

NEBRASKA SIOUX LEAN BEEF, PART B
QUESTIONS and POINTS OF DISCUSSION

1. What do you suppose held up the report Mr. Bates finally did give to the Council? Could/should the Council have forced him to come in sooner? Were there other ways they could have found out what was going on or pressured him (e.g. through the Board members) to be more forthcoming?

2. When the news was bad, was there any way for the Tribe to regain control of the situation? What coping mechanisms or means of damage control were possible? (Here, be sure to consider *Lakota* approaches and also whether or not they would have worked in this joint venture set-up which included non-Indians.)

Put yourself in the shoes of a Council member or district leader. What might you personally have done as a reasonable response to the problems associated with NSLB?

3. Given the substantial amount of money already committed to this project, by the Tribe and by others, should OST have continued to seek funds for the plant? (Recall the BIA money in late 1986 and the funds Councilman Tapio mentions for the rendering plant.) If yes, should qualifications have been placed on the use of the funds?

4. Create some scenarios of what might have happened had the Tribe acted differently during this period of misinformation. Are such scenarios helpful when choosing a course of action?

SUGGESTED RESPONSES

There are no "right answers" in a case discussion, since the most fruitful conversations bring many approaches to the floor and allow participants to together select the one they think is best. Therefore, no *answers* are given here, only thoughts on some directions which might be explored.

In this case, discussion should probably center on the possible "check up" mechanisms the Tribe could have created (and used) to find out what was really going on at Nebraska Sioux Lean Beef, as well as the potential for proactive leadership by Council members and district chairmen.

In other words, part of the discussion should highlight the fact that early identification of an "out-of-control" situation is imperative. Council members and district leaders certainly had a sense that there were big problems at the plant, and they also had means at their disposal to learn more about those problems. Unfortunately, it is probably true that tribal leaders neither realized what power they had over the situation nor exercised it until far too late. Thus, another part of the discussion should focus how and when leadership could have been exercised.

For instance, the Council could have acted immediately after Mr. Bates' "no show" at the meeting they requested him to attend. They could have sent a delegation, perhaps through Mr. Means' committee, to investigate the plant and its records. They also could have told him that no requests for further funds would be considered he unless presented a full report of plant activities to date. Another possibility would have been to ask the tribal representatives on the Board to act vigorously on the Tribe's behalf, and then require those representatives to attend Council meetings.

Significantly, these suggestions for increased government involvement highlight an important tension in tribal business affairs: *when is it appropriate for tribal government to stay involved with a business, and when can the business be "set free" to operate as it pleases?* Many reports on tribal businesses indicate that tribal government cannot exercise a heavy hand if the business is to succeed; on the other hand, businesses should be expected to communicate with their funders and to maintain certain ethical standards. Oftentimes, the mere existence of communication, without "orders" being given one direction or another, keeps operations above board and at the highest achievable profit level. For instance, better communication could have given the Tribe a stronger sense of when it would be appropriate to continue funding and when it would be appropriate to cut their losses.

Finally, as the last comment intimates, creating scenarios of what might happen in the future given various courses of action is almost always a useful exercise. Even if it does not make the decision at hand completely clear, the method can at least make the decision *clearer* by defining points for intervention and by making tribal expectations explicit.