



Mental Etiquette of a Leader

Five Lesson's of Tribal Leadership, You Must Always Expect the Unexpected

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Sooner or later things are going to happen that a textbook has not prepared you for. When running a Nation, you deal with murder, rape, severe health issues, and suicides. There will be moments in time and situations where your life history and experiences have not prepared you to deal with these situations. When that happens, simple common sense has to kick in, as well as relying on others who may have dealt with similar situations. But most of the time, utilizing common sense will get you through it.

First - Supplement a good plan today with great people. Any leader, any good leader, must first surround themselves with good people, people with talent in their expertise. Having a strategic plan obviously is very important, but the difference between having a strategic plan and having a working strategic plan is totally different. A working strategic plan is something always in motion, periodically getting updated, and giving parameters for how your Tribe is really going to operate. It applies to all areas, and the common vision has to be clearly understood by those working for the administration. Times will come when things may get a little gray or fuzzy, but clarity comes through discussions, better understandings, and sit-downs with the Chiefs, Tribal Council, and administrative staff.

Second - What you need is what you need. I believe one of the things Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians has done really well is to ensure the basis of decision making consists of the future needs, the future priorities of the Tribe. If there is particular legislation it's an educational process. First, we identify a need; second, the administration has to get behind whatever the people need or what shortfall is experienced. Education of the Tribal Council is important, it may take a period of time to get accomplished, but communication with

those involved with pushing ideas and enacting these ideas to put them into action is crucial. A Tribe is a great place to work, but also can be very frustrating. It is not your typical corporate job. In a Tribal job, a Tribal career, you not only have the operations on your shoulders, but you also have the well-being of a people on your shoulders. That's not always easy, there is a constant push from others to always do better. Even though things may be going pretty well, there's always going to be a push. The leadership's staff must always understand we do not simply run an organization, we're taking care of a people; as long as that is clear and everyone pushes ahead, things will work out just as it has here.

Third - Balance and shared responsibility is sensibility. It is not easy. Using our Tribe as an example, when it comes to day to day, the Chief handles those operations, which I believe we have done well. Times arise when we need to send Council Members, Chairpersons, Vice Chairpersons, or the Vice Chief to conferences for meetings with certain folks, always realizing that there is a time and a place. From the Chief's perspective, good judgment is needed, "When do I need to be there?" because sometimes folks just want to see or talk to the Chief. As long as you maintain a fluid system, meaning everybody clearly understands what their role is, and most importantly that you are carrying a common message to state government, to federal government, then you're going to find a lot of success.

Fourth - Knowledge is power. The biggest thing for me is staying in touch with my direct reports on key issues and projects. Historically I've been accused by some of possibly being too much of a micro-manager, but the way I lead a people is simple. As a leader you have two opportunities, to be in the know or not.

I choose to be in the know. That sometimes creates a little more analysis for the staff that may appear to be micro-managing. However, a Chief must have certain statistics, certain information to effectively run a Tribe. You can't know every little thing that's out there, but you definitely have to understand the major issues and projects in your organization.

Fifth - I'm in it for family...and that is a broad relation. The reason I'm in this leadership position is because I feel a cause for the Cherokee people. Growing up I never had the intent of being a Chief, but with the help of the Tribe and getting a formal education, I wanted to give back, hopefully in an important role. From my perspective, giving back to your people, obviously family comes into play, community comes into play, and regions come into play. For me, it's about giving back effectively, making sure we're moving everyone ahead. I've said this many times, it would be easier for the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to sit and hoard the resources that we have, and just say to heck with Swain County or Jackson County, etc. But as a Tribe, we've made solid attempts and been very successful in creating good partnerships. Partnerships take you a long way, it may not make sense today, but tomorrow it will. My philosophy on leadership is about a people, not about an individual.

Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Principal Chief Michell Hicks, CPA, was born and reared on the Cherokee Indian Reservation in North Carolina. Chief Hicks has held various positions with the Tribe dating back to 1987 until his election to the Office of Principal Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in 2003.

Chief Michell Hicks is a member of the board of directors for the Museum of the Cherokee Indian, the Cherokee Preservation Foundation, Tribal Business Committee, National Congress of the American Indian, and the National Indian Gaming Association.