

## Grand Presidents Message

Over my career, I have served as a county Planning Commissioner, director of a shareholder owned golf course corporation, political appointee, elected county central committee member; I have worked with the Federal, State and local governments; interfaced with numerous non-governmental organizations, public interest groups and the general public; and of course, most recently as a Grand Officer of the Native Sons of the Golden West.

Sadly, in each of the aforementioned roles, I have had more than one occasion to say “If my children behaved as poorly as [insert group or person’s name here], they’d be grounded until they’re 40!” More disappointing is many of the people who have occasioned this comment are in or well above that age themselves. I’ve even had moments (too many to count, after all, we’re all human, right?) of self-reflection that I myself have acted in such a poor manner.

No organization, no matter how selective their membership (FRIENDSHIP), how noble their mission (LOYALTY), nor how lofty their goals (CHARITY), is immune to human nature. Conflict WILL occur on some level, some day with one of your Brothers. How we react when it inevitably happens, is WHOLLY within our control.

This is no easy task when we perceive that someone, especially if it is a Brother, is behaving in a way that feels unkind to us — attacking, blaming, lying, shaming, and so on. It is so easy to believe that our misery is coming from their behavior, rather than from our own response to their behavior. Self-justifications distort reality; the more we use them, the more we create an alternate reality. This leads to a decreased ability to make good choices, as the information we’re using to do so is tainted. Most dangerously, one self-justification begets another, setting off a domino effect that sends us more and more off track. Once we justify one decision, we’re deeper into it, and to get rid of the doubt we’ll feel, worrying if it was the right choice, we’ll make a decision that digs us even further into it. And the cycle continues.

Global labels are almost never accurate, but our brain finds them very satisfying to develop and spew. They allow us to see our Brother as deliberately hurting us — as intentionally sinking the relationship. It’s their fault, and we’re the victim, so we feel entitled to punish and attack them.

Once we give a Brother a global label — “He’s a has-been”, “He wrongs Brothers”, “He’s arrogant” — we focus on gathering evidence to confirm our conclusion, and overlook all evidence to the contrary. We keep mulling over how he wronged us, but don’t think about how just yesterday he was right beside us at a Parlor fundraiser, clean-up, or event, volunteering his time, working every bit as hard as us. As we strengthen our “case” against him, we’re filled with self-righteous indignation, which allows us to go on the attack. When the global label becomes firmly entrenched, we come to see the person as hopelessly flawed and unable to change, which leads to contempt, the death knell of a relationship.

As I’ve read through the early proceedings of the Native Sons, I’ve encountered many instances of Brothers behaving poorly, even in some cases criminally against their fellow members. No order can survive long with festering, internal strife, yet the Native Sons have continued on all these years despite these relative blips on the radar. And that’s the way I see it in most instances, these squabbles, complaints, accusations are more often than not, a simple misunderstanding that could be resolved if we firmly remembered our oaths. I realize some of you will see that admonition as trite, you “really

were wronged!” and perhaps you were. My words are not intended to dismiss legitimate complaints, but in my seven years as a Grand Officer, I’ve seen very few of that category. Yes, our Constitution offers redress for wrongs, real or perceived, but using Grand Parlor as a school yard monitor is not what our predecessors contemplated.

“The obligation requires that no Brother shall wrong a Brother or a member of his family, nor permit them to be wronged. We understand the term wrong, as used in the obligation, to refer to some act, which is, of itself or in effect, injurious, and not too hasty, ill-considered words or declarations, said in moments of passion or otherwise and involving no charge or moral turpitude, or violation of the rules of organized society, known to us all. We most emphatically say, that under the cover of the work ‘wrong,’ as used in the obligation, every trivial dispute, every personal grievance, every profane utterance or meaningless jumble of ethics, made outside of the Parlor, which may jar the nerves of a Brother thus addressed, cannot be dignified by the name ‘wrong,’ and made a subject of judicial inquiry by the Parlor, thereby keeping the Parlor in a turmoil, inaugurating a tempest in a teapot, and leading to ultimate dismemberment and dissolution.” (Past Grand President John A. Steinbach, 21st Grand Parlor)

None of us are immune to these issues. I’ve personally felt wronged by a Brother, fellow Grand Officers, Past Grand Presidents and I’m sure they feel EXACTLY THE SAME WAY about me. I’ve sometimes taken my own advice here and tried to resolve the issue, whether over cocktails, a yelling match in a car or even really blowing my top. Other times, I’ve nursed the wound and allowed it to poison what once was a valued and treasured relationship, and for that I am sincerely sorry, and I resolve to try better in the future.

I’ve tried to be as neutral as I can in saying what I think needs to be said, but I know my own biases have bled through, yet I hope that this article has hit home with each and every member. However, if you reached this final paragraph and you still think I’m writing about you specifically, I’m saddened that you’ve missed the entire point of this article. I apologize that my words haven’t conveyed my intended message and I hope that each and every one of us can continue on as Brothers, honoring our obligations. For good or ill, I am human, and so are you.