

Practicing Peacemaking: Lessons from the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace

The Great Law of Peace is the spiritual and political foundation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy that provides a framework on how to cultivate harmony internally, relationally and politically. These tools are woven into the fabric of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and offer guidance for responsible and restorative relating.

History

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy—formed by the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca approximately 800-1,000 years ago—is **one of the oldest participatory democracies in the world**. Guided by the Great Law of Peace, the Confederacy established a system of governance rooted in unity, consensus, and collective responsibility. Its principles influenced early American political thought and was the framework for the U.S. Constitution, as acknowledged by a 1988 U.S. Senate Resolution and other evidence.

Peacemaking Tools Inspired by the Great Law

Good Mind: Release personal bias, grief, anger, pride, or jealousy to access clear thinking, deep listening, and honorable communication for decisions that prioritize collective well-being.

Consensus: Engage in decision-making through dialogue and patience. Consensus requires mutual understanding rather than majority rule, supporting outcomes that reflect the collective voice.

Condolence & Healing: Recognize that our personal inner states directly affects our communal and political states. Tend to grief and conflict as necessary processes for restoring clarity, dignity, and connection within an individual or community.

Responsibility > Power: Leadership is defined by accountability and service, not authority. Leaders are expected to act with humility, emotional resilience, and sustained commitment to the people.

Balance : The Great Law upholds balance by recognizing the authority and innate wisdom of women (live givers) to install or remove leadership and steward the continuity of the people. This system reflects a broader commitment to shared power, community accountability, and honoring diverse forms of knowing.

Inquires

- How can we ground ourselves (personally and collectively) so that our work, communities, and visions are rooted in collective wellness and become more immune to individual corruption?
- What practices would support us (personally and collectively) to enter shared spaces with clarity, compassion, vulnerability and respect?
- How can we recognize that our inner intelligences (emotional, mental, and spiritual) are responsibilities to carry, develop, and use for the well-being of the whole?

Relevant Resources

Haudenosaunee (Mohawk / Kanyen'kehà:ka)

Thanksgiving Address:

https://americanindian.si.edu/environment/pdf/01_02_thanksgiving_address.pdf

The Great Law of Peace (a brief) Transcription :

<https://sctribe.com/sites/default/files/2022-10/Great-Law-of-Peace.pdf>

ECOLOGICAL GOVERNANCE

Peacemaking in practice



1. WHO GETS BLAMED?

When things go wrong, the blame gets placed at the center of the group. All accept their part in it.

2. WHO MAKES THE DECISIONS?

Each person has a key role, and their responsibility to that role necessitates being direct and truthful.



3. WHOSE PERSPECTIVES MATTER?

Each person has an equal chance to share their perspective on ideas, brainstorming and solutions.



4. WHAT PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES DO I HAVE?

Each person in a leadership circle is responsible for their own wellness, care and nervous system management.



5. HOW DO WE CONSIDER THE NATURAL WORLD IN BUSINESS DECISIONS?

One person can carry the role of being the voice of the nature in all decisions.





SAMPLE MEETING AGENDA

Peacemaking in practice

PREPARING FOR THE MEETING

- Prepare an agenda and share with all in advance, if possible
- Choose your facilitator (either you or someone else) who is ready to do that role
- Select any ideas or issues that need to be addressed and share what will specifically be addressed in advance in the agenda so all meeting attendees are prepared and can be fully present (informed consent)
- Select an opening (poem, song, breath activity, somatic practice)

SAMPLE AGENDA

- Opening
- Agreements (chosen by the group)
- Reports (based on roles and responsibilities)
- Regular topics
- Issues circle (time for a new idea to be brainstormed, or a true problem to be solved)
 - Identify the issue (formal round)
 - Discussion (open round)
 - Solve (formal round)
- Commitments round (who will do what by when?)
- Closing

Ideas on how to do a round:

- Time sharing: no one's voice is any more or less important
- Everyone takes a turn, going around in a circle (can pass if necessary): Everyone's voice matters. so use a talking piece to help folks remember who is speaking.
- Listen for understanding - listen when you are not speaking.
- Honor your team's contributions. *Consider that the leader goes last in each round, not to comment on others, but to add what may have been missed in the shares.*

Relevant resources;

Traction: Get a grip on your business by Gino Wickman
<https://www.maijawest.com/matriarch-makeover-library>