

Working Effectively With American Indians

Part 2: Finding the Pattern



American Indian cultures share values that are different from the dominant society

◆ Nature & Environment

◆ Time

◆ Groups/Tribe

◆ Other People

◆ Family

◆ Self

◆ Children

◆ Spiritual Beliefs

◆ Health & Medicine

◆ Death & Funeral

◆ Communications

Nature & Environment

- ◆ **Nature is the controlling element**
- ◆ **Mother Nature will provide or replenish**
- ◆ **The earth should be:**
 - **cared for**
 - **treated with respect**
 - **preserved for future generations**
- ◆ **Take only what is needed for life from the natural environment**

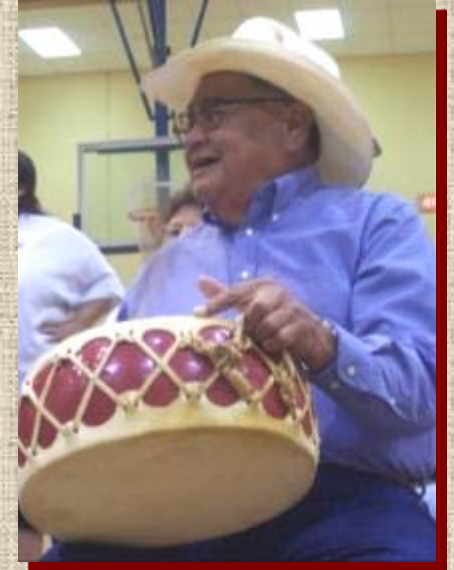
Live in Harmony with Nature

**Different from the dominant society's
need to control nature**



Time Orientation

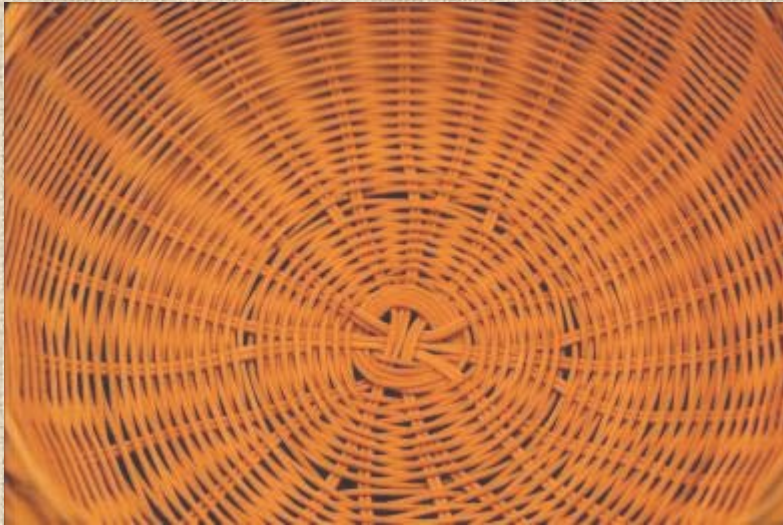
- ◆ Present orientation
- ◆ More concerned about relationships and meeting the needs of others than “clock time”
- ◆ Time is without beginning or end
- ◆ Saving for the future is not highly valued



American Indian view of time is vastly different from the dominant society's linear view of time.



Life consists of interrelated cycles, rather than a series of cause and effect relationships



Celebrations Observe Nature's Cycles

- ◆ Seasons
- ◆ Passage into adulthood
- ◆ Birth and death



Relations with People

- ◆ The group is more important than the individual
 - Interdependency between individuals
 - ◆ Responsibility to the tribe
 - ◆ Work for the well being of self and other tribal members
- ◆ People should be discreet and humble

Relations with People continued...

- ◆ **Respect personal boundaries**
 - **Noninterference is valued**
 - **Don't ask too many questions**
 - **Don't impose your wishes on others**

Relations with Tribe/Group

- ◆ Value cooperation over competition
- ◆ Sharing
 - Group effort is valued over on individuals recognition
 - Person who self-aggrandizes is criticized or humbled
 - Difficult to accept positive feedback, if it sets them above their group
- ◆ Sharing
 - No form of indebtedness attached to sharing

American Indian values contrast with dominant society that tends to value youth, knowledge, fame and fortune.



Most Respected American Indian Individuals

- ◆ The person who brings honor to the group
- ◆ Elders – age and wisdom
 - value wisdom more than knowledge
- ◆ People with internal strengths
(vs. “high achievers”)



Relations with Family

- ◆ **Strong kinship ties**
- ◆ **Matriarchal and patriarchal systems**
- ◆ **Extended family**
 - **Interdependent network of people who nurture one another**
 - **Primary social support unit**
 - **Child rearing responsibilities and role modeling**

Relations with Family continued...

- ◆ **Respect for elders**
- ◆ **Family concern may take precedence over the individual**

Relations with Self

- ◆ **Harmony and balance - -**
 - **Spiritual**
 - **Social**
 - **Emotional**
 - **Physical**
- ◆ **Value individual autonomy**



Relations with Children

- ◆ Children are highly valued
 - Celebrated in naming ceremonies, at dances and pow-wows
- ◆ Children are given freedom to develop at their own pace
- ◆ Parents keep children close
- ◆ Everyone has responsibilities for parenting



Spiritual Beliefs

- ◆ **Spiritual beliefs are integrated into way of living**
 - **Distinct way of living and interpreting life**
 - **Health and medicine**
 - **“Bad” happenings = punishment**
 - **“Good” happenings = reward**
- ◆ **Tobacco**
- ◆ **Four directions have spiritual significance**



Health and Medicine

- ◆ Mind, body and spirit cannot be separated
 - Illness results from being out of balance with nature
 - ◆ Natural & supernatural influences
- ◆ Treat perceived cause, not symptoms



Health and Medicine continued...

- ◆ **Traditional medicines and cures**
 - Ceremonies and plans
 - Herbal medicine
 - Purifying sweat baths
 - Foods sacred to the particular tribe
- ◆ **Elderly relatives advise**



Death and Funerals

- ◆ Family and community responsibilities
- ◆ Timing of funerals
- ◆ Importance of funerals
- ◆ Communications about death and funerals



Communications

- ◆ **Avoid intense eye contact**
 - **Disrespectful, impolite, hostile**
- ◆ **Handshakes: important gesture**
 - **Too vigorous = aggressiveness**
 - **Limit other touching**
- ◆ **Silence, pauses in conversation**
- ◆ **Use formal titles, especially for elders**
- ◆ **Language is oral tradition, not written**



Values

American Indian

Anglo-American

Fate _____ **Personal control**

Traditional _____ **Change**

Human interaction dominates _____ **Time dominates**

Elders/leaders revered _____ **Human equality**

Group welfare _____ **Individualism/privacy**

Values continued...

American Indian

Anglo-American

Cooperation ————— **Competition**

Present orientation ————— **Future orientation**

“Being” orientation ————— **Action/goal/work orientation**

Formality ————— **Informality**

Indirectness/ritual ————— **Directness/openness**

Spiritualism/detachment ————— **Materialism**

Key Points

- ◆ **Emphasis on present happenings rather than future events**
- ◆ **Practice traditional medicine along side receiving western medicine care view time in cycles (circular) rather than linear**
- ◆ **Silence is ok in communication**
- ◆ **Group recognition is valued**
- ◆ **Elders are highly respected for their wisdom**