

SPIRIT LAKE CONSULTING, INC. / (701) 351-2175



THE COURAGE TO KNOW

BY DR. ERICH LONGIE

Our first course, Introduction to Ethical Issues on Indian Reservations is in progress. So far 53 tribal members have signed up for this course and it is a race to the finish with twenty of them already done or nearly so. The course is 5-8 hours long and gives an overview on ethical issues existing on Indian Reservations today. The answers to the first assignment are... well expected.

Dirty Laundry: It is clear from the answers tribal members are well aware of the ethical issues on their reservations. The course gave them an opportunity to organize their thoughts and express themselves in writing. Future courses will teach them strategies how to change themselves (first) and then help others to change.

Of course, some asked why I am airing our dirty laundry out for the entire world to see. Those individuals also don't believe there are as many unethical work habits as I point out. Well, just like the original surveys that we used to start the project, the responses in the Intro course validate what I (now we) have been saying all along, unethical work place habits are rampant on most Indian reservations.

Tom Peters, the famous management consultant, once said that while all the computers and other technology that we now have give us the "power to know", what we are sorely lacking in business, and society as a whole, is the "will to know". I would put it more strongly than that. We often lack the "courage to know". Deep down, we realize there are problems but we don't want to face what we know.

HOW CHANGE HAPPENS:

FIRST WE THINK.
THEN WE BELIEVE.
THEN WE ACT.

COURAGE TO KNOW (CONTINUED)

Why these courses? Why five of them?

The answer to the first question is rooted in our study involving an earlier course (Tribal Leaders With Character) as well as twenty years experience providing consulting services to reservations in the Great Plains. In our previous research, participants indicated that falsifying time cards, hiring relatives and other violations had become so common that these were accepted as standard practice, however, we found that, over time, a training program combined with on-line interaction could change those perceptions. Based on these results, we expanded the Tribal Leaders with Character Course to a new course, Introduction to Ethical Issues on Indian Reservations.



Historically, Native American societies were governed by a set of ethical traditions ...

In a meeting at Belcourt I had the opportunity to visit with North Dakota House Minority Leader Merle Boucher who stated to me that support for additional funding for reservation programs must be tied to additional accountability. Other state and tribal political leaders privately agreed with Representative Boucher's public statement - they perceived a connection between competent, ethical managers and support for funding reservation programs.

Historically, Native American societies were governed by a set of ethical traditions; an individual would be ostracized for stealing, for not doing his or her share in the work of the tribe. The reservation system and Indian boarding school destroyed many of these traditions. We have always had some ethical people, but the next two courses offered by the Tribal Leaders Institute will focus on bringing more ethical systems back to the reservation.

The Effective & Ethical Management courses will introduce participants to the types of policies and procedures that can prevent the five most common ethical infractions identified in our reservation surveys. Ethics by Design is a follow-up to both the Effective and Ethical Management course and the Introduction to Ethics. While the management course discusses individual policies and procedures that can prevent problems, e.g., basic accounting standards for cash, indirect costs, the Ethics by Design course introduces the concept of effective, ethical systems. The electronic filing cabinet section of the website is particularly important for these two courses as it includes samples of personnel handbooks, forms, written policies and procedures, Excel files for expense and time accounting and more.

Why do we need these courses? What is different about the reservation? Off the reservation, a new city planner, for example, enters the position with a college degree, most likely a masters, some experience in positions preparing him or her for the job and an office full of forms, binders documenting policies, maybe on-line versions on the local intranet. The reservation is different. A new tribal planner is often appointed following an election. He or she may have good intentions of changing the unethical patterns of the

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past. However, if this planner has a college degree, it is almost certainly in an unrelated area, such as Indian Studies or Social Work, with no previous related experience. There are very few written resources to use in managing the department or trying to effect any change. Tribal Leaders Institute's Electronic Filing cabinet will eventually include multiple examples of documents administrators need to implement real changes. These will be obtained by permission from both other tribes recognized as having exemplary management and from non-tribal organizations. Course web pages will have links to the electronic filing cabinet and include assignments where participants modify these resources for use in their own organizations.

[You don't need to wait - if you have materials you would like to contribute, please email these to ericstev@spiritlakeconsulting.com .]

The final two courses are being created at the request of tribal leaders. Because ethical infractions and related problems, such as absenteeism, are endemic to the reservation, entry-level workers have not been exposed to more functional models of work ethic. A unique part of the Tribal Leaders Institute design is the manner in which culture is incorporated. A common factor across reservations is a pride in being Indian. These are the individuals who chose not to move off their homelands to be assimilated. In both the entry-level and introductory courses, Native American history and cultural values are emphasized; generosity, courage, honesty and perseverance. Workplace ethics are framed within the context of those cultural values. When an employee repeatedly fails to come to work, takes supplies for personal use or charges time he didn't work, that is not "the way it has always been" or "showing the system". It is stealing from the tribe. It is the opposite of our traditional values of giving generously and being known for our word. When Chief Joseph said "I will fight no more forever," and laid down his weapons, the war was over because he gave his word. Our challenge to those new employees is, if you want to say you are an Indian, act Indian and that means being known for honesty, generosity, integrity and perseverance.

How the courses work

Each course section has at least one "Your turn" case study on which participants reflect and respond and/or a "Learn More" link to documents available for full-text retrieval in the Virtual Library. The responses to the case studies are sent to the course moderator and posted on the Spirit Lake

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Forum. Identifying information is removed and these are posted anonymously. Thus, tribal members are exposed to the ethical views of others without the need for taking a public stand. Editing prior to posting prevents attacks on individual council members or program directors to be posted anonymously on a public forum. The purpose of the forum is to discuss ethics, not attack individuals. One finding our surveys documented repeatedly – none of these ethical issues are limited to a single or a few individuals. Throughout the courses will be links to a Tribal Leaders Council forum on ethical questions, to allow community input, and a greatly expanded section on by-standers. We strongly encourage individuals who are enrolled in one of the courses to post your comments on the Forum. Any members of the public are welcome to post as well. You can see it for yourself here:

<http://www.spiritlakeconsulting.com/tribal/>

Eventually the Virtual Library “bookshelves” will include three components; pages with links for full-text retrieval of public domain documents and others that the project has received permission to reproduce, “Virtual Field Trips” which are external links to documents on the web for free resources we do not have permission to reproduce and a “bookstore” with reviews and links to recommended texts available for purchase. The Virtual Library also includes a “Media room” with podcasts and videoclips. As with the print resources, both downloads and links to free and commercial resources will be provided.

<http://www.spiritlakeconsulting.com/TLI/library/>

What is different this time?

Many of the governing bodies starting with the tribal council are filled by individuals who are all in elected or appointed positions. The largest employers are tribal industries, with hiring, promotion and salaries subject to these governing board influences. Spirit Lake Consulting, Inc. as a privately owned corporation, albeit owned by a tribal members has a greater ability to develop these courses free from local political influences. I give some credit for the positive feedback and encouragement from participants in the course to the freedom from local political influences, for example,

“This is a great “think,” you are doing. I just jumped into with both moccasins.”

The early responses to our case study questions in the introduction indicate we have a promising model for effective ethics training of tribal employees. It's not just me seeing a problem, but tribal members from many reservations and many levels. We have program directors,

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administrators, managers, professionals and even two tribal council members enrolled in the current session of the Introduction to Reservation Ethics course. Their participation in the course signals an interest in improving workplace ethics through the highest level of tribal government. The course participants have much greater ability to make change happen than if the concern for ethical systems and behavior existed only at the entry level.

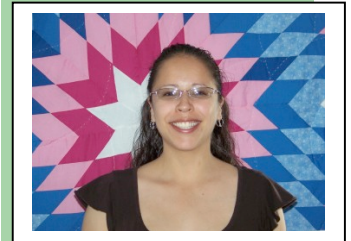
What will be the outcome if our other ethics courses are as promising as the results from the introductory course? Simply put, improving ethical workplace behavior will improve every tribal members life. Why?

Well, the tribal council members would sure be happy if minor ethical violations would decrease. This would allow them to handle “more important” issue such as strategic planning.

In *Rebuilding Native Nations: Strategies for Governance and Development* author Miriam Jorgensen assert, “Elected leadership serves primarily as a distributor of resources (p 8, 2007).” He goes on to say:

“The demands on tribal leaders are immense. Much of their time is taken up with day-to-day management, constituent service, and the urgent search for more federal or other resources. And much is simply fire fighting: dealing with the latest funding crisis, the latest threat to sovereignty, the latest programmatic problem, and so forth. Small wonder that the orientation of tribal leadership is often short term. More than one tribal leader has said, in effect, “Who has time for strategic thinking?” (p. 9, 2007)

With an ethical work force tribal leaders will have time to spend on economic development, which in turn will mean more jobs for tribal members and a better standard of living for the reservation. However, ultimately, change will not happen unless YOU, not your neighbor, not your co-worker, not your supervisor, but you practice the values of courage, honesty, perseverance and generosity throughout your work day.



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BETTER”***

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LEARN MORE !

Here are some references we recommend:

Eagly, A.H., & Chaiken, S. (1993). *The psychology of attitudes*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.

Jorgensen, M. (Ed.). (2007). *Rebuilding Native Nations: Strategies for Governance and Development*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press

On the web

“Attitudes can be changed through persuasion.” This is pretty much the premise upon which the Tribal Leaders Institute is based. To learn more about social psychology theories of attitude and behavior change, we recommend this article on wikipedia

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attitude_\(psychology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Attitude_(psychology))

COMING SOON ...

Maybe you'd prefer to take your classes in person instead of on-line. Good news! We have sessions of the Introduction to Reservation Ethics classes coming up in January and February on the Spirit Lake and Turtle Mountain reservations. These sessions will have some hands-on computer time in the labs with our computer-based training, but greatly improved as a result of the suggestions we received from the first 50 participants. You will also have the opportunity to engage in live discussion with your colleagues.

Contact Dr. Erich Longie for ericstev@spiritlakeconsulting.com or, for our Turtle Mountain site, contact Willie Davis at sharkwheels@yahoo.com

The next course, Ethical and Effective Management will be available both on-line and on-site in Spring, 2009.