



Differences between traditional Aboriginal cultures and mainstream Western culture¹

TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Community is the foremost of all values
Knowledge transmitted orally; storytelling traditions
The present is the dominant tense
The world is understood mythically
Goals are met with patience
Ownership is often communal
Gifts are regarded as social glue
Work is often motivated by group need
Aging is a source of wisdom
Eye contact is thought over-assertive
Silences are acceptable anywhere
Assertiveness is non-communal
Listening skills are prized
Soft spoken words carry farthest
Nodding signifies understanding
Handshake is soft, signaling no threat
Collective decisions are consensual
A faith in harmony with nature
Family is extended family
Responds to praise of the group

MAINSTREAM/WESTERN CULTURE

Individualism is the foremost value
Tradition of printing and literacy
The future tense is dominant
The world is understood scientifically
Goals are met with aggressive effort
Ownership is reward for hard work
Gifts are regarded as holiday issues
Work is motivated by ambition
Aging is decay and loss
Eye contact is part of conversation
Silences are a waste of time
Assertiveness is a basic social skill
Communication skills are prized
Emphasis carries the day
Nodding signifies agreement
Handshake is firm, assertive
Collective decisions are put to a vote
A faith in scientific control of nature
Family is nuclear family
Responds to praise of the individual

¹ Aboriginal Human Resource Council (2007), *Differences between traditional Aboriginal cultures and mainstream Western culture*; Retrieved March 18, 2009, from <http://www.aboriginalhr.ca/en/resources/getstarted/cultures>