



Kwakwaka'wakw Leadership Principles

The Kwakwaka'wakw Leadership Principles are key values, principles, and ideas selected to support hereditary leaders (men and women) in their pursuit to fulfill their roles and responsibilities as leaders of their families and 'na'mima. These are not exhaustive and are presented as a beginning step toward traditional knowledge and knowledge transfer.

1. Awi'na'kola – “To be One with heaven, air, land and sea, and everything in it.”

A leader must be concerned about worldview, cultural perspective, and cultural orientation. We must focus our leadership on relationships and reciprocity. We take for nature and give back our gratitude. In this way, we model a way of being in the world that demonstrates we are all part of the web of life, together, not separate. By knowing all living things are connected, including the water, the plants, the lands we occupy, and all human beings, everything is of value and has a purpose. We treat them special. We need to be grateful for the opportunity to express fellowship.

2. 'Namała – “Oneness on your face.”

The “initiated” or “trained” understands the meaning of namała. They see it as a practice, a way of being in the world. They follow a path laid down by our old Kwakwaka'wakw chiefs. They understand these ancestors carried this mindset, which set actions toward oneness. Further, this wisdom was shown to them at birth and matured as they aged. This mentorship was taught by their parents and grandparents and was embedded in the language and gestures. Words like 'na'mima...people of one kind, we are 'nam'gamukw....one tribe, namwiyut, we are all one structured the thinking of young and fresh minds.

Meeting rituals guided leaders to choose a style of meeting that was inclusive, collaborative, and transparent. Every voice mattered. All concerns were heard, and solutions were considered. Like the stars above, an earthly constellation of family members helped the leader to learn, grow and be accountable.

3. Maya'xalapa - Respect each other

To a chief, matriarch, and knowledge keeper, “To respect each other” is demonstrated through actions and words. We first learn to respect ourselves and model this to others. Humility guides the formation of respect, holding us accountable for our beliefs, values and actions. If we are kind to ourselves, we can be kind to others. If we are truthful to ourselves, we can be truthful to others. If we can be generous to ourselves, we can be generous to others. If we see all living things as part of our family, we see others in this way, as family, as loved ones, as worthy of our respect so that it will be. This foundational leadership principle is important to our success.



4. Gawala ɣa ɥamattala - How to lead by example.

To lead by example is to be aware of your potential to influence others and your ability to navigate the culture, your own and other's learning, measure your performance, and motivate others. This kind of self-location enables the chief to be reflective and connect to the needs of the family, 'na'mima and people of the community. Being humble, kind, inclusive and transparent is important in your position as a chief or matriarch. We, as leaders, are not expected to know everything, so asking others for help, advice, and direction is an important quality. Cultural advisors played an important role in the leadership of the 'na'mima.

5. Nɔnwakola - Discussing things to produce the right solutions.

Inviting people to discuss the needs of their 'na'mima and community is a powerful way to solve problems. The old chiefs and matriarchs worked to draw wisdom to the house floor for millennia. Everyone in the house was considered a vessel for wisdom and leadership. Both men and women were viewed in this light. Our leaders met around food, song, and story and shared ideas and needs. A chief (host) provided food from his 'na'mima territory and gave generously. He did not hold back. Feast songs were sung, and a story was shared to set the tone for the discussions. Everyone was heard. Reflection on what was said was an important part of the meeting process. Sometimes, the reflection was for a couple of days. Then, decisions were made.

6. Daɣa ɣa ik noɣe - Carry a good heart.

When a leader carries a good heart, he/she is warm, welcoming and understanding. A good heart means the leader is working from a place of love. They hold a high level of curiosity, openness, and willingness to understand what is needed, being called for fully, and understood. Heart wisdom is special; the leader is tuned into intuition and calmness and can feel what is right and proper. This heart warrior is unafraid to be vulnerable, to show emotion, and to be open and sensitive. Being vulnerable is not being weak. It is being truthful and is a courageous act.

7. Saɳaɳa - To be whole.

A leader's goal in life is to be a whole person. This is an awakened state of mental, emotional, and spiritual consciousness; here, all his/her faculties are firing, working and available as this leader navigates the duties of a community authority, warrior-protector, healer, treasurer and economist. He is a leader responsible for his people, family, 'na'mima, lands, and resources. It has been said that "a leader knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way. More than anything, this kind of leader empowers his/her family, 'na'mima members, so each can reach their leadership potential. To be whole is to model wholeness, truth, opportunity and possibility. In this way, there is hope, faith, promise and trust.

8. Gawalapa - Working together.

Working together builds community and fosters a sense of partnership and fellowship. Like our ancestors who paddled a community canoe together, they learned to work in sync, share the load, and be a part of a collective effort to focus on a destination. When they got tired, they dug down deep and did their best. They drew on their ancestors' character embodied in the songs they sang. The paddlers had a responsibility to one another. Today, we have a responsibility to lift one another and work together. When we see the wisdom in each community member, we help raise their self-esteem and confidence.

