

# Communicating with Indigenous people through a dual lens

Sarah Thomas and Deneka Michaud

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**Listen to understand.  
Absorb the teachings.  
Know when to ask.**

- When the opportunity arises to hear from elders or Indigenous peoples:
  - Listen to understand.
  - Don't listen to respond.
  - It isn't a conversation. Your role is to be a sponge and absorb the information.
  - You can take away the information. Reflect. And then do additional proactive learning to deepen what you heard.
- Don't expect that because someone is Indigenous that they are going to teach you.
- People with lived experience react differently to events and information. Knowing the right time to ask questions comes through relationship building.
  - Build the relationships first.
  - Do whole body listening (words, body language, tone, etc.) to read whether the person would like to share information with you.
- Learning is ongoing. Be proactive. Read. Do research online. Learn as much as you can on your own.

# Engaging respectfully and authentically.

- Engagement (in the professional communications sense) can be quite different in Indigenous communities than Western communities.
- First, build relationships prior to a project or event. Don't enter the relationship simply because you "need" to for a project.
- Engage early. Go beyond consultation. Go beyond collaboration. Form true partnerships.
- Enter relationship building with humility. Just because as a professional communicator you may have the Comms degree or decades of Comms experience, doesn't mean you know what is best.
  - Don't tell Indigenous communities how they should be communicated/engaged with.
  - Indigenous people should inform you how they want to be communicated with; how engagement with their community will work best. Listen. Ask if needed, and then listen.

# Protocol

- Always make protocol a priority.
- By taking the time to build meaningful relationships, protocol knowledge will be entrusted to you.
  - This may occur overtly, or by being invited to experiencing it. The latter is more likely, and a more powerful learning experience.
- You must be invited in. Don't invite yourself to events, ceremony, etc.
  - If an event is public (ex: Pow wow), by all means take that opportunity and attend.
- Protocols are different (different areas in Canada, different occasions).
  - Learn from the local Nation what their protocols are. They need to lead.

# Events

- Don't get stuck on scripted events.
  - Your job is to get the right people in the room.
- Don't get stuck on specific timelines.
  - Allow the events to flow through the protocol organically.
    - Protocol such as witnessing depend on who is in the room and what the energy is. Witnessing may involve dozens of people with speeches; taking a fair bit of time. Or it could be a handful of people without speaking, which is quite quick.
  - Just because an event is organically evolving, doesn't mean it is disorganized. The event is occurring as it was meant to.

Traditional land acknowledgements are very important. Always do them to start events.

- Use traditional spelling of the Nation names.
- Use traditional pronunciation.
  - Learn the traditional name of the Nation and how to say it. Practice.
  - Do research online (watch videos where Nation members say their Nation's name).
  - Through your relationships, ask a Nation member how to say it properly.

# Videos. Audio clips. Writing.

- Place audio clips into digital materials (ex: in a blog post, on a website), recorded by Nation members, so others also learn proper pronunciation.
- In video, if people would like to speak their traditional language, support them to do so. Then, place English subtitles.
- Capitalization:
  - *Elements of Indigenous Style*, by Gregory Younging.
  - Identify Indigenous people, rights and culture with capitals. This demonstrates importance.
  - Don't be afraid to break CP Style to ensure Indigenous elements are capitalized and given respect.
- Storytelling:
  - Don't tell Indigenous people's stories. Support them to tell their own stories.
  - How to facilitate Indigenous storytelling?
    - Ask people if/how they would like to tell their stories.
    - Embed those telling the stories into the editing process. Whether written, audio or video, they should review several times and sign off on the final product.

# Commitment



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- Commit to learning. Not because you have to for work. Because you want to to support Indigenous Peoples.
- Research on your own.
- Be honoured and listen when being taught. This is a special occurrence.