

# Please don't play with team members' emotions



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There have been many lies being spread about votes the board has taken. The saddest thing for me is that some people actually believe every word without ever checking into it. But, on the other hand, I don't know too many people who spread lies and rally people for support so a person should be able to believe the "leader."

Facts: Last year, the board and administration set aside \$550,000 to be spent on raises, bonuses or 401k contributions. The board had not discussed a plan on carrying out any of these options prior to the chair's announcement.

The chair put out information on social media, front page of the newspaper, etc., to play on team members' emotions. As of today, Dec. 6, the board has not voted on raises or bonuses. They were not on our agenda during the last special meeting, so when something is not on the agenda then the board needs nine votes to add it to the agenda. There were not nine votes to add it to the agenda to be voted up or down.

When the chair presented his plan (Nov. 24) on how he wanted the bonuses distributed, the board members had different ideas. His proposal was giving 3 percent for those under \$50,000 and those over \$50,000 to get 2.5 percent retro back to July. I would rather see people under \$30,000 get 5 percent, \$30,001 to \$50,000 3 percent and over \$50,001 to

receive 1 percent, or a variation similar with the team members who make less to receive more. There were other proposals of a certain amount per each team member, about whether over the max should receive anything, or if we should base it on how many months team members worked for the company this year. The point is the board didn't vote "no" on the bonuses or raises — the only vote that was taken was to add it to the agenda. Apparently, the board shouldn't discuss options on how to distribute the money, but rather just vote on something. Did I mention we no longer have \$550,000 to distribute? I believe it is about half that amount.

As for the raises, Director Hoffman brought forth a resolution for COLA increases for 2016 and I seconded his motion. We did not have the votes to add it to the agenda. There has been 3 percent added to the 2016 budgets for raises in 2016. We have yet to pass the 2016 budgets. There is not one board member on this board who would not like to give out bonuses, raises, 401k, etc., to our team members but we have to make those decisions responsibly. We cannot have a repeat of 2008 caused from reckless spending from years prior.

To see a repeat, check out the December 2007 issue of the tribal paper to see the same tactics being used. Some directors talked about the millions we were in debt and had to borrow to give bonuses in 2007. I believe the total debt in 2008 was \$70 million that we had to borrow that we are continuing to pay off, which also caused about 150 people to lose their jobs.

I am not trying to intimidate anyone, but those numbers are real. I am not saying we will be in the same boat, but rather look at the similar promises.

Decisions need to be sound and, if raises are given, they need to be sustainable. Our team members absolutely deserve at the very minimum a cost of living increase. It is not responsible to

demand and rally the team members by playing on their emotions just to make yourself look like the hero. Last comment on this subject, when was the last time you heard a CEO or top executive of a company or organization take such actions without first discussing and vetting proposals from its governing or business board?

We received an email about polling the board to see if there was going to be a quorum for the Dec. 1 workshop. The chair was going to be in D.C. and others were not going to be available. I asked for a special meeting to be called to discuss these raises, bonuses and other decisions that we need to make. Unfortunately, there was not a majority to call a special meeting or have a workshop. Another waste of time not being able to get business accomplished. The chair did, however, decide to call a special meeting late last week for Monday, Dec. 7, even though nothing on the agenda is special, rather just normal course of business items.

The last week of October, CORA closed down fishing in areas of Lake Michigan to our fishermen. The reason was for overharvesting lake trout. This area is to remain closed until Dec. 31. Directors Chase and Morrow wanted to give the affected fishermen a subsidy for having to shut down their operations during the most profitable days of the year. In November, the board voted to disperse \$200,000 out of the fishermen's fund to offset the financial loss. The board discussed this with the fishermen and staff members on how to distribute the money. There has been discussion on those getting paid who could have put the tribe over the harvest amount. The board voted on five or six criteria for distribution and it failed twice. I abstained from those votes because of a conflict of interest. The chairman ran out into the hallway on break and said to the fishermen, "Do you want to see who voted no?" He also said if Bridgett would have

voted you guys would have gotten paid. I just sat appalled at the fact that he wanted me to vote when I was a conflict of interest, but if I had voted on it he would have dragged my name through the mud. I will not vote anytime I feel I have a conflict. I don't care if others do it or have done it, I will not. Most, if not all, fishermen know I have a conflict and they support my decision and understand why I did.

At the November meeting in Hessel, the majority of the board voted to post the CEO position. I did not support this. Fred has been here a year and there have been many changes and not too many people deal with changes well. I can't say that I agree with everything Fred has done but I can't say that about anybody and we didn't bring in a professional because we were on top of our game. We needed someone to come in here with no ties to make the tough choices.

When the casinos first opened, we didn't have much for competition and made easy money. We are in a very competitive and saturated market today. We have to make changes to remain a viable enterprise to provide services to our members.

Here are some concerns with posting the position: We have a tribal preference policy that I agree with but I believe sometimes we use it as a mandate instead of a preference. A family member, friend or political ally may be chosen who can be manipulated. The new person comes in and fires a bunch of staff instead of working with and training them. We have invested one year of time and money into moving forward only to have no idea of what will happen. We have two downstate casino projects that Fred has been involved with and given input on. At the end of the day, this board is not more qualified than someone who has as much experience in the gaming industry and turns around casinos for a living. The last thing is many of the managers I have talked to have learned more this year than all the years they have worked for Kewadin.

One argument is we need to follow policy and post the position. I have recently seen so many inconsistencies in the jobs that are posted with time frames, qualifications, interview selection, etc., that we need to conduct this human resource audit and change policy to fit the needs of the business. The CEO position should have actually been given a two-year contract with stipulations and reviewed prior to two years to renew or part ways. Many other casinos do this.

One other lie I want to clarify is that I am not jealous of the chair's work in D.C. or at the national level. Where does that even come from, because I do not support changing or cancel-

ing meetings when we have a vice chair? I appreciate the work the chair does in D.C. and, for myself, I prefer to stay in my community where I am involved in many areas and do not have the desire or need to meet the president or anyone else at that level, as they are just another person like you and me.

As I write this report, there is a special meeting called for 5 p.m. today with nothing special on the agenda and it is not one or two critical items, it is a few usual items. Tomorrow's normal meeting has been stacked with many time consuming controversial items such as budgets, raises, bonuses and the fishermen's subsidy, as well as being on the day of our elder's holiday meal. Instead of us meeting in a workshop today to discuss some of these items, there are financial reviews being held instead. This is the reason I get frustrated because of the games that get played with scheduling. I will not blame this all on the chair because seven board members refuse to stand up and stop the insanity. Apparently, it is more important to protect your family and keep your name out of the tabloids than to do what is best for your tribe.

Apparently, the pizza rally may have not been as successful as someone expected, so there will be things said like the board or supervisors threatened team members not to participate. I guess there has to be blame placed somewhere. You build support, you don't mandate it!

I want to apologize to the members who attend the meeting and only get five minutes to speak because you may not be an ally or speaking about someone's agenda. It should be a fairer process and not about who you are or the subject you speak about.

Lastly, I want to thank all the elders, team members, family and friends who made cakes for our Christmas party cake walk. Our party was awesome and could not have been possible without the help of the Kewadin staff, Francie Wyers, Sue St.Onge from the YEA, and our youth who volunteered. In my next unit report, I will have a list of names to thank those team members individually who decorated, shopped, wrapped, etc. Thank you to Keith's and my family and friends for their continued support in helping make the party a success!

God bless all of you during the holidays! Thanks to our team members for all your hard work this year! With so many unfortunate lives lost this year, I hope we all cherish one another and pay better attention to our health and the decisions we make.

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