

Wednesday, April 30, 2014

Dear Board –

My Board. Please sit back. As this is not nearly as straightforward as it should be.

As most of you know, I never came looking for any of this, but as some of you know better than others, I won't shy from it, either.

As a place to start, you may want to hear me say what I've said so many times – that I would always be (and have always been) the first to say that the AWON Website can be improved. It absolutely can be – and on a weekly if not sometimes on a daily basis, for anyone who's been watching – it has been.

This is not easy work, or work that can be put aside, or left for someone else, who doesn't know much at all about the things that we all know.

37 years in business have taught me many lessons, and fundamental among them is the monumental difference between an ally relationship and an adversarial one.

The banners are all shipped now to 16 cemeteries around the world, where they'll all be attached to AWON wreaths to be presented for our fathers on Memorial Day. I wish you could all know the true meaning of this effort to our membership. It really touches only those involved, of course, but a warm and wonderful and consistently ally relationship with 16 coordinators produces extraordinary annual results.

It means that CPL David L. Conway (Gerry's Dad) will be remembered at Margraten, along with 74 others; CPT Edward Alfred Peters, Jr. (Ed's Dad) will be remembered at Normandy, along with 22 others; and that PFC Ralph Clinton Pinkerton (Jerry's Dad) will be remembered at Manila, along with 78 others, all by name.

As a welcome exclamation point to a lot of work, we just received the letter below – from a Grandson. His mother, Carol Hubany, remembers her Dad – SGT Victor J. Hubany at Henri-Chapelle. The interesting (and especially gratifying) thing about this letter is that the Grandson is none other than the Superintendent at RHONE – who, based on his Mother's experience with AWON, has his own aspirations of serving one day as Superintendent at Henri-Chapelle! Here's his letter:

> "Malone Letter.PDF"

This has been as a result (just one result) of a clearly ally relationship all around, over eleven years.

Very much the opposite of what we're all facing here: a totally inappropriate and dysfunctional relationship with my Board and our Web Committee. It's actually pretty hard to believe.

Against a backdrop of very little help or attention from ANY AWON Board (you would have to be in just my place to know) – over almost 20 years (next July), and with just one exception in all these years (someone on the Board who was willing to step up and actually “help” the site – beyond providing guidance from above), there’s this – in so far 18 years – no one on ANY Board has ever asked for my ideas or aspirations for the site. This is unbelievable. To this very moment, no one has.

You have methodically excluded me from any early participation or web advocacy – on the “team” you formed last summer, preferring to keep it to yourselves in what can only be described as an internal bake sale situation, asking and answering your questions, color coding your responses (for careful, no-names anonymity), on the way to Ed for his review.

It could have been seen as a reasonable way to start. Had I been actually INCLUDED in the questioning – or if the results had even been shared with me some time ago – or really at ANY point between then and now, I might have felt a little differently than you’ve made me feel since then.

As now – on the eve of the original deadline – the results have carefully NOT been shared with me, color coded or otherwise.

Then you called in Ben Weber – who says he has provided you with an “In-Depth Analysis” of the AWON Website. What, in total secret?? And why would THAT be?

You’d tap BEN . . . before coming anywhere near me? What am I – chopped liver?? Unless you know something I don’t know, you have ignored (actually kept carefully away) the only team member with so much as a hint of experience in the SPORT!

No one else will say it, so I guess I will. That what I do and have done in AWON (design, webwork, videos, packaging, research, E! presentations, etc.) is not a hobby. It is and always has been what I do in professional life. Jerry, this is true for you as well, as you’re a pro at the treasury work on the outside, too. But this isn’t generally true in AWON. Not since Jack.

So who among you, I have to ask, thought it would be a good idea to invite opinions about the website from Ben – but not from me? With no intention to even SHARE these opinions with me? And excuse me guys, but why not?? . . . for the “team?”

Have all my years not earned the open honesty of this Board? With all due respect, who among you would stand by and watch this whole thing happen – as you actually have stood by –so far – and watched it happen. Though (just my wild guess), you’d “personally” never stand for what has happened here . . . if it had happened to you.

But wait, that is only the beginning. Apparently as a result of what Ben provided

(what, surreptitiously?) to the Board – he was named my #2 (!) – before I even met with the committee for the one and only time we’ve met (on 1/12/14), despite TWO reports in two separate issues of The Star – extolling the virtues and progress of our congenial web team.

This is astonishing to me, as when I asked “the team” about Ben’s web background, as I was still processing what had just happened there – they had no IDEA of his background, either on the web – or otherwise(!)

As it happens, assuming someone there might know this – Ben has no web design, no web development, or web coding background, whatsoever. He is simply another “user,” as we all are. So he has his opinions, I understand. But don’t we all? So this choice – and the fact that it had been made FOR me – were BOTH astonishing, given that I’ve had years of service to every Board we’ve had – to every member – and to many of their fathers.

As it also happens, the Web Committee had no IDEA on 1/12/14 (at least that they were willing to share with me) that there was an “Analysis” – at ALL – let alone an “In-Depth Analysis” that was provided at the St. Louis meeting. So I have to ask you – how can this even BE – that your Web Committee had named my #2 guy (with zero knowledge of his background) . . . hey what a “team” so far! . . . or that he’d provided the Board with his In-Depth Analysis – last OCTOBER!!

Now six months down the line . . . no one has had the courtesy to share it with me.

Then with a straight face (at least over the phone) to set about a website “Redesign” – against a deadline – without even mentioning (let alone delivering to the WHOLE team) – something as important as an “In-Depth Analysis” of the AWON website?

This is truly beyond astonishing. And I’ll eat my hat if every one of you isn’t honest enough to say so.

As on the eve of the original deadline – NONE of this has been shared with me.

As an exclamation point to this project management style:

> “Ben Weber Exchange.PDF”

Ben did this for YOU! But obviously, not for me. And in whose concept of a working relationship that involves a Board web “team” would something like this (even the knowledge of its existence) be withheld? And what would have been your reasoning with BEN – about why this was being withheld at all – from anyone – let alone from the one person you were trying to pretend – at least to the membership (reference The Star) – was central to the redesign effort?

Yet, Ben was obviously led to believe that he was not “at Liberty” to share such a thing with me. Ah . . . “Liberty.” Which I had always thought (had for all these years assumed) had a special place – a special value – in AWON. Apparently, I was wrong.

Now I want to know (can any of you blame me for wanting to know) – who among you thought all this was a good idea?

There are supposed to be “Team Building” and “Project Management” skills among you. At least I’ve heard this, as LinkedIn keeps sending me these endorsements.

I have played on teams and I have managed projects. I’ve also BEEN “managed” by good project managers – and I have to say that no strategies and actions and non-actions and internal games of keep-away like this have EVER had a place on teams I knew – or on projects that really wanted to be ones with good results.

I won’t even mention ends that are somehow justified by means.

That these same strategies would ever be a part of an AWON Board would literally be abhorrent to most people, at least most of the people I know – certainly to most AWON members. And (I suspect) to most of you . . . “individually.”

I would never have believed it in a million years – about an AWON Board – unless I’d seen it all before. And some of you know that I have. Up close and very personal. And about which, until now, I have remained silent myself, obviously to my own detriment – and supposedly for the greater good. Two of you know exactly what went on back there. And now I’m asking you – for the group – don’t let this awful darkness fall on AWON . . . now – or ever again.

I know for a fact – that there is real quality – and integrity – on this Board. There are those, and I may even know who you are – who will simply NOT stand by and watch things like this – clearly odiferous things like this – happen here. Let alone happen again, initiated, perpetuated, spun, then stifled – by an AWON Board.

Here’s the problem, as I see it, and you can take this observation or leave it. Though if you leave it, it will be at the peril of all of us who have worked so long and hard for a membership that barely seems to enter the conversation. It may be for lack of a Membership Chair (and any serious wish to find one), but that’s another story.

This story – and this observation – is about anonymity – and how it can materially affect the results and ongoing effectiveness of a Board. Sometimes in a good way – and sometimes, as you must know (or at least suspect) – in a bad way, too, when it’s used in the wrong way, to support agendas not always in the light of day.

There is a value in anonymity, I so well know. As an active researcher (I taught Primary Research for 13 years at UCSB) anonymity and the promise of anonymity – encourages response. Sometimes a GOOD thing. Especially in law enforcement.

But as any researcher also knows, not all response is good response. And as you may know (I suspect you do) – that good researchers want the most qualified responses – as the actual source means a great deal – as it should. It will be no surprise that the attitudes and opinions of those with the deepest actual experience and affinity with a subject (those who have a demonstrated commitment) are weighted higher (often MUCH higher) than the purely anecdotal perceptions and incidental opinions of casual observers.

In the context of a Board, the same is true.

Except the promise of anonymity here can so easily change the outcomes markedly, and rarely for the better, especially when anonymity is needed (even required) to reach a certain result or decree. Especially an unpopular one. These circumstances sometimes claim a “unanimous” vote of the Board, whether it was ever that or not. Which can be troubling – when the outcome is important.

The truth is, there is a built-in ability (even an implied validation) to hide one’s true feelings on a Board – that most who serve have known. Individual convictions, even deeply held, can so easily be swept away in what may seem to be the momentum of an especially vocal minority. Meaning that too often, the intrinsic, but PERSONAL quality and integrity one might have personally – as an “individual” can change into something much different – less high road – in the presence of & under the implied protection of an anonymous Board “composite.”

Especially when decisions and processes can be so easily mandated and obscured in a combination of sanitized minutes, in carefully-worded “releases” in purely state-owned media, with no IG, with no advocacy (that a Liaison might provide), and with absolutely no process for an appeal.

It’s happened before in AWON, and before it happens again, I would simply ask you all to search your souls to decide whether the “way” so far, that has been apparently approved and implemented by all of you . . . is really the way AWON does business.

So what to do.

At least one of you should recuse yourself immediately. There may be others who would like to self identify. I’ll leave that to the integrity I know is still among you.

We NEED to solve this, and solve it rationally – even ethically & straightforwardly – and in the open light of day.

I’ll do the very best I can in this with the resources you (actually) provide, if we can come to terms.

I have an alternative plan I'd like to propose. But only if you're receptive. And I truly hope you are. With a new team, a new process, a new timeline, and with a somewhat lesser budget than you had originally allocated. The rest can go to "Membership." Or wherever you decide.

But forgive me if the circumstance is different now than it was when you all started. It sometimes happens when bubbles burst.

I need a couple of assurances – before there's any proposal. Not outlandish ones, but ones you should see the wisdom of providing. Of course that's my viewpoint talking. But nothing here should be difficult for anyone interested in actual web success.

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**One:** I really need to see the goods from last summer, color-coded or whatever. I need to understand where the process started.

**Two:** I need to see Ben's "In Depth Analysis." There can be no WAY you can withhold it now – and not be "at Liberty" to finally share it with me.

**Three:** I need your assurance that you'll not just allow – but require – a Liaison to the Board – not just for the Web – but for ANY major AWON infrastructure that finds itself in the hands of a person who is not also on the Board.

**Four:** will be a composite of questions that by rights – and in sunlight – I should be able to ask my Board. As I'm a member, too. So I will ask, even though I know I'll be answered selectively, if at all. But I bet they're things you would want to ask your Board, if you were me . . .

- What really HAPPENED here?
- Who was really (really) running this show? Who?
- Who thought it was a good idea to build such a "consensus" among the Board – excluding all web advocacy or any possibility of an opposing viewpoint? Or even a real web-based viewpoint. Has this ever happened before??
- Who thought it was a good idea to pick me last for a team I basically founded?
- Who thought it would be a good idea to unilaterally name my #2?
- Who asked Ben to review the Website and report to the Board? And why?
- Who thought it would be a good idea to put Ben in a mindset to withhold his WEB analysis from the WEBguy?
- Who else was asked to "review" the site? Or was Ben the only one?
- Who thought it would be a good idea to withhold ALL you knew from me?
- Is there anything else you know I'd want to know about this?
- Who still believes the "process" you have put me through HAS ever or WILL ever be applied "evenly" to all the other major infrastructures in AWON?
- Who really wants me off the island – and is willing to tell me why?
- I still want to know what HAPPENED here.

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I honestly have no clue where ANY of this is coming from – or why – but I hope to find out. Wouldn't you, if you were me?

Because all of this is about (or might be about) looking out for one another. That's what our fathers did, and if it was right for them, it should be just as right for us.

Whatever it is flying around has been brazenly destructive – not just personally to me and to Dianna, but to relationships we have treasured – and to all of you and to this Board – and to the membership that trusts us all to do what's right. And by any measure, this hasn't been our finest hour. I didn't bring this on, you all must know.

I want to work with you. To include a future where we can work well and play well again together. Some of us have, and I hope and honestly expect that we will again. We have too much combined talent and dedication to squander even an ounce of it. We've already lost trajectory – and we can't afford to lose much more.

Thanks for abiding all my candidness, but there's just too much at stake for all of us, for our members and for all our dads – so many who count on us.

There is no reason on earth why we can't finally make this right.

Best to all – In Their Memory –

– Mr. Brief