



Stroking the Flame of Leadership

I admire the phrase “born leader.” It’s been said that anyone can be a leader but in actuality, one is born with leadership qualities that provide them with hindsight to make the best decisions at a specific time for the betterment of another person or organization. To be a proper leader, you need to understand what leadership is in order to best experience it. The flame of leadership that burns within me has only grown stronger since I have made the transition from youth, to businessman, to executive, to Chairman of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Council. Inspired by constant diversity and adversity throughout my life, I happily thrive on this energy.

I attribute my leadership qualities to my parents, who always motivated me to think ahead and better myself. My parents would constantly pepper me with questions: “What are you working on? What will it look like today? What will it look like the day after?” until I envisioned the best possible outcomes. My father, a leader in his own right as a satellite foreman, said it best, “Listen. Don’t speak first.”

My mother, Tribal Secretary for our Tribal Council for over 35 years, is the key influence in my life. As a little boy she would place me in her lap during Tribal Council meetings. I didn’t understand what was discussed but the experience definitely inspired me. It was a natural experience for me to hear about the



different issues and concerns affecting our Tribe, and to develop decisions based on what was best for our members. My mother said that one day I would lead our Tribe and go to Washington DC to work on tribal issues for the betterment of my people. Only now do I realize how right she was!

Being a leader as a kid wasn’t always easy. While living in Dorchester, Mass., busing was the norm and there was constant violence in the streets. My brother and I would leave our house and hope to come home safely each day. But it was worth being bused across the city to another school outside my neighborhood. I craved new challenges. I was able to overcome the violence around me by not letting it consume me. It was an unfortunate situation but I willed myself to think past it.

My leadership qualities were also shaped while spending time among my Tribal family in Mashpee on Cape Cod. During the 1970’s Mashpee Land Claim’s settlement case, I vividly remember my mother wearing Tribal clothing and being cursed at, despite the fact our town and region were inhabited by our Tribal ancestors for 12,000 years. At an early age I learned about conflict resolution and understood how to resolve issues and navigate through them to attain goals of success.

The drive to succeed as a leader helped me obtain an associate’s degree from Roxbury Community College and a Bachelor’s degree from the University of Massachusetts – Boston. Life experiences also shaped my work at Fidelity Investments as a Director of Business Portfolio Project Management. Yet I consider my current role as Chairman to be the most exciting job I have ever had.

As Chairman, I am committed to lifting the profile of our Tribe. I am fighting for my Tribe to get land into trust to create the Tribe’s initial reservation. I am a major proponent of housing, healthcare and education opportunities for our Tribal members. I am also thoroughly engaged in the design and development of a resort destination casino in Southeastern Massachusetts. “Project First Light,” which is expected to spur job and economic growth in Taunton, Mass. and other neighboring regions, is the result of our working with our state Legislature to achieve the first commercial gaming bill with a specific Indian Tribal provision.

Our image has been enhanced greatly through my leadership, which also includes the development of a USA-funded, state-of-the-art, 46,000 square-foot government center located in the heart of Mashpee. As we strive to secure our own economic growth, we plan to further invest in such areas as renewable energy and education.

I received a tremendous honor earlier this year when Boston’s Suffolk University Law School awarded me an Honorary Doctorate for my leadership work in education reform, including working with Congress to support the Native CLASS Act to improve education for both my Tribe and other Native American Tribes. This honor gives me the opportunity to nurture the relationship our Tribe has with Suffolk University and its Indian Law and Indigenous People’s Clinic.

The Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe is known as the “People of the First Light.” As Chairman, I can proudly say we are thriving during a true renaissance period. I remain confident and proud of the fact that the leadership light inside me will never flicker out.

Cedric Cromwell Chairman, Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Council

Cedric Cromwell has served on the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal council since 2001. He served as Chairman of Tribal Council since 2009. Chairman Cromwell previously served as both Director of Project

Management and as a Business Portfolio Director for Fidelity Investments in Boston, Massachusetts. He holds a degree in Management and Community Planning from the University of Massachusetts at Boston.