

Returning to the Circle: Considering Vision and Values in our Leadership

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In our leadership, we have the responsibility to carry forward the spirit of our ancestors. It is not enough to be a program on Tribal lands, operated by the Tribe or designed by Native people to ensure it carries our Tribal values and beliefs. We carry a history of assimilation and oppression that impacts each of us as Native people in different ways. We have been placed in a world where we have adapted many mainstream practices that may have obscured our abilities to see how we might create something from within the vision and teachings of our elders and our ancestors.

We have an opportunity to create projects that carry the vision passed on to us from a long history of strength and beauty. A history that holds women as sacred and children as gifts from the creator. A history that recognizes and honors our interconnected relationships.

Working in ways that reflect who we are as Native people at our essence requires effort on our part. It is important to be thoughtful and intentional in what we create. It will become a part of our community healing. This is no small task. Through our intentionality, we can impact our futures, creating *work* that is grounded in the essence of who we are as indigenous women.

As we draw from our histories/herstories, we know that the circle has been central to our indigenous societies. Elements of a circle society carry the following characteristics:

- 1) Everyone benefits
- 2) There is balance and harmony in all aspects of the society
- 3) Leadership is shared
- 4) Individual skills or knowledge is used

In our leadership, we work in ways that carries the four (4) elements of a circle society forward. We are constantly aware of ourselves within the context of our interconnectedness to the circle and all who sit within it considering power and our relationship to it. This can be challenging because we have been taught from many different sources that power is bad or evil. That it is controlling, especially for those of us working to end violence against women or who have experienced violence themselves. Often our only discussions about power have been in the context of *power and control*, the kind used in violence against women and oppression. As we consider power, we want to remember that power is neutral and it is how we use it that makes it good or bad. We have a responsibility to understand our own power and work to engage it in ways that carry our individual and collective values.

- *What do I know about my own Power?*
- *What do I understand about how I use it?*
- *How do I take responsibility to own and participate in my own power?*

We are responsible for exploring and strengthening our understanding of power in its many forms. Through our expanded understanding, we can more fully engage in embracing our power in ways that enhance the beauty of who we are. As we explore power, we want to look at in some of its different forms:

- Power of knowledge
- Power of expertise
- Power of authority
- Power of leadership
- Power of spirituality
- Power of integrity

What is our experience with it? How has it been used in ways that inspires us? How have we seen it used or used it ourselves in ways that have been controlling or harmful? What lessons have you taken from the different uses of power you have experienced, positive or negative? As we work to understand power, we will expand our understanding of our use of power, what is motivating us to use and begin to engage in actively deciding how we want to use our own power.

Reflecting on our leadership

Once we start to understand what is moving us to use power in the ways we have been using it, then we can move toward using it in ways that moves us in the direction we want to be going. Through our intentionality, we are responsible to be reflective of what we are doing, what we create, how we are making a difference in our community.

Use the following questions to think about how you are operating with *integrity*, who you say you are is reflected in what you do.

- *How does what I am doing reveal the “circle”? What else can I do to reveal the “circle”?*
- *How am I working from my sovereignty? How am I working to protect sovereignty of others?*
- *How does what I am doing reflect our Tribal beliefs and values?*
- *How does this reflect who we are as a people, at our essence?*
- *How does this account for our customs surrounding family and community?*
 - *Surrounding how we view children?*
 - *Surrounding how we view each other?*
- *How am I taking responsibility for expanding my understanding of my indigenous foundation?*

Summary of leadership and power¹

	They lead by	They inspire	They require
1.	Domination, force	Fear of being hurt	Blind obedience
2.	Seduction, making deals	Dependence	Return of favor
3.	Charisma, personal persuasion	A winning attitude	Loyalty, no matter what
4.	Modeling integrity, generating trust	Hope for self and organization	Consistency, honesty
5.	Empowering others, service to others	Love and Service	Self-acceptance, purpose
6.	Wisdom, a way of being	Inner Peace	Anything/everything

Some quotes that might help to frame your thinking about returning to the circle...

BLACK ELK, OGLALA LAKOTA, 1931

"You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles and everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation, and so long as that hoop was unbroken, the people flourished..."

Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round and the earth is round like a ball, and so are the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down in a circle. The moon does the same and both are round

Even the seasons from a great circle in their changing and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood and so it is in everything where power moves."

¹ Excerpt from REAL POWER: Stages of Personal Power in Organizations by Janet O. Hagberg

VICKI DOWNEY, TEWA-TEGUGUE PUEBLO, 1993

"In the beginning, we were given Instructions of how to live. So that's been handed down from generations to generations until now. "This is how to live."

We were told to be good to one another. Respect one another. Take care of each other, as well as ourselves. These are some of our Instructions. As long as we do what we're supposed to do these are the basic important things, then we have no problems. Once we start hating out neighbors and start lying to them and not growing our food but depending on somebody else to grow food, that's when we unbalance our self. That's what the legends, our stories tell us."

OREN LYONS, ONONDAGA, 1977 – FROM AN ADDRESS DELIVERED TO THE UNITED NATIONS...

"Power is not manifested in the human being. True power is in the Creator. If we continue to ignore the message by which we exist and we continue to destroy the source of our lives then our children will suffer....I must warn you that the Creator made us all equal with one another. And not only human beings but all life is equal. The equality of our life is what you must understand and the principles by which you must continue on behalf of the future of this world. Economics and technology may assist you, but they will also destroy you if you don't use the principles of equality. Profit and loss will mean nothing to your future generations..."

I do not see a delegation for the four footed, I see no seat for the Eagles. We forget and we consider ourselves superior, but we are after all a mere part of the Creation. And we must continue to understand where we are And we stand between the mountain and the ant, somewhere and there only, as part and parcel of the Creation. It is our responsibility, since we have been given the minds to take care of these things. The elements and the animals, and the birds, they live in a state of grace. They are absolute, they can do no wrong. It is only we, the two-leggeds, that can do this. And when we do this to our brothers, to our own brothers, then we do the worst in the eyes of the Creator."

BAWDWAY WI DUN/EDWARD BENTON-BENAI, OJIBWAY, 1990

Sovereignty is something that goes in ever-widening circles, beginning with yourself.... If a person can go out into the stream and fish for their needs, if they can do whatever they have to do to provide for those who are dependent on them, then that person is sovereign. Sovereignty isn't something someone gives you. You can't give us our sovereignty. Sovereignty isn't a privilege someone gives you. It's a responsibility you carry inside yourself.