residents for not having a job or not having a better job are shown in Figure 1.



Although both unemployed and employed residents gave “other” as a common reason, the exact ‘other’ reasons differed. Three of the eight unemployed respondents who gave ‘other’ as a reason cited disability, two were disabled and one had a disabled child who required care. One individual clarified that, although childcare was available, they had made the decision that one parent would stay home until their children were of school age. A fifth respondent was a full-time student. Of those employed respondents, one stated she was too old to obtain needed training for her desired career, another stated her ideal job had been at another business “where they piled too much work on me”. The large proportion of employed respondents who had not looked

"If our population is unable to obtain transportation to training and jobs, then we will bring the training and jobs to the reservation."

for another job was somewhat surprising given the relatively low salary for these jobs. The mean salary of those employed was \$21,000 a year.

This reluctance to seek other employment may reflect perceived obstacles, i.e., the respondents did not believe they had the skills to do more preferred jobs and did not have a means to get to the workplace if they did. The overwhelming majority of respondents (89%) were interested in both training to improve their academic skills and training directed at specific workplace skills. Nearly all employed respondents (94%) worked on the reservation, almost certainly a result of the sampling, which occurred on the reservation during working hours. Both employed and non-employed tribal members were willing to work off the reservation. When asked how far they would be willing to drive to work, the majority (51%) would be willing to drive 20 miles or more to work.

Conclusions

This sampling was conducted during the workday on the reservation and included surveys in the tribal administration building. Therefore, it likely yielded a non-representative sample of individuals who are employed, with over 90% of those surveyed employed on the reservation. What these results do give us is an indication of the perceived barriers to work in the view of people who live and work on the reservation.

These results should be taken in context. The major tribal employers provide transportation to and from work. This is a key benefit given that there is no public transportation system on the reservation. If off-reservation employers sincerely wish to increase the diversity of their workforces, providing transportation would be one step to recommend. The lack of available transportation appears to be keeping workers at relatively low-paid jobs, since they do not have vehicles to drive to work off the reservation. Further, while workers identified lack of needed skills as an impediment to getting a job or a better job, without available transportation, they are unable to get to training. Without training, they are unable to get employment paying a living wage and without an adequate salary, they are unable to afford a vehicle for reliable transportation. There are several ways this vicious circle can be broken. These include provision of easily accessible, high quality training on the reservation, increasing the number of professional, management and skilled labor positions available on the reservations and creation of a public transit system. Of the three most plausible changes, Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc. is working on two. Our Disability Access and Caring for Our People Training computer-integrated applications provide training on the reservation, and training in Devils Lake with transportation provided to those who need assistance. The computer-based component can be used anywhere there is a computer, including the computer labs in the tribal college, high school and on any home computer. Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc. provides technical, skilled and professional employment on two reservations. If our population is unable to obtain transportation to training and jobs, then we will bring the training and jobs to the reservation.

Smith, D. (2000). *Modern Tribal Development: Paths to Self-Sufficient and Cultural Integrity in Indian Country*. Walnut Creek, Ca: AltaMira Press.

[NOTE: Dr. Longie received his bachelors, masters and doctorate degrees from the University of North Dakota. Both Dr. Longie and Ms. Longie-Young are enrolled members of the Spirit Lake Dakota Nation.]

Call for Personal Stories and Experiences

Do you relate with our articles on the experiences of a vocational rehabilitation counselor, or raising a child with a disability? Do you have a story you wish to share with the hundreds of tribal and disability care staff on our mailing list? If so, please write to us! We would like to hear what you have to say. In return, we will pay \$50 for each article we decide to put in our newsletter.

Email your attachment (no more than 2 pages) to jessica@spiritlakeconsulting.com, along with your name and contact information. If you would like more information on the articles we use in our newsletters, visit our archive at <http://www.spiritlakeconsulting.com/SpiritLakeConsulting/newsletters.html>.

“Do you relate with our articles? We would like to hear what you have to say.”

Upcoming News and Events

CANAR – Consortia of Administrators for Native American Rehabilitation:

Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc. will be an exhibitor at the Consortium of Administrators of Native American Rehabilitation meeting in Washington, D.C. on February 19-21. We will be demonstrating our Disability Access, Caring for Our People and Leadership Training CDs. We will also be giving out free samples of all our latest products. Stop by and see what SLC can do to make life better for you, your family and those you serve.

Altering your Perspective – 9th Annual “Educating the Bilingual Student” Conference:

We will also be presenting at this conference, which is scheduled for May 9th, 2007, at UC Riverside, sponsored by the Language and Learning Institute. This conference will provide information on successful practices of educating English language learners. Details will be included closer to that time.

For more information on these events or other SLC news, email info@spiritlakeconsulting.com.

New at Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc .

www.spiritlakeconsulting.com/forum

We are very excited about a new development on our website, an online forum that allows us and anyone else who visits the website to post updates and thoughts on employment, disability issues, and ideas for improving life on the reservations and other communities. Some posts that have already been put up for discussion: starting a small business, disability issues, and employment on the reservation. Visit the forum now to receive opinions and advice on these various issues and to post your own thoughts and ideas. **This is a great way to make connections and practice your own self-advocacy throughout the reservation and disability community!**



Internet Forum

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We're on the Web!

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About Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc.

Miniwakan directly translates to "Spirit Lake" in Dakota, the native language of our base on the Spirit Lake Reservation in Fort Totten, ND. Our corporate newsletter, the Miniwakan News, is distributed quarterly to the clients on our mailing list, who include VR counselors, University employees, Head Start workers, and people who reside on nearby reservations who have requested to receive information. Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc. is an Indian owned business; our mission is to be a resource to American Indian and other disadvantaged communities by providing training, evaluation, grant writing and planning services. We sponsor three projects: Caring for our People Training, which serves staff members working with people with disabilities, Leadership Training, which educates members of the reservation on the importance of business and entrepreneurship skills, and Disability Access, which aims to serve people with disabilities and their families.

Disability Access/COPT is a computer-based instruction package designed for people with disabilities and chronic illness, their families, and the staff members who serve them, residing on or near Indian reservations. The instruction covers not only general information such as universal health precautions, coping with diagnosis, legal rights, etc. but is also uniquely designed for the reservation environment. Given the relative rarity of high-speed Internet access, users receive a free CD-ROM that has most of the web pages and documents reproduced so that it can be accessed quickly on any computer. Extensive information is provided on diseases such as diabetes, which are disproportionately prevalent on the reservations. Cultural competence links are included throughout on everything from traditional views on death and dying to tribal resources for disability access services.

The Leadership Training Program follows the same computer-based instruction package, also equipped with a free CD-ROM. The motivation for this project stemmed from our knowledge that the average leadership curriculum ignores the most important issues faced by Native American leaders on Indian reservations. We have created a training module and a website packed with information on business ethics, management skills, and other related material. In this workshop, clients will learn useful information, such as ways to become a successful leader, the differences between tribal leadership styles, and how to create a flourishing work environment.

Disability Access, Caring for our People Training, and Leadership Training will be part of the exhibit presented by Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc. at the Consortium for Administrators of Native American Rehabilitation to be held February 18-21 in Washington, D.C.

Did you get this newsletter forwarded from a friend or colleague? Want to get your own copy every other week? Email

Jessica@spiritlakeconsulting.com to be added to our mailing list.