

# Nurturing Leadership & Wisdom Inside the Aspen Grove

[Using the Wisdom of the Ages](#)

[Beware of Cybercharlatans](#)

[Be Wise of the Six Sins](#)

[Nurturing the Aspen Grove](#)

*"Presently, the chemically injured community reminds me of a great colony of quaking aspen trees... A grove of quaking aspens is symbiotic and each tree's survival is linked to the entire colony. A single aspen tree may only live above ground for perhaps one hundred years, but the root system lives on sprouting new trees into life for thousands of years spreading the colony over many acres of forest throughout time. Aspens are also a pioneer species. They thrive in sunlight and take root after even the most intense forest fires and disasters, just like some of us."*

By Lucinda Hodges

from

[Under the Iron Heel](#)

Leadership is an intangible quality. For me a leader inspires us to be the best we can be, both as individuals and collectively. A leader instills passion, vision, ownership, direction, connection, commitment and hope for the future.

Leadership is the heart and soul of every strong and effective community; a unique indelible trait to be nurtured and developed. Though we certainly need to build bridges with outside groups and organizations, we would be wise to encourage and promote genuine leadership from within our own ranks. We are such a diverse, intelligent, educated, creative and tested group of people -- most of whom are yearning to contribute more -- especially towards building community, virtual, or otherwise, and that talent does not deserve to be squandered simply because we are ill and injured.

**Our problems are too big,  
interrelated, and pervasive to  
yield to directives from on high.**

*Frances Moore Lappé, Time for  
Progressives to Grow Up*

We are all acutely aware of the unique challenges the chemically injured community faces. Many of us are housebound, disabled, poor, and unable to travel. We are largely isolated from each other, invisible to society, and we depend primarily on the Internet for connection and support. It is this, the very cruel nature of chemical injury, which has historically impeded the development of unified community leadership and the hope of strong, viable representation we can all be proud of.

**One way to tackle the intractable challenges we face is to use the wisdom of the ages. Native tribal councils served our ancestors well for thousands of years and those basic elements of human nature, earthly boundaries, instinctual self-preservation, spiritual connection, generational foresight and careful council consensus will still guide us in our online community halls.**

Perhaps, redefining who our community is in this virtual age is a good place to begin building it. Though there are millions of chemically injured, chemically sensitive, and environmentally ill people in the world, only a few thousand of those injured people engage in an online community. Of those few thousand victims and survivors, only a few hundred are dedicated to participating in our cyber-city-halls: the Internet lists, forums and websites like. In my estimation this dedicated online-cadre of people represent the best and brightest among us, and this is where I believe our future, and our leaders, will spring from.

Fortunately, over the past decade the Internet has vastly increased our ability to access information to become well-informed patients and advocates

for our own self-care. As we have become more savvy and educated, we are discovering we can use technology as a tool to achieve many of our goals including civil discourse and transparency in our community.

So, now that we know who we are, and how we meet, and exchange ideas. Where do we go from here?

## Using the Wisdom of the Ages

One way to tackle the intractable challenges we face is to use the wisdom of the ages. Native tribal councils served our ancestors well for thousands of years and those basic elements of human nature, earthly boundaries, instinctual self-preservation, spiritual connection, generational foresight and careful council consensus will still guide us in our online community halls. We can combine the ancient wisdom of native tribal councils with the innovative use of technology as a way to nurture trust, create transparency, develop democracy, and foster leadership to form a common message that can be distributed and discussed in the greater population. This concept similar to, [Wisdom Councils](#), could easily be modified to work in an Internet-based community. The only real question is. Will we take charge of our own destiny? If not, who will fill the void within our community for us?

**Together we can be wiser than  
any of us can be alone.  
We need to know how to tap that  
wisdom.**

Tom Atlee, [The Tao of Democracy](#)

## Beware of Cybercharlatans

When it comes to online community halls, which offer us many tangible benefits, we are, unfortunately, very susceptible to being preyed upon by [cybercharlatans](#) or [greenwashers](#). I think greenwashing exists within communities as it does in consumerism. Most of us carefully read the labels of the products we buy. We must also be watchful media consumers and consider who is providing the information we read and what their motives may be.

**Most of us carefully read the labels of the products we buy. We must also be watchful media consumers and consider who is providing the information we read and what their motives may be.**

By extension, we must be streetwise in cyberspace and avoid the pitfalls of being vulnerable to online imposters by learning the basic terms for Internet scamming such as: [Sock puppets](#), [Meat puppets](#), [Astroturfing](#), [False Flags](#), [Front Groups](#), and [Internet Trolls](#). To protect our community, we must be on the lookout for people whose identity exists only in the digital world; this is termed [online reputation](#) and is an obvious indicator of [pseudonymity](#), which is the hallmark of an online personality, who appears to work alone and may operate a front group website.

## Be Wise of the Six Sins

To illustrate how cybercharlatans operate I have taken [TerraChoice's](#) six sins of greenwashing and applied those sins in terms of online red-flag behaviors we should be wary of so we can be astute and discerning community hall consumers.

1. **The Sin of the Hidden Tradeoff** ... A major red flag indicating a possible cybercharlatan is the use of censorship. Be circumspect of online lists, forums and member-based groups where your words, thoughts, ideas and/or interactions between members or list mates are unreasonably moderated. Charlatan list owners will justify blocking posts for the sake of harmony; but the hidden tradeoff will be the sacrifice of full disclosure of pertinent facts. Remember, information is power and without accurate information we can not make our own informed choices. Don't blissfully give away your right to make your own decisions.

**Remember, information is power and without accurate information we can not make our own informed choices. Don't blissfully give away your right to make your own decisions.**

2. **The Sin of No Proof...** Another major red flag of a cybercharlatan is a claim or statement which can not be easily authenticated with facts. Always look for substantiating proof of legitimacy especially if you are giving money, gifts or intellectual property. Bona fide non-profit organizations, such as [Code Pink](#), will display their tax exemption number

on their website. Don't donate money or buy goods and services from a charitable organization, without first obtaining a tax exempt number. Furthermore, a reputable organization will proudly display board members, technical advisors, editors, projects, campaigns, petition signatures, as well as the names and credentials of consulting peers and peer organizations. Do not be convinced that facts don't matter. They do matter, especially to the charlatan, who can only thrive in the absence of your asking for the facts. Thus, knowing the facts is crucial, and so is transparency of process and the open flow of information.

**3. The Sin of Vagueness...** Red flag number three: A claim that is vague is meaningless since it can not be defined or verified. A prime example: "Oh darn, I had that non-profit number, but I can't seem to find it anywhere, let me get back to you on that!" You wouldn't purchase a bottle of shampoo without a label on it; so don't trust a group or website without a label on it. If you are a member of a health or medical website, look for the [Health on the Net Foundation](#) accreditation. Don't trust claims that aren't clear enough to make sense or be understood. One example is, "Yes, all decisions and finances are approved by the board, but I don't have time to share that information." This is a clear example of the sin of vagueness from a cybercharlatan.

**Do not be convinced that facts don't matter. They do matter, especially to the charlatan, who can only thrive in the absence of your asking for the facts. Thus, knowing the facts is crucial, and so is transparency of process, and the open flow of information.**

**4. The Sin of Irrelevance...** This sin is a double-edged sword, and the red flag works both ways for spotting cybercharlatans. Never let a list owner, group, forum, or individual convince you that your questions are not relevant. If an issue matters to you, then insist that your questions are answered or else leave the group or list -- especially, if you are asking for real world information such as a mailing address. On the flip side, don't accept irrelevant information. Be a healthy skeptic and don't fall for conspiracy theories or accusations that don't ring true. Unending tales of high drama, crisis and distress may be camouflage to misdirect individuals and the community from seeking relevant information that will hold value and be illuminating of the character of a person or organization.

**5. The Sin of Lesser of Two Evils...** Another classic tactic of the charlatan greenwasher is to excuse their own bad behavior, such as temper tantrums, irrational rants, or scorched earth policies towards medical experts, peer lists or groups by claiming: "I had no choice. They made me do it!" Or: "I am allowed to be grumpy and irrational because I am ill and I live for my work!" These claims may hold some truth, but draw us away from the real issues and larger challenges. A genuine leader, list owner or forum moderator would not use these methods of persuasion. Don't

**Don't accept bouts of anger and verbal abuse, veiled under the guise of the lesser of two evils. This is frequently a bait-and-switch trick to turn you away from the true source of angst and hide the facts from you.**

accept bouts of anger and verbal abuse, veiled under the guise of the lesser of two evils. This is frequently a bait-and-switch trick to turn you away from the true source of angst and hide the facts from you. Two wrongs still don't make a right in the cyber world or

otherwise.

**6. The Sin of Fibbing...** Ah, this is an easy red flag to recognize from a cybercharlatan or greenwasher: a lie is a lie, is a lie, is a lie. Don't be quick to overlook misrepresentations. Often behind one false flag will lay a web of deceit.

## **Nurturing the Aspen Grove**

Above all else, use your common sense and realize that every one of us will make occasional mistakes, but it is a series of red flags that should make you rightfully question your allegiance to a list, group, forum or organization.

Also, keep in mind there will always be disagreements and conflicting opinions between smart, informed people -- that's politics folks-- and we need to be a part of our own politics; because politics are about who has power and who does not in a civil society. In a working democracy, we don't use weapons to win a battle, we use the power of our thoughts, ideas and words.

Finally, once you have sorted out the astroturf, charlatans, trolls, sock puppets and greenwashers, think of one another as neighbors and give support and encouragement. This is what will make us a real community: when we know where our loyalties lie and who we trust, we will be a source of strength to each other and therefore, a power to be reckoned with.

Lucinda Hodges lives in Montana where she home schools her children, tends her garden, wild crafts herbal remedies, and writes and maintain websites for [Pariah](#) and [Toxic Trains](#).