

Letter to Northern Seminary Staff, Faculty, and Board

From: Tommy Lee [REDACTED]

To: [REDACTED]

Date: Tuesday, March 21, 2023 at 05:17 AM MDT

Dear friends,

It is now 11:30 PM as I write this to you. I am sending this so that you get this in your inboxes first thing in the morning.

I was extremely disappointed by the news of Faye's resignation today. In the last few weeks I have watched and learned from a leader in action. She taught me a lot about being present. I have watched her sit down and hear the concerns of the faculty, staff, and students. She was there and took the time to listen to anyone who wanted to talk. She called me one evening at 9:30 PM to return my call. She was the only person at the Lisle campus and was just wrapping up the day.

I put some thoughts this evening to the staff, faculty, and board of Northern Seminary. PLEASE see attached.

Wyatt, this has gotten ridiculous and has become a great embarrassment to the Seminary. This will one day go down as a case study on leaders failing to lead. We should be doing good work here at the Seminary and for the Gospel but instead we are dealing with grown men who can't get over themselves.

Wyatt, I am disappointed in you. Very disappointed. I expected better. In the last few weeks you have hidden behind a "busy schedule" and nowhere to be found. You let people take the hits and yet you have remained quiet. In a time when your leadership is needed you are not at board meetings or meeting with staff. That is astounding and simply inexcusable. All people want to know is that you are listening and you are trying to understand. You have FAILED miserably. It is time to step down so the school can rebuild. You have disqualified yourself from leadership and I believe everyone knows it including you.

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Letter to Northern Seminary Staff Faculty and Board .pdf
81.3kB

Dear friends and colleagues of Northern,

“The fact that the Board, charged with seeing the best interests of the Seminary, failed to discern those interests has harmed individuals, and the institution... The way the women of the Board have been consistently treated with bullying, talking over, and interrupting, echoes the experience of the letter writers. To be disrespected and disregarded for my heartfelt efforts signals the end to my contributions as a Board member and necessitates my resignation, effective immediately.” - Fay Quanstrom, former Northern Seminary Board Vice Chair

These were the words of the Vice Chair of the Northern Seminary Board, Fay Quanstrom as she resigned from the board yesterday. I have watched Fay visit campus in recent weeks, making herself available to any staff, faculty, and students who wanted to meet. She gave of her time, listened intently to concern and criticism, and led when the Seminary needed her.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the Chairman of the Board, as he did not make himself available to the staff and student body, even when they expressed their deep hurt. His physical absence and tone-deaf official responses were missed opportunities to lead a hurting family through an extraordinarily difficult season.

I am saddened, angry and extremely disappointed by the inaction of the board, as they continue to insist that Bill Shiell did nothing legally wrong. While they were focused solely on what was legal, they ignored Bill’s bullying tactics, contempt and manipulation. In a school where we are training men and women to emulate Jesus as servant LEADERS, what does it say when our own leaders demonstrate an arrogance and blatant disregard for the very value the institution espouses?

We come to work each day expecting to be led by someone who models in words and actions what it means to be a servant of Christ, knowing full well that we are all imperfect and prone to mistakes. However, I have watched our former President demean and manipulate others, and the Board Chairman sit in silence rather than stand up against such behavior. Both the action and inaction are wrong. As the Director of the Grow Center I have the opportunity to work with leaders around the world, teaching about integrity, humility, love for all, and servanthood. What we are hoping our leaders will learn is not what has been displayed by our former President and several members of the board.

As many of the board members have remained silent and have put the legal interests of the entity above the personal welfare of the staff and student body, they have proven themselves unfit to continue leading this organization. The Chairman needs to step up the plate to lead, by being the first to resign, followed by any others who have disqualified themselves through their silence.

Below is an email I sent to Wyatt last week.

Tommy Lee

Wyatt,

I am a contractor and not a formal employee so I know that my words may not bear a lot of weight. But I wanted to write to you, Faye, and Melody (who I report to on the Board) as well as Jason and Lynn.

If I may be so bold as to say that the email sent out this week on your behalf and written by a PR company severely missed the mark as it lacked understanding and awareness for where employees, students, and faculty are. Wyatt, this school needs you to lead, more than ever. You are now seen as the leader and this is the time where we need you to be present to lead, listen, provide morale, and to come alongside the team as the organization is spiraling. This has been building up for the last few years now. I sat there in the staff meeting hearing NEW employees share how they feel demoralized and that they dread coming into the office. It was not an older employee, but a new one.

In the last few weeks Faye has done such a good job being present, talking to people, and just listening. If anything, I think they just want to be heard. From the few years I have been at Northern, I know many have worked hard and love the school, but have grown frustrated by the weakness in leadership that Bill showed. They just want to be heard and Faye has done that.

But there is a role that only you can play. Right now they need to hear from you and they need to see you. Wyatt, I know that you already know this, but it is during these times that leaders shine. It's times like this that leaders must make themselves available, take the hits, and bring confidence to the team. They listen, encourage, and come alongside their team of people. They need to see you and not just hear a statement saying be patient and we are working on it.

May I suggest something to you. I think it will go a LONG way even to send a note personally or BETTER YET come to campus and meet with the staff. They need to hear your words (off the record) that "even though there was nothing Bill did wrong LEGALLY" he clearly made mistakes in leadership and had blind spots which affected the team negatively. They need to hear you say, "I hear you. I see you. I want to understand what you felt because no one should ever feel that way no matter how old you are, the color of your skin, or your sex. We need to continue to address it, improve, and make sure this doesn't happen again. We are not perfect but we will try to do it for the glory of the Gospel. We ask the community to forgive us and come alongside us as we continue to work hard and make amends to be a better family. "

Wyatt, many people need to hear that from you as the leader. I know you will take the hits and the barrage of criticism will come your way. But stand firm, be compassionate, listen, allow them to air their frustrations, and take it. You are our leader, and this school needs you to lead right now. I am asking you to provide the inspiration and hope that I know you can.

Thank you for allowing me to share some words with you.