

**“Working Effectively with Tribes”**

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Write me a question you always wanted to ask about American Indians and turn it in to my able assistant. Don't sign your name.

## Introductory Remarks

- Born and raised in southwest Oklahoma. Member of the Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma with strong family attachment to the Cherokee Nation. Married to Choctaw, Ms. Sally A. Bread (Bell) from Miss. with three children, five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.
- Schooling in public schools. College at Northeastern State University, in Tahlequah, OK with a BS in Education, master's in educational administration from OU and a phd in education administration from OU, with a specialty in Indian education, organization, leadership and teacher training.
- 40 years of educational experience with public schools, tribal governments, tribal colleges, business development and college teaching.
- INDIANS are my family. Like family members, each has uniqueness. So diversity among Indians is real and must be acted upon accordingly. The term “Indian” is restrictive in respect to today considering that there are over 500 tribes in this country and each is unique.
- The “history” we read in most cases is a textbook version written by generally, non-Indian individuals. I believe in the value but have always told my students to also believe in the “traditional oral histories” as much as available in today's world.

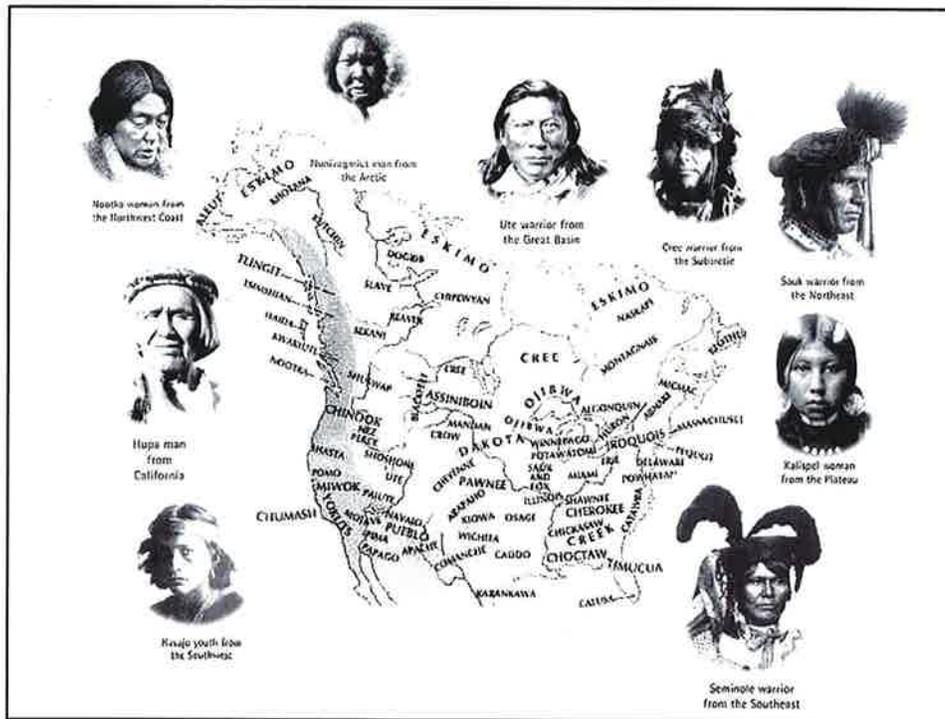
## History of American Indians?

- Limited background statement here with strong sentiment on the “today” rather than the “past” of American Indians.
- Granted...one must have some *understanding* of the past history(ies) in order to *comprehend* today’s and tomorrow’s paths.
- Clichés such as “can’t see the forest because of the trees” or “must see the whole picture, not just the pieces” apply to the **IMAGERY** of American Indians.
- The history of Indians is relevant to two conditions-what is “written” (academic) and what is “said” (oral histories from people).
- I sometime make fun of the written theories of where Indians came from such as the Bering Strait (coming into the now North American continent from the Bering Strait region) theory saying the Indians “couldn’t get their “bearings straight” and got lost.....

## Settlement, Resettlement, Settlement.....

- Spanish influence
- British influence
- French influence
- Warfare, climate, treaties, U.S. military forced tribes to move/migrate/resettle in different regions.





## Policy Trends Impacting Indian Peoples

- Elimination
- Converting via religious groups
- Educating (killing the Indian, saving the man)
- Civilization
- Assimilation
- Termination
- Sovereignty evolution
- Self-Determination
- Self-Governance





## Evolution of Sovereignty

<u>Form of Sovereignty</u>	<u>Timing</u>	<u>Scope</u>
• As an original matter	Inherent	All Native nations
• As a legal matter	1820-30	All Native nations
• As a policy matter	1975	Federally recognized tribes
• As a practical matter	1970s	Self-selected tribes



## Working With Tribes

- Know your tribes—research the history, **culture, communities, government, spirit**. Don't be too aggressive in letting them know that you are acquainted with who they are and where they are from. Try to stay away from “stereotypical” communication/behavior when working with related tribal entities. They will sense you out and determine if you are trustworthy and respectful.

## Imagery

- American Indian **IMAGERY** is frozen in time. You must thaw this image by becoming familiar with those areas I mention and establish an aura of “trust” with the tribal people.
- Today, Indian people include all colors, quantum of blood, degree of cultural familiarity, degree of educational attainment, customs, etc., etc.....Get the past COWBOY AND INDIAN IMAGERY out of the spirit and use your contemporary awareness in doing business.
- Most Indian tribal people probably will not trust you initially. You must build this trust by respecting them today for what they are, not for what they were!

## Stereotypical IMAGERY

- Indians are lovers (aye).
- All Indians are quiet/shy.
- Indians are not competitive.
- All Indians live on reservations
- All Indians do not pay taxes.
- All Indians are not educated.
- All Indians receive checks from the government.
- All Indians are stoic, cold, and dumb. “ugh”
- All Indians wear feathers and live in teepees.
- All Indians are rich because of gaming. | wished |



## Culture Today

- **Language** -Today most younger tribal members do not speak their language fluently. Check out the fluency of language factor within the tribe you are to work with for it has some relevancy to how effective you communicate (English/tribal language).
- **Customs** -Do not impose your customs. Some tribes are traditional in their meetings/communications and some are formal, according to euro customs. Some are a mix of the two.
- **Behavior/Attitude**-Inquire before you meet with tribal people on what is the appropriate behavior, especially if you are in their domain. Check your ego at the door and assume you are working with a consensus setting in terms of negotiating. Wait and let others speak. Being quiet is not a characteristic of shyness or docility, it is a matter of "thinking" before one speaks, especially among the older tribal members. Try not to be quick in forming your opinions on the intelligence of tribal people. Sometimes wisdom is stronger than intelligence. Both of these together are strong among our Indian communities in these modern times.
- **Values**-Generosity, respect for all, caring, group before individual, sharing...as much as appropriate without giving away the family house.
- **Ceremony**-We are a ceremonious body of people. Every meeting I have had with a group of representative Indian people began with ceremony and ended with ceremony, whether prayer, song, speech, music, tobacco, sweet grass, smudging, or just plain holding hands and being quiet.
- **History** (written and oral)-read some of their tribal history on the internet before you go to meet. If possible, ask some available elders about the history.
- **RESPECT**-If you don't know what and how to do this you might ask at this time.

## Obstacles in Communicating with Tribal Communities: *Commonalities*

- **WE** versus **ME** syndrome
  - Even today many culturally based Indian people are focused more on the whole rather than a part. Attention is on the tribal community not the individual. When being introduced to the Native community determine the degree of this value before commencing with planning/strategizing and researching.
  - English language versus tribal language or what I call "slanguage" (local dialect of English or Tribal language) which is a mixture of English and Tribal language.
  - Dress

## Communities

- Still traditional even if there is poverty!
- Still have an extended family structure/values spirit.
- Time concept is all about “doing what needs to be done when it needs to be done” rather than by the clock. Although not as grounded today as in the past this is still an issue for people working with tribal entities.



## Government

- Know what type of characteristics make up their government and the organization of their government.
- Know the terms used in addressing tribal officials and use them accordingly.
- Be acquainted with tribal offices and corresponding officials.

## Spirit

- To what extent is there a community spirit in the tribal entity?
- How proud are they?



## Degree of Tribal Language Factor

Determine to what degree the community/government uses their tribal language, sometimes this comes into play in engaging representatives.

## “Tone” of communication

- Paternalistic
- Patronizing
- Superior
- Subordinate
- Equal
- Respectful
- Sincere



## Strategies for Effective Partnerships with Tribes

- Networking using communication software (tribal listserv/e-mail/business network, web pages, electronic mail, etc.)
- On-going dialogue and education with and about (both ways)
- Internship/practicum with/for one another.
- Research clearinghouse/data bases
- Recognition/Awards activities
- Mutual trust and respect
- Monthly visitations, not meetings.
- Bonding activities (professional, cultural, personal)
- WATCH THE DISEASE I CALL TRIBAL POLITICS!! Try to include everyone where appropriate.



## Non-Verbal Communication Skills

- Eye to Eye contact is not as prevalent .
- Handshake is important.
- Watch your “posture” for it says more than you realize.



## Important Traits to Demonstrate

- Respect
- Open-mindedness
- Sincere
- Humor (know how and when to use it)
- Indian slang
- Hand gestures
- Sign Language



## Culture

- Conducting Meetings informally but formally (?)
- Letting others speak
- Be patient and not verbose.

