



Wisdom of the Elders

Volunteer Manual

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www.wisdomoftheelders.org/volunteer

INTRODUCTION

Wisdom of the Elders, Inc. (WOTE) shares the richness of American Indian oral history and cultural arts with all generations of tribal people. We strive to honor the role of elders within our culture as our mentors and advisors.

The WOTE community recognizes the importance of preserving indigenous knowledge, oral tradition and storytelling. Some of our volunteers learn about us from attending one of our annual events. Others find us on the web and listen to our radio programming online.

Wherever and however you discovered us, there seems to be a common thread. You were moved by the story. You felt a deep part of yourself reach out and meet us. And this connection has grown into a desire to explore our organization in a deeper way.

WHO WE ARE

Wisdom of the Elders, Inc. is an American Indian 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation located in Portland, Oregon. Incorporated in 1993 with a mission of cultural preservation, education and race reconciliation, we communicate these messages to diverse public audiences through public radio and website production, educational materials and public events, working in collaboration with diverse cultural, artistic and educational organizations.

WOTE isn't just a non-profit organization. It's a community. Our Board of Directors represents a diverse collection of tribal affiliations and other cultures. Our ages span three generations. We are here because we feel called to be here. We work together and share food together. We play together and pray together. We honor Creator and learn through our elders how to honor all of creation.

WHAT WE DO

WOTE records and shares the wisdom of indigenous cultural values that will strengthen ourselves, our families, our communities, and our world. We record and preserve the oral history and cultural arts of exemplary tribal elders, storytellers, historians, environmentalists, song carriers, and artists. We provide this wisdom and knowledge from our website at www.wisdomoftheelders.org and in public programs and other projects in collaboration with like-minded organizations and institutions.

We also share this wisdom and knowledge with public audiences of all cultures by exemplifying our highest cultural values of respect and honor, tolerance and forgiveness, and generosity and sharing. We strive to overcome inequality and other forms of oppression by transcending it and serving as an example to others that this work is not only possible, but also fulfilling and rewarding.

WOTE produces the American Indian national public radio series, *Wisdom of the Elders Radio*, its companion website and classroom-friendly curriculum based upon the radio segments. We also recently formed the Northwest Indian Storytellers Association, which presents an annual storytelling festival, symposium and apprenticeship program.

In our 15-year history, we have sponsored a remarkable number of public cultural events with a handful of dedicated volunteers. It is important to our mission and our work that we continue to reach out to volunteers and ask them to help us with one of our projects.

WHY WE DO IT

WOTE's mission of race reconciliation motivates us to share indigenous cultural values and other essential teachings with those of other cultures who recognize its value for building unity and harmony in families and communities. We focus upon restoring principles of justice to ones' life, family and community by sharing the wisdom of indigenous cultural values and spotlighting exemplary role models to serve as examples to younger generations.

We are encouraged that today's Oregon citizens are growing increasingly tolerant and accepting of our state's multi-cultural and inter-generational composition and are becoming more interested in tribal history and cultural arts. Some are recognizing that there

are aspects of these ways that are missing in their lives and want to follow the direction of wise indigenous elders. But they don't have access to those elders. We exist to provide that missing link—this connection—through our storytelling programs, events and gatherings.

TRADITIONAL CULTURAL VALUES

We learn about indigenous cultural values through our elders who are our living museums of these ways of respect and honor. Teachings are passed down from generation to generation, usually in the oral tradition. The WOTE community follows the teachings of our founder, the late Martin High Bear. He had a vision called The Seven Commandments of the Sacred Buffalo Calf Maiden. He spent most of his life teaching that to people of all colors according to the instructions given to him by the Spirit World. These teachings are shared with the community at our gatherings, and new volunteers will have the opportunity to learn them.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteers are given the opportunity to offer their skills and experience to support WOTE projects and public cultural events.

Currently, WOTE has two active working groups: Capacity-building and Fundraising. These groups are complementary in their efforts and are central to the success of realizing the mission. Each working group meets four

times a year in schedule with our quarterly board meetings, and between meetings each group organizes over email and phone to accomplish its goals.

Within the Capacity-building working group, volunteers help with event design, planning and publicity. Our goal is to increase numbers of public audiences by preparing and sending media releases, announcements and posters to promote storytelling workshops, festivals and other events to the media and the public.

Within the Fundraising working group, volunteers support a number of efforts aimed at generating income for the work that the organization is undertaking. Volunteers assist in the success of our Friends of Wisdom of the Elders (FoWOTE) membership program, build and update our donor base and help in the process of writing grants to fulfill specific projects of WOTE.

Volunteers sometimes attend monthly WOTE Tiosopaye events where they can learn how indigenous cultural values can strengthen their lives mentally, spiritually, physically and emotionally. Volunteers who demonstrate their capacity to support WOTE will have an opportunity to transition to Board leadership.

As a Board member, volunteers are given more responsibility for assuring that the operations of the organization continue and expand in ways that align with the mission. Board members also provide guidance for newer members and offer mentorship for the future leaders of WOTE.

GETTING INVOLVED

After you complete the on-line volunteer form on our web page, we will contact you and discuss more specifically what your role might be with WOTE. The information you provide will help us in finding the team that best fits your interests and skills. Feel free to use the available space on this form to offer skills and experience that you think might be valuable to the work of this organization.

Every new volunteer will be invited to our Friends of Wisdom of the Elders Celebration, a seasonal event where our wider community enjoys good food, great company and a bit of recognition for individual contributions. Here you will meet our diverse community and learn more about our projects and the people behind them. These celebrations are also an opportunity to meet the WOTE Board members and share visions for our future as we walk together in this great journey.



**WOTE's Guiding Principles:
The Seven Laws (or Commandments)
of the Sacred Buffalo Calf Maiden
In the words of WOTE's founder,
Martin High Bear**

And it was when our ancestors got this Pipe that there came the Seven Laws of God. The Seven Commandments was told to them by visions. So the Indian people were created under the Seven Commandments and this was the way it was handed down from generation to generation among the Red Man.

So these Seven Commandments was handed down to me when I was up on the hill four days and four nights. And this is why different people wanted to tape me. So they taped the Seven Directions of God's Laws. Some people called it the Seven Commandments. These are laws from God, the Creator. We call Him Great Spirit. And I explained what that means beside Christianity's Ten Commandments. We teach these to people. And so we are so much closer to God because we have our culture strong.

So I shall recite them as the Buffalo Maid that brought the sacred Calf Pipe from the Great Spirit. I'll try to explain a little about what these seven really mean and see if you people can understand and study it. They might be talking about you people.

**THE FIRST COMMANDMENT:
WICO'ZANNI: THE PEOPLE SHALL
LIVE WITH HEALTH**

The first teaching is: The people shall live with health. The Seven Commandments always started from health. People back years ago, many moons ago, used to live with health. That was the old way back in the old days.

People were healthy. They ate fresh off of Mother Earth. They ate from the buffalo where the meat was fresh. They drink the holy water from this spiritual island with health, breathing nice clear air. Nothing was there that they had to look for because God created everything for them to live with. That's the way our people lived two, three, four, five thousand years ago. They lived under God's instructions. They prayed 365 days out of a year.

And a lot of us, when we get up, we still pray to God. Thank him for yesterday. Thank him for last night, "I had a nice rest. Grandfather. Thank you a lot." And this is the way, I guess, He knew who out of a family would live this life and would be strong enough to take it.

And this is where they started with the visions and dreams that had come to these holy people, the medicine people. And they studied those dreams and visions. It was explained to them and so they passed the word on to one another about the health of the people. They were pretty healthy. No disease of no kind. If there was any, there was medicine people and medicine in these herbs to heal each other.

**THE SECOND COMMANDMENT:
WICO'ICAGE: THE PEOPLE SHALL
LIVE FROM GENERATION TO
GENERATION**

They said there shall be generation after generation of the people. This is the second commandment. And so that is the way the Great Spirit has created the Indian people on this island. A lot of things have been handed down from generation to generation. And so things were here before. The Seven Commandments that He has handed down, these commandments were here before, maybe ten thousand years ago. This is the way the people lived. This is the way the people were.

The miracle that has always happened to us families, and they respect it very much and are thankful to God that this miracle happened, is our children. The babies born from a woman, formed into a child and come on earth: That's the miracle. And so this is why this miracle works in different ways. And this spiritual power is still on earth in this way.

God never misses a thing. Everything He puts out to His children. You are all his children and so He put them all out so you can use it, generation after generation. That is why, today, you are here. That comes under the second law of God.

And we need to figure out ourselves where we come from, who we are. And so these are the things that we have to understand. We're all old enough. We are not little children anymore. Today is the seventh generation. This is why I've always said, "Take care of your children, the miracle that God has given to you."

And this is why we always talk about it, not for ourselves, but for the young people and into the "unborn" who aren't here yet. And so this is very important to us.

**THE THIRD COMMANDMENT: INILA:
THE PEOPLE SHALL LIVE WITH
QUIETNESS**

Remember one of our commandments is quietness. Whoever says anything to you, cusses you up, don't pay no attention to them. They are just words. Don't let it hurt your feelings. And whoever threatens you, listen to them. And when he gets through putting these words out, walk around him, for he's telling on himself on a lot of things. These are the things that have been handed down to us generation after generation.

This is why people live in harmony. They lived with one mind. And this is why today, we try to bring that back to the young people. And so we use that word "quietness." This is something that is very important to you people. Face the problems. Live with quietness, because the young people are the ones going to have to hit these problems.

During my travels I've been places where I was called names. Christians called me 'devil worshiper,' but I never say a word. One day the mistake will show up. But if I argue back, I am just helping them, helping them do what they think I am. And so these are the things that we often talk about.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT: WI'YUSKIN: THE PEOPLE SHALL LIVE WITH HAPPINESS

The Fourth Commandment in our Indian religion is to make people happy, or you can say happiness. They're all happy. When I was growing up, you didn't have to have money to live. My grandparents lived about six miles out of town. They survived off of Mother Earth and so there was nothing that they had to go to town for. I never was in town. I'm always out in the country.

Back in the old days, when I was growing up, we went out to pick wild fruit. I used to go out with my grandmother and pick June berries, turnips. We would go out and pick wild turnips. She'd braid them, dry them out. She'd take dried meat, berries... Fall would come and they would butcher. Maybe they'd butcher two cows and they'd get two or three older families to come out and camp around. They'd jerk and dry this meat on teepee poles. They'd dry it out, put it in boxes and store it away. That's the way they'd keep their meat. Wintertime comes, they never went hungry. That's the way they survived off of Mother Earth. So this is the way I grew up. Nobody starved. Nobody seen hard times. Everybody was happy. So this is why I honor and respect everything, because I was taught from the time I was your age, maybe smaller. I lived with it.

Thousands of years ago, there are as many as two, three thousand living in one big tribe, one band. The big bands were like one great big family. They are all happy. When they talked to each other, they make that sound. There's happiness in that speech. There's

happiness in what they talk about. People didn't have nothing to worry about. This is the way they lived. They like to make people feel good so that they can live with this health.

So try to be happy. The old people used to come out of the tipi and say "Aho, Tunkasila. Thank you for everything. Pilamiyalo." They prayed to Him right away. Meet the day with a good smile. When the darkness comes, people always say the darkness is the holiest part, especially at midnight, when they turn the day into a new day. They always say that's the holiest part of the night. Ask a spiritual leader, medicine man, about a lot of these things and he will tell you what that meaning is, so that you can understand. That is the way to get the help. So it is very important today, living in our everyday lives.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT: OKICIYAPO: THE PEOPLE SHALL HELP ONE ANOTHER

Now we come to the Fifth Commandment: The people shall help one another. People in them olden days used to help each others day in and day out. That's a very important thing. Anybody need help, they all help 'em. So they helped each others with food, or any kind of help they can. They all pitched in and helped each others. Whatever anyone has to do, they all share. If one was sick and in need of help, or somebody getting hurt, they was all one big happy family. So that's why they looked up to these Seven Commandments. That's the way they lived.

So I say to everybody, think about the people, your friends, your relatives, before you think about yourself. Think about them. No matter what color, we are supposed to be here on this island to help one another. Anybody need help, they all share and help 'em. That's the main important thing.

But today, the world over, people live thinking about themselves but not others. A helping hand, this helping hand...Today, that's gone. Instead, they make it miserable. Someone can struggle with doing something here and they'll all go by 'em. They won't even try to stop to help the guy out. They're not sure how to help, so instead, they live in their little world with a fence around them. They don't let nobody in. They can go out, but don't let nobody in. I'm thinking that is a poor system.

No one else can make it miserable for you. Just yourself makes life miserable. And so all these ways, today, it's too modern. We are His children, but a lot of us don't behave. And I think a lot of people don't respect others. We forgot a lot of good things. A lot of good things have passed by us. So that is one of the things we have to study up on - what things have happened.

So help one another. Share and help one another. Respect them. This is one of the things that was taught really heavy to us medicine people and to everybody. And so these are the things we often talk about when we spiritual advise people. It isn't what we are. We're not supposed to be proud of what we are as medicine people. But we are supposed to be humble, live in harmony, respect, honor, and share. The most

important one is to share and help one another.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT: WO'WAS'AKE: THE PEOPLE SHALL LIVE WITH POWER

So then came the Power, the Sixth Commandment: The people shall live with power. They had the spirit power in them at all times, day and night. This is what the Great Spirit handed down to the Indian people. Our ancestors were powerful people because they were healthy. Jump back to the First Commandment. They lived with health. They was strong. They had good water. They had good food, nice fresh air. They were on the move all the time, running with the good nice winds. And they got power from God. They have a good standing with God because they prayed to Him. Like I always said, God's power has no beginning and it has no end.

And they got power from God. They have a good standing with God because they prayed to Him. Like I always said, God's power has no beginning and it has no end.

We always say today that when our ancestors were living, they lived a beautiful life compared to what we are living today. And so you know, our ways are different. In the old days when our ancestors lived, they were all together living in a big band. They had all the tipis. Always in the center is where the chief is and that's where they all have the council fires. Everything that was said was memorized in their minds so people never forget. What they talk about, they listen. What they have heard, they go home with it and study it

to see what they meant by these words. We haven't got no books with no pages. There was no pencils.

So they studied the great powers that God handed them. It took them many years. They had to search for it. And then they found the power. And they lived with this power, but not the full power. Some of it. So this was what they worked with. That's the way our ancestors lived in a big family under the Seven Commandments that God has given us.

They were pretty powerful. They were holy and spiritual people. They had everything they wanted and they thanked the Grandfathers for everything. And also they had the power through the Pipe that was handed down to them from the Great Spirit.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT: YUO'NIHANYA NA WO'ONSILA HONOR AND RESPECT

The last one: Respect and honor. The people, they respect one another. That's the seventh one. The Indian people in them days, they were kind to each others like brothers and sisters. It is one of the big traditional ways that God showed the people to live. So today, we're here to kind of speak out a little about these things, to tell about the Seven Commandments, how people lived back in the old days.

The richest person that's walking on Mother Earth today is the one that has friends and lives with harmony with others, with respect and pitiness for others. That's the richest person that living today. So this is why I say we all

honor one another, just like the spirits that brought the Calf Pipe to us back home in South Dakota.

This Commandment meant kindness. People pity each other and show their respect to one another. They honor. That's the way the old people lived thousands of years ago. They all lived in the same method. So this is why all the people, maybe we can go clear back ten thousand years maybe. They all lived the same way. Because God created everything here on earth. The people shared alike. So this is one of the big traditional ways that God showed the people to live.

Respect and honor is very important. Respect is one of the Seven Commandments that we have. This is the way our ancestors lived. So this is why I have always spoken to the people that we respect the creation of God, what God has given to us.

God has handed down to us a religion. And this is a true religion we have here today - the Indian religion. This religion we have belongs here and this is what we work with. So this is why we respect this religion structure. So it never was changed. Nothing was ever changed. But religion is different in different parts of the world. The other religions have come in here and we have to respect it because it's part of God's work.