

Q & A about events in 2013

What was the conflict about? There were differences over control over the mission and vision of Repairers of the Breach (ROTB). In the early weeks of 2013, the three-member Board of Directors of ROTB stated in Board meetings and other gatherings that they were considering changing the mission and vision; that they were considering serving a different population; and they were questioning the programs and services that were being offered at that time. One idea was that ROTB become an employment incubator which might attract significant State and Federal government funding. As Executive Director I questioned the idea saying that only a very small percentage of persons entering the Center could realistically become job-ready within a time frame of six months, given the scope of their issues needing to be addressed. The idea of seeking public subsidy challenged how historically we had chosen not to seek government funding, not wanting to compromise our pioneering model and our open door; and also challenged our awareness that many of our donors appreciated our status of being sustained by private funding only.

At that time could you be described as against change? No. As a co-founder with Tony Lee, having led the organization through every kind of growing pains and processes from the early time when we were only twelve people producing a homeless newspaper with \$500 in the treasury in 1992, to our peak moment in Fall of 2012, I have consistently been strident in adapting to change and leading the organization through changes of all kinds.

Why was such drastic change being promoted in 2013? Was the organization failing? No, Repairers of the Breach was approaching a jubilee moment. Our 8-year renovation was complete. We had met the fund-raising goal of \$2.2 million. We had never been in debt. Our finances, always pure under my leadership, were prosperous. We had several hundred thousands of dollars in surplus, a portion earmarked for building exterior work and replacement of the existing fences with something more aesthetic. We had tripled our floor space and were in a state of readiness to implement new programs in spaces which had been “adopted” by groups I had approached and elaborately furnished by several faith communities and individuals. The organization overall was thriving and harmonious with hundreds of collaborative partnerships and thousands of donors. Needs of homeless people were being met and lives were being transformed. Hearing the Board declaring such drastic changes the comment was made, “If it’s not broke, why fix it?”

Was there a succession plan in place? Yes. The Board approved a “road map” in May of 2012. Culminating four months of internal diagnostics by a consultant, the document she produced including over 200 recommendations called for hiring additional key leadership. Confidence was expressed that I could lead the plan--which addressed a gradual divestment of my responsibilities as I would in future become less able. Mention was made of my eventually taking on a future role of Chief Visionary Officer (CVO). I was amenable to these plans. Why the plan appeared to be derailed by the Board in September of 2012 was never explained.

Why did a “coup” take place? How did the idea take shape? At the beginning of 2013 tensions which had been more subtle in 2012 worsened between myself and the three-person Board and one staffperson. Board meetings called “Executive Sessions” were increasingly held without me. Even though this Board had done no fund-raising, Finance Committee meetings were held excluding me. Without explanation I was stripped of my HR responsibilities. Then one day I was informed I would no

longer have access to checkbooks. For support I began turning to a close circle of trusted individuals and informed them of what was happening.

Why wasn't mediation brought in? Because of the increased daily tension between myself and the Board, between January – August of 2013 I requested mediation 8 times during Board meetings and in other meetings. It was declined.

Responding to concerns for ROTB I had confided in them, approximately 20 people attended an “open” Board meeting in May, 2013. When the floor was opened for discussion at the agenda’s end, comments were made by a few observers about the disrespectful tone in which I was spoken to by the Board; and some of the attendees told the Board that a three-member Board is too small for the large, “premiere” nonprofit organization ROTB had become and challenged the Board to expand its membership. The Board responded by assuring the group that by July, 2013 they would add new Board members. Five persons at the meeting expressed interest in serving on the Board. During June those five people plus two other qualified individuals were interviewed, all with favorable interviews. But July came and went. In August, one of the five who attended in May asked why Board expansion had not taken place. Communication from a Board member indicated they were postponing Board expansion until September, 2013.

Meanwhile, new developments raised immediate concerns about my position as Executive Director and the direction the Board was taking in several areas. Even though the organization was prospering, a deficit budget was being approved. The question of what was going on with the finances loomed over events as I was being excluded from Finance Committee meetings; especially the question of why there would be a deficit budget projected in view of the surplus of funds. Plans were underway to take away my oversight of keys and locks and put them under the control of Carol Young. The agenda for the August, 2013 Board meeting was delayed in being made available. Those five people in attendance at the May Board meeting who had been interviewed for the Board met with me. They included great, compassionate long-time donors and very dedicated volunteers who had been part of the life blood of ROTB. As we brainstormed about how to manage what was going on, knowing that Wisconsin law allows Boards of Directors much latitude, and that the removal of any Board member can only be done by other Board members, we decided that a coup was the best viable idea.

The five dedicated donors and volunteers united with me and carried out a coup during the August Board meeting of 2013. We were incorrectly informally advised this would be legal. This resulted in my termination and was followed by a retaliatory court injunction lawsuit against us by the Board and one staffperson.

Thanks to some caring people at St. Francis Borgia Parish of Cedarburg, 2 Foley and Lardner attorneys defended us pro bono and it was resolved out of court.

Unfortunately Georgia Pabst of the Journal Sentinel only referenced the Court document of the Board in her reporting -- which in our opinions made numerous false allegations -- and she ignored our group’s rebuttal document. This biased reporting added to public confusion.--*MacCanon Brown*