

Let us operate from a position of strength



**JENNIFER MCLEOD,
DIRECTOR, UNIT I**

Aaniin Anishnabek, at long last, there is discussion and forward movement on the tribes' strategic plan! Currently, individual departments are in various stages of completion of "departmental" strategic plans. I am very pleased to say that some departments have HAD strategic plans all along, but efforts are being expanded and will lead to the TRIBE having a TRIBAL strategic plan! I have been giving voice to this need for a long time as I feel our tribe has floundered without it. How can we move forward without knowing where we are going or how we are going to get there? I tend to be a logical and methodical woman and have been highly critical of our tribe's illogical actions and the excuse, "This is how we've always done it." In my opinion, doing what we've always done, without a cohesive plan to respond to changing times and circumstances, has put our tribe in a bad situation. You have heard me say we need to prioritize and you have heard my frustration at the "head-nodding, but nothing getting done." I am happy to say at last, something is getting done, but I worry it is not enough, nor will it be fast enough. There are some serious circumstances

occurring and we are moving too slowly to respond in an effective manner. A neighboring tribe will be building a casino in Mackinaw City just off the expressway and just a few miles from our St. Ignace casino. This could have a devastating effect on our revenue and our ability to provide services to our members.

If we would have had a strategic plan, it would have addressed "competition," however, without a plan, we are now in a "reaction mode." Once again, we will probably be making quick and perhaps poorly thought out decisions, just like we did during the federal government's sequestration crisis. Thankfully, we have good legal advisors and department heads and, hopefully, we have learned a few things from the sequestration crisis. One thing you can count on, though, in reference to this new casino, politicians will come out saying, "It's not MY fault," or "If we had expanded into a Unit VI this wouldn't have happened," or some other garbage that only creates drama instead of solutions. I prefer we be LEADERS, work on solutions and FAST. I have some solution suggestions:

First, put our tribe into a position of operational strength by following the WILL OF THE PEOPLE and separating the duties of the chairman of the tribe from the CEO. Our people voted for this separation! Our failure to do this is hurting our tribe. The day-to-day operation of the tribe needs someone there on a day-to-day basis. This is not happening. I have addressed this in previous unit reports why this is vital but, in the end, the day-to-day operation of our tribal government needs to be handled on a day-to-day basis and by an EMPLOYEE, not a POLITICIAN. The daily operation of our tribal government needs to be consistent from one election to another and not

subject to an upheaval every four years. I will bring a resolution to do this. It is the will of the people. Be prepared, you will hear our current chairman accuse me of "stripping away the power of the chairman," and lots of personal attacks against me and whoever supports this move. But, we've been there before and I know our people recognize it for what it is — high drama and politics.

Having the right people in the right job at the right time is operating from a position of strength. At this time, our chairman is the right person to be maneuvering in the D.C. and state political circles. He is good at it. It requires full-time effort and he is giving it much of his time. However, running the day-to-day operations is also a full-time effort. The same person doing both jobs means one of those jobs will suffer. One need only look around and see how our highly qualified people are leaving tribal employment to realize something is wrong. One need only TALK to them to learn how difficult it is working under the dysfunction of an absent "CEO." We need a full-time employee, empowered with the full duties of a CEO, running the day-to-day business of our tribe. If we fail to do this, the "brain drain" will continue and our vulnerability will increase. I prefer to operate from a position of strength. Let's put the right person, in the right job — the right TIME is NOW.

It appears we have the right person in the right job in our casino operations. Casino CEO Fred Buro and all the general managers are doing fine work increasing our profitability, even under very difficult circumstances. I am not saying we are out of the woods or that things are perfect, but the data shows that what Fred, the general managers and **ALL team members** are doing is working. It's truly a group undertaking and they have some serious obstacles

to cope with. Nationwide, casino revenues are on a downward trend and ours are no different. Add to this the downward trend of the Canadian dollar, and the 30 percent decrease in Canadian traffic to Sault Ste. Marie, and you will see a serious downward trend in our casinos' gross revenue. Many local businesses in the Sault are also suffering from the loss of Canadian customers. However, the new casino competition in Mackinaw City further compounds the difficulty of generating profit in an already depressed market. I am looking forward to hearing what their plan is for addressing this new situation.

On a positive note, there are GOOD things happening in the tribe. At our school, 90 percent of students are now proficient in reading, a 23 percent increase from fall 2014 to spring 2015! In mathematics, 85 percent of our students are proficient, which is a 35 percent increase from fall 2013 to spring of 2014. These are extraordinary accomplishments, and I am so grateful to the hardworking staff who made this possible. Chi-miigwech! Also, our school is working on the possible additions of a gymnasium, stage and perhaps additional office and classroom space. A request for proposals has been sent out and we are looking forward to reviewing the proposals. I can already envision an awards program where the entire student body can attend at the same time!

More good news: Economic development is getting attention! We are finally starting to look at self-sufficiency from a non-gaming perspective. I know the tribe has done this before, but lessons have been learned and I believe THIS TIME will be better.

Other good news: Random drug testing has been on the board of directors agenda and is getting long overdue discussion.

I've personally heard from tribal members and non-tribal team members that the current drug testing policy needs to be looked at — I AGREE! Obviously, what we are doing isn't good enough, because it isn't working. I've learned a great deal during our last meeting regarding random employee drug testing and have spent considerable time thinking about the issue and what we can do better. I do see one thing missing. I am definitely not an expert, but I do know for any drug testing program to be successful, it must be applied fairly and to everyone — including elected officials of the tribe. I believe board members, and any future elected offices that may come to pass, should, by **tribal law** (instead of employment policy) be subject to random drug testing.

Drug usage in our communities and in our enterprises is devastating our people. A small piece of hair from employees and elected officials alike, is a small price to pay to protect our people. It is not the sole answer to the plague destroying people's lives, it is but a small part of a big solution. It is not too much to ask to save people's lives. In our old tribal ways, we care for and about each other, and no one is better than anyone else. In this "modern era" it is still possible to hold on to those things that make us who we are, Anishnaabe. I am no better than anyone else, and if random drug testing is required of team members, it should include me. We are all connected.

Miigwech to all who have contacted me and shared your thoughts and perspectives. Working together, we will be strong.

Anishnaabe gagige
(Anishnaabe for always),

Jan
(906) 440-9151, jmcleod1@saulttribe.net or jennifer.mcleod.2012@gmail.com.