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module summary

This module will introduce the foundational role of relationships in Indigenous worldview, how they are conceptualized and Indigenous methodology, both formal and informal, for building relationships. You will gain strategies and principles for building respectful relationships with Indigenous organizations and communities.

Building Relationships Part 1: Lessons from Lewis

“Let us put our minds together to see
what kind of a future we can build”

– Chief Sitting Bull, Lakota Elder



video summary

(47:18 minutes)

Lewis shares some of the lessons he has learned (some the hard way) through his lifetime of building bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in different capacities. He describes four relationship cornerstones - consistency, respectfulness, reciprocity and responsiveness - that must happen for the relationship to be sustained over time. Lewis talks about the importance of Ceremony and positioning ourselves in the place of the learner to build better relationships and answers questions about practical steps to take to build stronger bonds between communities, organizations and individuals.



key concepts

- Art and Ceremony of Relationship Building
- Principles of Treaty Relations
- Respectfulness, the Spirit and Intent of Relationship Building
- Consistency and Creating Opportunity
- Responsiveness and Rhythm
- Reciprocity and Celebration
- Open and Honest Dialogue
- Story as Methodology
- Seeking Solutions
- Being a Learner
- Creativity
- Role of Elders
- Elected Leaders
- Natural Community Leaders

“ We could not be without being in relationship with everything that surrounds us and is within us. Our reality, our ontology is the relationships.

– Wilson (2008)

“ The beginner’s mind is the mind of compassion. When our mind is compassionate, it is boundless.”

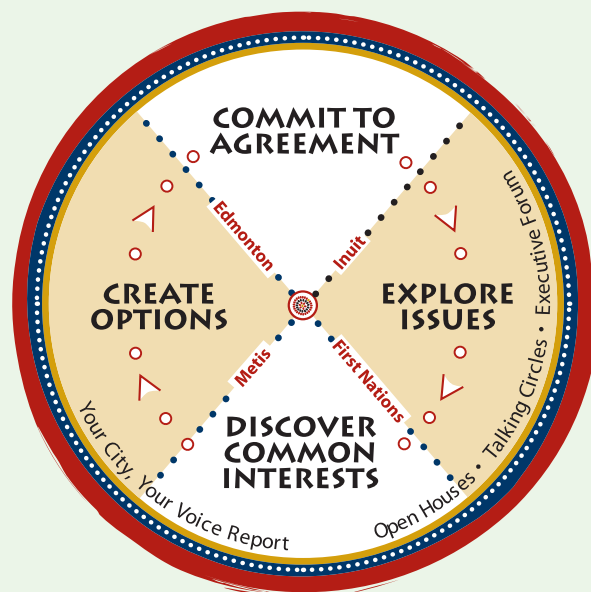
– Shunryu Suzuki

Relationships are the cornerstone of how we relate to the world. They play a major role in how we define ourselves and the world around us. “We could not be without being in relationship with everything that surrounds us and is within us. Our reality, our ontology is the relationships” (Wilson 2008). They can build us up or tear us down. There are many unspoken rules around how we build relationship not only with other individuals, communities and organizations but more importantly the relationship we have with ourselves and the land around us.

In Indigenous worldview we do not see ourselves as separate from the land and we honor that relationship through our songs, stories and Ceremonies. When we actively engage with the songs, stories and Ceremonies we learn how we are all connected to the world around us, they teach us to be in better relationship with ourselves so that we can be in better relationships with those around us. Relationships flow much smoother when we can be our authentic self, when we don’t have to pretend, we have all the answers or are experts. Being our authentic selves allows for us to show our humanness and make mistakes, it allows for us to ask questions and to learn other ways of knowing and being. When we are open to learning the teachers will come, it may not always be in the human form but rather in the things around us, when we take the time to go and sit in the bush or by the mountains, watching children play or the animals at work, there are lessons in all living things and when we take the time to watch and listen we learn.

When we see ourselves as learners we will always be learning because we will find the lessons in every situation. As helpers it is essential to always be learning about more effective ways to work with people. More and more agencies are becoming “trauma informed” and using trauma informed practice to better relate to victims and survivors of abuse. The more we understand how trauma effects brain development and adult functioning, the more we also know that there are ways to create new pathways in the brains of children, adults and even seniors through relationships and ceremony. For example, drumming has been shown to promote healing at a neurological level (Perry 2006). Rhythmic movement like swinging, dancing or clapping games learning a new language, word games, storytelling and singing are all ways to promote healthy brains at every age.

The famous words from Chief Sitting Bull quoted at the beginning of this module teach us how important it is to put our knowledge together so that we see the whole picture. We know that when we can do this, we are truly able to move forward in a meaningful way. Every community has a leader, either an elected politician or a natural leader who people go to when they need to get things done. Many families have matriarchs, when we can connect to both types of leaders; we have a greater chance of moving forward towards a common goal. There are currently numerous Indigenous organizations throughout Alberta that would be able to assist you in seeking out the people you may need. Through the work of these Indigenous organizations and with the help of technology, we have better access to resources to guide us in ways of delivering services while utilizing Indigenous knowledge. One way is utilizing Elders, which not only builds relationships but also aid in how best to use Indigenous knowledge to work in a respectful and collaborative way. Working with Indigenous organizations, like your local Alberta Native Friendship Center can help you connect with an Elder that has knowledge that is helpful in serving women, children and senior survivors.



Methodology used to develop the Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Accord



Chief Sitting Bull retrieved from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:En-chief-sitting-bull.jpg>

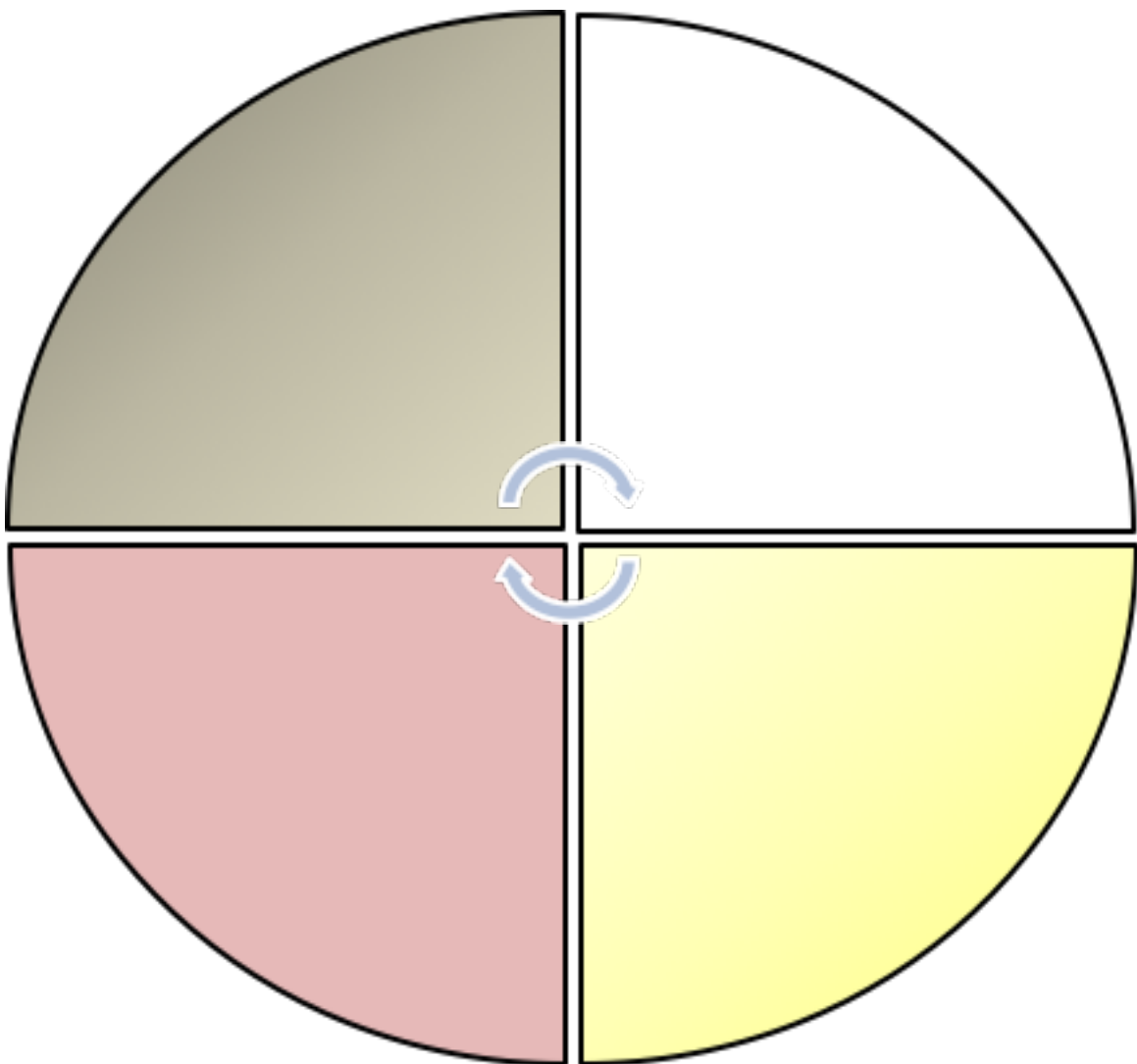
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Individual Self-Reflection Questions for Relationships Lessons from Lewis

Using the medicine wheel below identify the ways you honour and support the four aspects of relationships in the work you do with women, children, families or seniors. Write those on the inside of the circle. Now think about what you would like to do more of and write those on the outside of the circle. This can be a reminder of how you would like to grow your circle of practice.

Body

Mind



Emotions

Spirit

What does being a learner mean to you? How can you create opportunities for dialogue, story sharing and learning in your work?

How do you already practice the four cornerstones of relationship building in your work with those you serve in the shelter and within the community you serve? What would you like to do better?

	What I already do well	What I would like to do better
Consistency		
Respectfulness		
Reciprocity		
Responsiveness		

What stood out most for you from Lewis’ experience with the Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Dialogue process? What part of this process can you bring into your work?

What 'cultural rub points' have you experienced in your work? How did you notice, respond and learn from them? What strategies will you use when you encounter them in the future?

What the phrase “the process is the product” mean to you? How can you focus on slowing down and centering the process in your work?

What was your most important take-way from this video?

How will this knowledge inform your work going forward?

Staff Sharing Circle Discussion Questions for Relationships Lessons from Lewis

Group Brainstorm - Draw a Medicine Wheel with body, mind, spirit, and emotion sections and ask the group what are some ways to honour and support the different parts of relationships we have in the work we do?

Lewis focuses on the importance of dialogue and story to build common ground, to learn about each other and to build trust in relationships. Think of a time in your personal or professional life when you experienced a transformative dialogue or story. What conditions made that dialogue/ story possible? How can we create those conditions in our work?

How does our organization already practice the four cornerstones of consistency, respectfulness, reciprocity and responsiveness in our work with Indigenous organizations and communities? What could we do better?

What stood out most for you from Lewis' experience with the Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Dialogue process? What can our organization learn from what Lewis described?

What 'cultural rub points' have you noticed in the work we do? Do we have effective strategies for noticing, responding and learning from them? What strategies can we use when we encounter them in the future?

What the phrase “the process is the product” mean to you? How can we focus on slowing down and centering the process in our work?

What are some questions you still have? How can we find the answers?

What was your most important take-away from this video?

How will this knowledge inform your work going forward?

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Women's Sharing Circle Discussion Questions for Relationships Lessons from Lewis

Group Brainstorm - Draw a Medicine Wheel with the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional parts and ask the group what are some ways to honour and support the different aspects of their relationships? Ex. What are some ways you honour the physical part of a relationship? Possible answers might be shaking hands, hugging, exercise, wiping away tears.

Lewis focuses on the importance of dialogue and story to build common ground, to teach each other and to build trust in relationships. Have you ever experienced the power of dialogue or story? What made it so impactful?

How can you try to bring the four principles of relationship building – consistency, respect, reciprocity, responsiveness - into some of your most important relationships? (yourself, your children, your family or community, your helpers, etc.).

What 'cultural rub points' have you noticed in that have made your time in shelter more challenging? What might smooth out some of these rub points?

What the phrase "the process is the product" mean to you?

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References

The Your City, Your Voice Report on the Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Dialogue (2006. City of Edmonton)

https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/PDF/YCYV_report.pdf

Report on the process of the EUAD, what was shared in the Talking Circles, a summary of the key themes and the plan for next steps.

Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Accord (2006. City of Edmonton)

<https://www.edmonton.ca/documents/UrbanAboriginalAccord.pdf>

Full text of the Accord created through the Dialogue process.

Research is Ceremony Indigenous Research Methods

(2008. Wilson, Shawn)

https://epubs.scu.edu.au/gnibi_pubs/17/

Applying Principles of Neurodevelopment to Clinical Work with Maltreated and Traumatized Children (2006. Perry, Bruce)

https://childtrauma.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Perry-Bruce-neurosequentialmodel_06.pdf

Bruce Perry's research paper outlining the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics

Further Learning Materials:

Dakota 38 (2012. SmoothFeather Productions) Run time: 1:18:10

<http://www.smoothfeather.com/dakota38>

Film documenting the journey of one man's dream to honor and acknowledge the ordered hanging of 38 Indigenous men, by then president Abraham Lincoln in 1862. It was created in line with Native healing practice to encourage reconciliation.

