

Statement, EGM. April 17, 2014

I wish to draw attention to one concern; to quote from mediator Alan Simpson a few times; to quote two sentences from the Board Manual; to make five brief comments; to end with an appeal in three points.

The concern is: It is my experience that this agency for some years has been caught in debilitating agency dysfunction.

The quote from Alan Simpson is contained in his [Pre-Mediation Assessment Report](#):
The board cannot continue in the same patterns of dysfunction without causing increasing damage to the whole agency. Yet, it appears that the board is not quite ready or able to work together in a problem solving environment for the good of the whole agency.

A further quote is from Alan Simpson's e-mail to all Staff and Board June 7, 2013:
These are the comments I heard from you [Staff and Board] [that are "healing and hopeful"] about moving forward together:... [the agency should] "resolve future issues quickly by using the conflict resolution policy in [the] board manual"

Step 4 of the Board Manual's Conflict Resolution policy reads:

If the Executive Director is party to the conflict, or if a member of the Board is a party, then the matter shall be taken to a non-Board member agreed to by the disputing parties. If either party rejects use of such "binding arbitration", **the way forward shall be discerned with prayer and consultation with all parties.**

Some comments are:

- For years, the Board and Executive Director, Staff included, have been parties to a debilitating conflict.
- The consequent "prolonged dysfunction" has indeed caused "increasing damage to the whole agency."
- There has indeed also been agency failure to "work together in a problem solving environment for the good of the whole agency." The problems have persisted.
- When the Executive Director and Board went to a "non-Board member", mediator Alan Simpson, according to Step 4 of the Board Manual conflict resolution policy, we were consequently informed in writing by the mediator:
There is danger in seeking a quick fix for this current crisis due to financial restraints and the prolonged organizational dysfunction. When the board decides to move forward in a collaborative manner the following pathway might assist your agency...
- The recommended "pathway"ⁱ laid out by Alan Simpson in some detail has not been implemented by the agency.

Fellow members: **I appeal to you:**

- To call for a full reconciliation process to address this agency's longstanding dysfunction, through employment of a professional mediator tasked to mediate fully all the conflict issues, and report back to the membership at the next Annual General Meeting;

- to not permit this Extraordinary General Meeting to be used as that kind of reconciliation forum, for there is no professional mediator present and previously tasked for such a multi-level, time-consuming process;
- to hold the agency accountable to pursue a **“way forward [that] shall be discerned with prayer and consultation with all parties”**.

And a reminder: Tomorrow is Good Friday... *but Sunday is a comin'*! And hope will not disappoint! Amen.

Thank you.

ENDNOTE:

ⁱ **RECOMMENDATIONS**

It was determined in the brief interviews and group assessment that there is a willingness to engage in a mediated process to talk about the working relationship between the Executive Director and Board members. There is also a desire on staff (*sic*) to proceed with a mediated process to talk through past issues.

However, the difficult work of collaborative conflict resolution requires an immediate large amount of time and effort. The cost of facilitating the process and the personal energy required to engage in the process is (*sic*) a great deal to ask of the participants and the agency. If the agency (including staff and board) can find a common and higher value in the process they might be able to proceed with the facilitated conversation. The good news is that all the participants in the assessment identified their common interest as a desire to see M2W2 (*sic*) continue to prosper for the sake of the inmates, volunteers and supporters. This might be your best anchor for proceeding.

Two hurdles to overcome before entering the process will be rebuilding trust and moving away from an adversarial and accusatory posture. This is the hopeful path for building a cooperative workable solution. There have been some signs of this movement in recent days.

M2W2 (*sic*) board (including the executive director) has a dilemma that requires a collective effort to solve. The board cannot continue in the same patterns of dysfunction without causing increasing damage to the whole agency. Yet, it appears that the board is not quite ready or able to work together in a problem solving environment for the good of the whole agency. Some crucial questions must be asked before proceeding with facilitated conversations:

1. What can we do to create a climate of honor and respect so that you can serve each other and the agency under your care?
2. What is my personal contribution into (*sic*) the organizational and relational dysfunctions?
3. How will we know when we are willing and able to do the hard work of collaborative conflict resolution?