To: Ken Monzingo, President

From: Employees who care about the ACBL

Re: The ACBL is Lost

Mr. Monzingo,

We are a small group of employees, Horn Lake and the Field, but we represent a silent majority who care about the ACBL. We are writing to inform you about the real state of the ACBL. Put succinctly, it is an organization in free-fall, with no strategy, no operational effectiveness, erratic decision-making and very limited management talent. In almost every area, we see no hope for the future of bridge with the current management team. The demographics continue to seriously impact the popularity and success of the ACBL and these organization problems compound this bad situation.

We write this letter with both deep regret and fear. Bridge is a very small world and going public this way is not something we do lightly. In fact, we are saddened that we have been unable to find another way to express our concerns. But, all previous attempts to improve the organization by working within have resulted in no improvements.

As bad as things have been for many years, they are now so much worse, and in every area:

1) Financial – We have wasted literally millions of dollars on consultants and dead software projects, to a point where we have to raise fees substantially just to maintain the organization at its current level. Additionally, there is a real need for investments in major infrastructure projects, such as software development, director development, training staff, etc.
2) Tournament organization – It is now common for events at NABCs to start late, sometimes very late. We have, basically, lost operational effectiveness and cannot run an excellent bridge tournament, a very sad indictment of the national bridge organization. Even our most senior directors have been responsible for events that start 20, 30 or more minutes after scheduled starting time. 20 years ago, this would have been an isolated disaster; now, it is a semi-regular experience. This is not good customer service and alienates our most dedicated customers.
3) Employee morale – Across the board, among the field directors and home office staff, morale is as low as it has ever been. More and more, people are just "marking time," doing the minimum to get by and waiting for retirement age and Social Security eligibility. Directors who even 2 let alone 5 years ago, said they would direct until they die have now left the organization, frustrated with the incompetence they have to deal with on a daily basis.
4) Leadership – Simply put, there is none. Communication between the field and Horn Lake is almost non-existent. If someone in the field asks a question, they are more likely to get ignored than even get a meaningless answer. A valid answer is the rarest of gems. And, when communications do come out, they are more than likely to be new and unfair policy changes, designed to negatively impact already discouraged employees for the benefit of the organization and its bottom line.

While no organization can get to this low level based on only one episode, the reason for this is straightforward—a complete lack of competence and direction from senior management. An organization is only as strong as its people and it is clear the ACBL has not recruited strong talent. For example, Robert came on board with acclaim from his former position for his outstanding management

there, and, at first, seemed to be willing to "make a difference," but he has clearly given up. He now appears to do nothing more than marking time, like many other employees, and enjoying a good salary to travel around on ACBL expense money and play bridge. The depth of talent under him is also extremely weak. They lack knowledge of bridge (our organization's product) and do not understand what happens at bridge events. As a result, they are incapable of making informed decisions and do not seek advice from those with knowledge. Sadly, it seems Robert does not know or care about this situation.

There have been individuals who tried to bring process and organizational excellence to the ACBL, but these individual do not last long and disappear quickly and quietly. Two of them have been managers, Kathy Byford, Manager of HR, and Sylvia Hardin, Senior Director of Field Operations. We respect the effort Sylvia made; she was appointed to lead the Field organization, almost two thirds of the employees, despite having no knowledge of bridge administration. However, she made initial progress, with new training, clarity of organizational responsibilities and better communications. Now, she is gone. Individuals can decide which is more representative of Robert's managerial limitations, the promotion of such an untrained, uninformed individual to a senior management position or her dismissal without even the time to overcome such hurdles. But, either in her hiring or her firing, Robert has shown a compete disdain for organizational success.

Sadly, this has been repeated over and over, whether in the on-again, off-again situation with ACBLscore, the gigantic sums of money spent on TourneyTRAX, with no resulting savings in administrative costs, or ACBL Live, to compete with another offering, Fast Results, rather than partnering with them, and the continued employment for years of Bruce Knoll, a very weak IT Director, only to finally replace him with Mitch, a clear improvement but still someone totally inexperienced in software development methodologies. Alex Turner is in charge of Marketing, which appears to be defined as one email, to an untargeted audience, for each tournament. Even Joe Jones, while clearly the best of the senior management team, is suffering in his expanded role after Jeff Johnston's passing, spread too thin and asked to work on projects and issues that he is totally unqualified to lead.

We are asking you to take immediate, emergency actions on the following topics:

1) Dismiss Robert – While clearly a friendly person who means well, he has demonstrated a complete inability or disinterest in making things better. In fact, his complete disregard for everything that is wrong just leads to further problems. Whether Robert was always ill-suited to be the ACBL's CEO or has fallen to this state because of other problems since he came on board, he clearly has no ability to turn things around.
2) As part of a selection committee to find a replacement CEO, put at least two or three employees, from both the Field and Horn Lake, on the search committee. These should be non-management employees, individual contributors who understand the needs of the organization and can articulate them in ways that managers, particularly non-bridge experienced managers, cannot.
3) Target a replacement CEO to be on board in no more than 4 months, hopefully, before or just after the Washington NABC.
4) As interim management, since no member of Robert's team is qualified to run a bridge organization, set up a team of 3 BoD members to provide leadership to the senior managers until a new CEO is hired.
5) Attempt to bring back Sylvia Hardin. While certainly not an outstanding manager, unlike the other members of Robert's team, she was starting to show some gains and making

improvements in her department. Given her complete lack of knowledge about bridge or the ACBL when she started, this is a sign she can grow into a valuable leader. At the very least she can continue her work on major projects, such as director training and development.

6) Make IT a significant priority with a much increased focus on the software the organization uses and the resources need to develop or purchase and deploy it. While Mitch may well have a role with the ACBL focusing on its hardware infrastructure, the software we use is clearly the backbone of our organization and Mitch just does not understand the software arena sufficiently to lead the ACBL in this endeavor.
7) Significantly increase the efforts and focus on Marketing, with a Marketing Director who can be innovative in the ever-changing world of social media. The success of BridgeWinners is demonstration that there is much interest in bridge but that new methods need to be developed and exploited to reach these audiences. Doing the same things we did 10 years ago and expecting significant improvements is just not reasonable.

Please understand, these are not demands. These are pleas, from desperate employees. We love bridge and we love our jobs making this great game successful for all our players, clubs and volunteers. But, without the tools we need to succeed and the leadership to take us forward into the 21st century, with new technologies, new social customs and new players, the end for bridge as we know it cannot be far away. Right now, we have neither the tools nor the leadership, and, without the latter, nothing else matters.

cc: All 25 BoD members
Robert Hartman, CEO
Richard Anderson, Chair, Board of Governors
Richard Popper, Vice-Chair, Board of Governors
Sandra DeMartino, Chair, Aileen Osofsky Goodwill Committee
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