

Managing Internal Issues

The emerging trend of limited participation by trade union members in the life of their individual organizations, may tend to suggest that this comes as a consequence of a waning interest. The vibrancy which once characterized trade unions, now seem to have given away to a state of docility. One may wish to speculate as to why this state of affairs exists, but based on what is placed in the public domain, a conclusion can be made that a lack of trust and confidence are two defining issues.

Whereas it may appear to some that there is a semblance of docility within the labour movement, there are those who would contend that they are more concerned about the internal hostility which exists within it. Taking a broad side view of what is taking place across society, it would appear that rancor and discord has become an integral part of the way of life and the behaviour within institutions. Trade unions, political parties, and even the church have in recent times been guilty of bringing their internal matters into the public domain. This action which is referred to as 'washing dirty linen in public,' is never in the best interest of the organization, as it inevitably leads to discord, fractures and a disruption in the work of the body. Where this unseemly behaviour occurs, it is often driven where there is a matter under dispute, divergent views that are promulgated, and/or varying positions taken on policy matters. Much of this is also fueled by an individual's stance on a matter or where a strong personality dominates. The core of the problem can evolve around the promotion of self-interest and the ego of an individual.

It is not unexpected that contentious issues will contribute to the creation of tensions within organizations. However, it is unfortunate that such matters should spill into the public domain. This can give rise to tensions and deepen fractures, as persons without knowledge or facts on a matter, undertake to voice opinions, give support on a position or to an individual. Those who move to place matters in the public domain, can be accused of looking to attract the sympathy of the public and to garner justification for their actions. Some may also be justly accused of looking

to use the public forum for the purpose of creating a further divide; especially where the discrediting of others intentionally or unintentionally occurs in the process.

Individuals who serve in leadership roles within the labour movement and in other civil society organizations, should be well aware that it is inappropriate to attempt to resolve internal disputes in the public domain. Those who indulge in this practice, are guilty of displaying disrespect and disregard for the rules, regulations, policies, procedures and practices which govern the operations of the organization. In their effort to involve the public and to attract support, it would seem that those who transgress in this way, are not mindful of the damage that their action can have on the image of the organization, whether in the short, medium and long term.

Whilst some may argue that the public has a right to know, this should be weighed against the likely damage that can result from the negativity which arises from blatant untruths which are communicated, malicious rumors that are generated, speculations and possible character assassinations. It is hard to conceive how respect and confidence for those individuals involved and the organization as a whole, are not lost or called into question.

Winning at all cost comes with a price. This should be frowned upon, much in the same way where there are intended or calculated actions that are meant to create mischief. Disgruntled members or leaders of trade unions and other civil society organizations, ought to pay respect to following the process within the organization, and to do so as required in making a legitimate complaint or grievance. It basically is in poor taste as a first step to resort to running to the media, rather than to follow the established process within the organization to seek redress. It is this type of indiscipline that calls the integrity of organization into question. It is for this reason that those on the inside and outside, tend to lose confidence in organizations. Human nature being what it is, egos, the fear of failure and failure to accept defeat very often give vent to what is known as the 'sour grapes'.

The practice of crying foul after an internal election by finding fault with the voting system and procedures, is simply not inspiring. It is fair to say that after the fact that possible irregularities may be identified. In such an instance, it begs the question as to why these matters are not first identified and addressed internally, before claims are made in the public domain, without conclusive evidence to support them. This level of distrust is contributing to destroying the morale within organizations and to driving away potential members. These are turned away because of the implications of corruption, unfair practices and infighting.

It should go without saying that mutual trust and respect are key to the management of internal matters. The following of guidelines and best practices must also be encouraged, as these will lend to transparency and the maintaining of confidence and trust.