

Trust and the Pipe Carrier

Spiritual leadership engages me in my business dealings and my ceremonial life. In the traditional native community I am one of many pipe carriers. This responsibility is a privilege, and has taught me that being responsible to one's truth has its own rewards.

I was given a pipe as part of my first vision quest, a four-day solo experience where one sits or stands in one spot in prayer and communication with the Creator. Many truths were revealed to me, including that I was to leave my native circle. I was told that love was the only teacher I would need and my teacher, although wise, lived on the underbelly of anger.

For years I had been uncomfortable with how my elder taught. Everything from how the fire was made to why it was raining was my fault. His way was to strip us of our dignity. I found it easy to justify staying, against my inner knowing. Who was I to second-guess a respected elder? He demanded a lot of his students and we all eagerly gave. To belong felt less threatening than going it alone. The price for inclusion was our self-esteem. We surrendered to our teacher and we named that surrender loyalty.

As the whispers of my soul grew louder, I knew that for every "yes" I gave to his anger, I said "no" to the person my soul wanted me to become. With all the courage I could muster I told my elder the truth. I was immediately ostracized, blacklisted from any future gatherings or native ceremonies. Two days later at my office I received threatening calls to induce me to return the pipe because I was no longer worthy, no longer Indian. During one of the last phone calls I received, I was threatened with bodily harm. A deep knowing took root in me: to defend myself would only prolong the drama. In that moment I could feel the challenge the Creator was putting before me, to listen to their experience of me, or listen to my knowledge of myself.

I heard their words as an observer, completely free of judgment and hurt. When they were finished I simply said “I understand. My love for you all remains unchanged. I have to go now, don’t call me again”. From that moment all the attacks stopped.

One of the most important aspects of being a success in any career is to know yourself fully as you lead, manage, coach, direct or develop any one person or thing. The active engagement of your soul’s truth propels you into being an innovator amongst so many imitators. Innovators learn from their teachers, allow themselves to be personally inspired and use that inspiration to infuse their own leadership. Imitators download what they have learned and replay the same tunes the same way no matter the situation or the changing landscape. Imitators never move themselves, their employees, organizations or the world forward. The world doesn’t need more imitators, it needs innovators, and fully self expressed individuals who risk for the sake of creating something better for us all.

Responsibility is a gift, not a burden. Accepting the role of true leadership means the willingness and ability to be “response-able” for one’s impact. It calls on much more of you to show up in the world. Throughout your business ventures, lean fully into knowing who you are. This internal knowing can guide every move and decision. Listen to the whispering of the soul and your capacity to grow personally and professionally will expand exponentially.