

American Indian Protocols

"When I was invited to live in a Shoshone community one of the first things I was taught was Indian protocols. Many years have passed since then, and where ever I have traveled among the Native Peoples I have found these protocols to be universal truths. There some variations between tribes so I always make it a rule that when in doubt, ask. Be humble and explain you are learning and want to be respectful. Native people are always happy to teach you." - Phillip Gottfredson

Indian Code of Ethics:

1. Each morning when you wake up and each evening before sleeping, give thanks for the life, for the good things the Creator has given you and others, and the opportunity to grow a little more each day. Give thanks for yesterday's thoughts and actions and for the courage and strength to be a better person.
2. Respect. Respect means "to feel or show honor or esteem for someone or something; to consider the well-being of, or to treat someone or something with deference or courtesy." Showing respect is a basic law of life.
3. Treat every person from the tiniest child to the oldest elder with respect at all times.
4. Special respect should be given to elders, parents, teachers and community leaders.
5. Don't make anyone feel "put down" by you; avoid hurting other hearts as you would avoid a deadly poison.
6. Don't touch anything that belongs to someone else (especially sacred objects) without permission or an understanding between you.
7. Speak in a soft voice, especially when you are with elders, strangers, or others who should be especially respected.
8. Never walk between people who are having a conversation.
9. Treat the earth and all of her aspects as your mother. Show deep respect for mineral world, the plant world, and the animal world. Do nothing to pollute the air or the soil. If others want to destroy our mother, rise up with wisdom to defend her.
10. Show deep respect for the beliefs and religions of others.
11. Listen with courtesy to what other say, even if you feel that what they are saying is worthless.
12. Listen with your heart.
13. Respect the wisdom of the people in council. Once you give an idea to a council or a meeting, it no longer belongs to you.
14. Be truthful at all times and under all conditions.
15. Always treat your guests with honor and consideration. Give your best food, your best blankets, the best part of your house, and your best service to your guests.
16. The hurt of one is the hurt of all, the honor of one is the honor of all.
17. Receive strangers and outsiders with a loving heart and as members of the human family.

18. All the races and tribes in the world are like the different colored flowers of one meadow. All are beautiful. As children of the creator they must all be respected.
19. To serve others, to be of some use to family, community, nation, or the world is one of the main purposes for which human beings have been created.
20. Listen to and follow the guidance given to your heart. Expect guidance to come in many forms: in prayer, in dreams, in times of quite aloneness, and in the words and deeds of wise elders and friends.

Second version author unknown:

Native American Indian Protocol

Non-American Indian people have a poor record of developing relationships with First Nations communities. There may be many specific reasons for this but it boils down to the lack of understanding that protocols exist within First Nations. It should follow then that if you were wanting to work with Native People that you need to make an honest effort to observe and understand their protocol.

American Indian people have traditions that are based on their respect for the Mother Earth. Understanding and respecting Native ways, the protocol that has been developed and in use for thousands of years, is the first step to being able to work together. Protocol is the way to have a meaningful conversation. This is true with every nation and is important all over the world. When proper protocol isn't followed then minds become closed. Non-natives in Canada and the U.S. understand well their own protocol but don't seem to realize that when attempting to work with Native people that the protocol of the Native people must also be addressed and respected. Non-native protocol is well understood by Native people because it is on TV, on radio, in the papers, in the churches, it is everywhere.

Native protocol is not difficult or complicated, it requires only common sense. Knowing that it exists is the way to begin the process. But there isn't just "Indian" people in North America, there are many Nations. Each has a different language, different environment, and a different culture. Begin with a basic understanding of protocol and then realize that there are protocols unique to each nation. There is a common basic protocol that was amongst all tribes but if people aren't even aware of this and they try to accomplish things with Native people and they don't succeed, it is probably because they have botched the initial protocol. Watch, listen, learn and ask about the different ways of the different nations. Above all, be real, don't be false, phony or condescending because if you are you will be spotted a mile away. As you learn these ways, give yourself time to learn and understand them. To say a people's ways are wrong is arrogance and shows an attitude of cultural superiority. As we learn to respect other peoples ways, it helps teach us to respect our own ways more.

Here is just a few examples of some native protocol to be aware of:

Ø Native people feel it is impolite to stare at someone in the eyes. Never walk between people having a conversation

Ø Speak in a gentle voice.

Ø Show respect for the beliefs and traditions of others.

Ø Be truthful at all times and under all conditions.

Ø Native people take what you say literally, what you say is what you mean.

Ø Never have Alcohol around sacred objects as the energy of alcohol is disruptive to positive spiritual energies.

Ø Native people feel that spiritual guidance can come in any form.

Ø Traditional people feel that there is a spirit and life in all the things that have been made by the Creator.

Ø Most native names are considered sacred and should never be made fun of.

Ø Do not touch any type of native looking article without permission whether the person is wearing it or has it in their possession.

Ø You shouldn't whistle at night as many tribes believe that it will bring bad spirits around.

Ø Prayer may be very important to them and there are different ways that people pray.

Ø If they talk about seeing spirits, this is part of the native belief system.

There are many other protocols that could be explained. This partial list is just a guide to help you to gain an understanding on some of the cultural differences to be aware of when working with native people. If you can keep an open mind to cultural differences then you will be able to observe and learn more as you work around native people.

Third advice:

First Nations Protocol- Working with First Nations

by Kakwirakeron and Dave Good

Non-Native environmentalists have a poor record of developing relationships with First Nations communities. There may be many specific reasons for this but it boils down to the lack of understanding that protocols exist within First Nations and that an honest effort must be made to observe them.

First Nation traditions have a foundation that respects Mother Earth and this is why a natural alliance is possible between Native and non-Native environmentalists. Many First Nation territories

are the front-line of environmental crises. Understanding and respecting Native ways, the protocol that has been developed and in use for thousands of years, is the first step towards working together for the environment. Protocol is the way to have a meaningful conversation. This is true with every nation - it is important all over the world. Individuals in business, who don't respect proper protocol, fail in their efforts before they get to the "meat of the issue" because people are turned off. Minds become closed. Non-natives in Canada and the U.S. understand well their own protocol but don't seem to realize that the protocol needs of First Nations must be addressed. Non-native protocol is well understood by Native people because it is on TV, on radio, in the papers, in the churches, it is everywhere.

Native protocol is not difficult or complicated, it requires only commonsense. Knowing that it exists is the way to get to first base. But, there isn't just "Indian" people in North America, there are many nations. Each has a different language, different environment, and a different culture. Begin with a basic understanding of protocol and then realize that there are protocols unique to the different nations. It is very basic, but if people aren't even aware of it and they try to accomplish things with Native people and they don't succeed, it is probably because they have botched the initial protocol. It takes experience of the people you want to talk to and develop a relationship with. This starts with respect for the ways of the community you are visiting. Watch, listen and learn about the different ways of different nations. And, be "real", don't be false, if you are, you'll be spotted a mile away.

Relationships that are possible are deep and fundamental. Helen Forsey offers these thoughts in her article, "Parallels and Alliances - A Non-Native Woman's View", written in October, 1991:

"In building these alliances, we must insist on honestly addressing what is real in each of our lives, expressing and hearing each other's true thoughts and feelings- the pain and anger, the guilt and mistrust, as well as the hope, the warmth and the joy. True respect cannot be built on a foundation of half-truths, of glossing over our differences and difficulties for the sake of some illusory harmony. Reality is too complex, and the urgency of the tasks at hand too pressing. To fight oppression we need all our strengths, all of our varied truths, all of our creativity, all our courage, all our caring. When we lovingly challenge a sister or brother on something they have said or done, it is because we want the connections among us to be strong and durable, and that can only happen if they are based on truth., Sometimes truths are all we have; if we share them with one another, with open hearts and minds, we can render the old divide-and-conquer tactics of oppression obsolete."

The poor record of environmentalists in building alliances with First Nations, as often results from people either not bothering to consult with, or not even realizing that a local community would even have opinions and concerns on activities planned and undertaken. They never even knew to head to first base. This cultural tunnel-vision impairs the whole range and depth of possibilities of alliance building throughout whole social / environmental movement. Once headed in the general direction of first base bring your skills of an open heart and open mind. The first lessons of protocol will follow.

Lorraine Sinclair cautions:

"Environmentalists will often visit First Nation territories and start telling them what to do. Be careful of expectations. Communities are often going through the process of healing. Perhaps they are dealing with problems like alcohol and suicide and simply don't have the extra time to drop what they are doing and act on your recommendations."

Respect the ways and realities of the community you visit. The foundation for an alliance is on sacred ground. One way to begin a conversation on first meeting is to offer a small gift. It is customary to wrap tobacco in a cloth, usually red, yellow, or white, and present it to the person you're meeting. This isn't necessary for everyone you meet; you'll know when it is appropriate. Cedar, Sage and Sweet grass are other offerings used when meeting. Remember also that there may be other appropriate gifts with other nations that this author is not aware of. Learn the ways of the people you meet. The gift is greatly valued when it's not store-bought because you have truly a scarce gift in these modern times. It is important that these gifts were honestly, and naturally taken from Mother Earth. But, even if this isn't possible, please make an attempt. Your efforts will be seen as an honest attempt to communicate.

Each nation has many examples of customary protocol and ceremonies that the honest communicator will learn. Among the Iroquois, when one visits someone else's village or attends a council meeting, a special greeting is made to the host. The ceremony begins: "Where we come from we have Chiefs and they send greetings to your Chief; Where we come from we have Clan Mothers and they send greetings to your Clan Mothers; Where we come from we have men (warriors) and they send greetings to your men; Where we come from we have women and they send greetings to your women; Where we come from we have children and they send greetings to your children." Meetings begin by giving thanks to the sustainers of life - to Mother Earth, the four winds, the sun, the moon, the stars, and then back to the people present.

Always acknowledge the territory you are meeting in- this is true for all nations. Learn who's territory it is before you arrive; if you know little about the culture, the people and their ways, then say so and request instruction. As you learn these ways don't argue them. To say a people's ways are wrong is arrogance and shows an attitude of cultural superiority.

The Canadian Environmental Network (CEN) learned this lesson in the fall of 1992, at their Annual General Assembly, held on Hecla Island in Manitoba. Indigenous representatives were forced to boycott the meeting because the CEN failed to consult local First Nations. Many indigenous representatives were greatly saddened because they truly wanted to participate at the meeting. If the local people had been consulted, the CEN would have discovered, in advance, that a controversy existed over the possibility that Hecla would become a National Park. Each Nation, each territory, has their own cultural identity, their own ceremonies and sacred objects. You may want a photograph of the beautiful arbor you're in, or the dance you are seeing, for your memories, but ask first if it is okay. Don't be afraid of your ignorance- there'll be many specific examples, at least you are showing the willingness to learn.

Suppose you've invited First Nations representatives to your meeting. At the end of the meeting, you offer drinks because you want to socialize. You may have seriously compromised the presence of an Elder, the Bundle-carrier, the traditional person. The alcohol is a bad combination in their presence and their sacred objects. You may have forced them to undertake purification - their medicine is endangered.

This summer promises an historic event in alliance- building: The First Nations Environmental Network looks to formalize affiliation with the Canadian Environmental Network. The model proposed for the alliance is based on the Two-Row Wampum of the Iroquois Confederacy. It represents two canoes traveling side -by - side down the river of life as equals. This kind of agreement has been used for centuries to protect each nation's sovereignty. The Two-Row Wampum signifies an agreement to work together as equal partners; one is not the subject of another. One canoe doesn't steer the other. During storms and dangers each assists the other. The common objective shared is to protect the environment and save it for future generations.

Native people have a proven understanding of their relationship with nature. Their own security has been maintained through centuries of experience. In an Environmental Alliance, Natives can't be left out or assumed ignorant of conservation. It is bitter irony that the colonizers, who have wreaked abuse for generations and now recognizing the problems, present themselves as the ones with the right answers.

Reprinted from "Frontlines," published by the First Nations Environmental Network.

Sulian Stone Eagle

Eskasoni, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia

Canada

INDIAN VALUES, ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS, TOGETHER WITH EDUCATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS.

JOANN SEBASTIAN MORRIS

Values Attitudes and Behaviors

Educational Considerations

1. Cooperation

Cooperation is highly valued. The value placed on cooperation is strongly rooted in the past, when cooperation was necessary for the survival of family and group. Because of strong feelings of group solidarity, competition within the group is rare. There is security in being a member of the group and in not being singled out and placed in a position above or below others. Approved behavior includes improving on and competing with one's own past performance, however. The sense of cooperation is so strong in many tribal communities that democracy means consent by consensus, not by majority rule. Agreement and cooperation among tribal members are all-

important. This value is often at odds with the competitive spirit emphasized in the dominant society.

A common result of the disparity between cooperation and competition is that, under certain circumstances, when a fellow Indian student does not answer a question in class, some Indian children may state they too do not know the answer, even though they might. This practice stems from their noncompetitive culture and concern that other individuals do not lose face.

2. Group Harmony

Emphasis is placed on the group and the importance of maintaining harmony within the group. Most Indians have a low ego level and strive for anonymity. They stress the importance of personal orientation (social harmony) rather than task orientation. The needs of the group are considered over those of the individual. This value is often at variance with the concept of rugged individualism.

One result of the difference between group and individual emphasis is that internal conflict may result since the accent in most schools is generally on work for personal gain, not on group work. The Indian child may not forge ahead as an independent person and may prefer to work with and for the group. Some educators consider this to be behavior that should be discouraged and modified.

3. Modesty

The value of modesty is emphasized. Even when one does well and achieves something, one must remain modest. Boasting and loud behavior that attract attention to oneself are discouraged. Modesty regarding one's physical body is also common among most Indians.

Indian children and their parents may not speak freely of their various accomplishments (e.g. traditional Indian dancing: championships or rodeo riding awards won.) Therefore, non-Indians are generally unaware of special achievements. Regarding the matter of physical modesty, many Indian students experience difficulty and embarrassment in physical education classes and similar classes in which students are required to undress in front of others.

4. Value is placed on respect for an individual's dignity and personal autonomy. People are not meant to be controlled. One is taught not to interfere in the affairs of another. Children are afforded the same respect as adults. Indian parents generally practice noninterference regarding their child's vocation. Indians support the rights of an individual. One does not volunteer advice until it is asked for.

A conflict in these essential values is evident in circumstances in which Indians resist the involvement of outsiders in their affairs. They may resent non-Indian attempts to help and give

advice particularly in personal matters. Forcing opinions and advice on Indian on such things as careers only causes frustration.

5. Placidity is valued, as is the ability to remain quiet and still. Silence is comfortable. Most Indians have few nervous mannerisms. Feelings of discomfort are frequently masked in silence to avoid embarrassment of self or others. When ill at ease, Indians observe in silence while inwardly determining what is expected of them. Indians are generally slow to demonstrate signs of anger or other strong emotions. This value may differ sharply from that of the dominant society, which often values action over inaction.

This conflict in values often results in Indian people being incorrectly viewed as shy, slow, or backward. The silence of some Indians can also be misconstrued as behavior that snubs, ignores, or appears to be sulking.

6. Patience

To have the patience and ability to wait quietly is considered a good quality among Indians. Evidence of this value is apparent in delicate, time-consuming works of art, such as beadwork, quillwork, or sand painting. Patience might not be valued by others who may have been taught "never to allow grass to grow under one's feet."

Educators may press Indian student or parents to make rapid responses and immediate decisions and may become impatient with their slowness and deliberateness of discussion.

7. Generosity

Generosity and sharing are greatly valued. Most Indians freely exchange property and food. The respected person is not one with large savings, but rather one who gives generously. Individual ownership of material property exists but is sublimated. Avarice is strongly discouraged. While the concept of sharing is advanced by most cultures, it may come into conflict with the value placed by the dominant society on individual ownership.

Some educators fail to recognize and utilize the Indian student's desire to share and thus maintain good personal relations with their peers.

8. Indifference to Ownership

Acquiring material goods merely for the sake of ownership of status is not as important as being a good person. This was a value held by many Indians in times past. The person who tried to accumulate goods was often viewed with suspicion or fear. Vestiges of this value are still seen among Indians today who share what little they have, at time to their own detriment. Holding a "give-away" at which blankets, shawls and numerous other items, including money, are publicly given away to honor others is still a common occurrence, even in urban areas. Because of this traditional outlook, Indians tend not to be status conscious in terms of material goods. Upward social mobility within the dominant non-Indian society is not actively sought.

Non-Indians frequently have difficulty understanding and accepting the Indian's lack of interest in acquiring material goods. If the student's family has an unsteady or nonexistent income, educators may incorrectly feel that economic counseling is in order.

9. Indifference to Saving

Traditionally, Indians have not sought to acquire savings accounts, life insurance policies and the like. This attitude results from the past, when nature's bounty provided one's needs. Not all food could be saved, although what meat, fruit or fish that could be preserved by salt curing or drying was saved. Most other needs (e.g., food, clothing, shelter, and land) were provided by nature in abundance, and little need existed to consider saving for the future. In Indian society, where sharing was a way of life, emphasis on saving for one's own benefit was unlikely to be found. This value may be at odds with the dominant culture, which teaches one to forgo present use of time and money for greater satisfactions to come.

Emphasis on the European industrial viewpoint in most educational systems causes frustration and anxiety for the Indian student and parent, since it conflicts sharply with so many other values honored by Indians (sharing, generosity, and so on).

10. Indifference to Work Ethic

The Puritan work ethic is foreign to most Indians. In the past, with nature providing one's needs, little need existed to work just for the sake of working. Since material accumulation was not important, one worked to meet immediate, concrete needs. Adherence to a rigid work schedule was traditionally not an Indian practice. Indians often become frustrated when the work ethic is strongly emphasized.

The practice of assigning homework or in-class work just for the sake of work runs contrary to Indian values. It is important that Indians understand the value behind any work assigned, whether in school or on the job.

11. Moderation in Speech

Talking for the sake of talking is discouraged. In days past in their own society, Indians found it unnecessary to say hello, good-bye, how are you and so on. Even today, many Indians find this type of small talk unimportant. In social interactions Indians emphasize the feeling or emotional component rather than the verbal. Ideas and feelings are conveyed through behavior rather than speech. Many Indians still cover the mouth with the hand while speaking as a sign of respect. Indians often speak slowly, quietly, and deliberately. The power of words is understood: therefore, one speaks carefully, choosing words judiciously.

The difference in the degree of verbosity may create a situation in which the Indian does not have a chance to talk at all. It may also cause non-Indians to view Indians as shy, withdrawn, or disinterested. Indians tend to retreat when someone asks too many questions or presses a

conversation. Because many Indians do not engage in small talk, non-Indians often consider Indians to be unsociable.

12. Careful Listening

Being a good listener is highly valued. Because Indians have developed listening skills they have simultaneously developed a keen sense of perception that quickly detects insincerity. The listening skills are emphasized, since Indian culture was traditionally passed on orally. Storytelling and oral recitation were important means of recounting tribal history and teaching lessons.

Problems may arise if Indian students are taught only in non-Indian ways. Their ability to follow the traditional behavior of remaining quiet and actively listening to others may be affected. This value may be at variance with teaching methods that emphasize speaking over listening and place importance on expressing one's opinion.

13. Careful Observation

Most Indians have sharp observational skills and note fine details. Likewise, nonverbal messages and signals, such as facial expressions, gestures, or different tones of voice, are easily perceived. Indians tend to convey and perceive ideas and feelings through behavior.

The difference between the use of verbal and nonverbal means of communication may cause Indian students and parents to be labeled erroneously as being shy, backward or disinterested. Their keen observational skills are rarely utilized or encouraged.

14. Permissive Child Rearing

Traditional Indian child-rearing practices are labeled permissive in comparison with European standards. This misunderstanding occurs primarily because Indian child rearing is self-exploratory rather than restrictive. Indian children are generally raised in an atmosphere of love. A great deal of attention is lavished on them by a large array of relatives, usually including many surrogate mothers and fathers. The child is usually with relatives in all situations. Indian adults generally lower rather than raise their voices when correcting a child. The Indian child learns to be seen and not heard when adults are present.

In-school conflicts may arise since most educators are taught to value the outgoing child. While an Indian child may be showing respect by responding only when called upon, the teacher may interpret the behavior as backward, indifferent, or even sullen. Teachers may also misinterpret and fail to appreciate the Indian child's lack of need to draw attention, either positive or negative, upon himself or herself.

Comments by Phillip Gottfredson

I respectfully have added a few of my own suggestions I have learned as I have come to know the American Indian Peoples:

Native people are the most giving people I have ever met. And when they do give you something you can be sure it comes from the heart and you did something to earn it. It is good to accept a gift as it is an honor and not a privilege.

When visiting the home of a Native person take a small gift, something you made yourself. If you don't have the skills to make something give them something that is important to you, from your heart. And don't expect anything in return. Remember it's about giving. Or consider the following:

Give a pouch of tobacco. (not cigarettes) The tobacco should be organically grown, no additives. American Spirit is the most popular brand. Tie a piece of red cloth around it. Tobacco is a spiritual plant as is the color red. Tobacco is used in sacred ceremonies.

Or take a couple big bags of groceries of good wholesome food.

When giving a gift ask the recipient for permission before you give it to them, and explain why you want to give them something, what it means to you. Don't be offended if they refuse.

The majority of Indian people I have come to know don't like the word "goodbye." It's too final, means the end. Better to say something like "until we meet again."

Friendships are forever, and Native people are serious about making any such commitment. You earn their respect first, then you walk your talk. Honesty, integrity, kindness, love, respect, wisdom, and humility are seven teachings of the American Indian Peoples.