



# Wellbriety!

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*Two Learning  
Articles*

Don Coyhis on *Declare Healing, not War*  
and

D. J. Vanas on *Breaking the Silence*



*It's Autumn, 2006!*

*Don't Forget...*

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Wellbriety Movement  
National Conference

*The Wellbriety  
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*Youth, Families, &  
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# Declare Healing, Not War

## On alcohol and other drugs

by Don Coyhis,  
Founder and President of White Bison, Inc.

**As** White Bison and the Wellbriety movement continue the wellness journey into the new 16-year cycle that we are now in, we are becoming aware of the language we must use and the power of words and phrases. We are told that every word has a spirit and intent behind it. Each word has a spiritual meaning behind it. It is the spirit of the word where the power comes from. Each word is a spiritual instruction to the Great Mystery. Each word or phrase is a prayer and a request.



Don Coyhis

When we say the word out loud or in our thoughts, we are making a request. The Great Mystery responds. As we travel on the Wellbriety journey, we need to be aware of what we are asking for and to understand the relationship between the word and the spiritual instruction behind it.

For example, if we call our youth “high risk” youth, there is a spiritual meaning to those words. Then the spiritual world helps us to see

our youth in this manner. So we will tend to see the bad they are doing and build a blind spot to their actions when they do good. If we think this way, we will consider ourselves “to be right” when our youth act out in negative ways. But it’s really a self-fulfilling prophecy because of how we think.

What would happen if we called the youth “At Promise”

instead of “At Risk”? Then we would see the youth growing and getting better. The words we use have a spiritual meaning and

give an instruction to the spiritual world. We need to be aware of the words the dominant culture uses and decide if we want to use their words to call on the spiritual powers in the way those words do.

The world we currently live in and have lived in for a number of years in the past, seems to have a consciousness of “declaring war.” When certain things go out of harmony, then war is declared as a way to implement a solution. In the substance abuse and misuse

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community, the person who does this is often called a Drug Czar. When the Drug Czar declares war, then funding becomes available for everyone to declare war. This way of thinking and acting from the past has given us these wars: War on Drugs!! War on Poverty!! War on Terrorism!! The culture Wars!! And now, the War on Meth!!

As Native people, we need to consider, spiritually, what this instruction is asking for and what response the spiritual world is likely to give us. We need to ask, what is the spirit and intent behind this instruction? What are we asking the Great Mystery to respond with?

When we say “ Declare War on Meth...” we are actually asking the spiritual world to bring forth the forces of meth and surface all the issues that will make the war possible. Some of these include drug pushers, chemicals, users, distributors, violent resistance, programs to track the enemy and its resources, troop movements, predicting where the enemy will attack next, satellite tracking efforts, scare tactics, and so on. We can see that war begets war! Declaring war attracts the enemy and creates a consciousness that is just the opposite of what we want. The spiritual world is responding exactly to the request/instruction that we asked for. So, lets say we change the request and say *Declare Healing on Meth*. Then the spiritual world will bring forth all things to fulfill the request for healing.

If we declare healing on this problem of drugs and alcohol that we have, and that’s our focus over this next stage of our Wellbriety journey together, you, the grassroots people are

going to tell us some things. You are going to call on the ancestors who are going to speak to you. The songs you learn to sing are going to speak to you. Participating in Wellbriety talking circles will help new ideas to flow in. Somebody will say something over here that will trigger something over there.

Working the 12 Steps in our cultural ways will become an act of healing. Making programs like *Sons of Tradition* and *Daughters of Tradition* available to our youth will encourage them to be “At Promise,” and not at risk. Bringing *Families of Tradition* circles into our homes will be a great act of prevention through a healing commitment and family activity. Some of us will declare healing on meth, alcohol and other drugs by coming forward to organize and be part of a *Warrior*

*Down* group right at home. *Warrior Down* will provide protection for our people who come home after a time in prison or from a stay in a treatment center.

Our youth have high rates of suicide attempts and suicides. We shouldn’t try to declare war on suicide but we can think *healing, not war* about suicide prevention. We can find out about the *No More Fallen Feathers* approach, whose purpose is to put a safety net under our youth and help them heal from the thoughts and feelings that bring about high suicide rates. Each of our communities has its own traditions and spirituality. We can return to those ways as an act of healing for all our problems. When we do, we’ll find that culture is prevention, culture is treatment, culture is intervention and culture is recovery. This is what the wellness and Wellbriety journey means

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to us. If we think in these ways, we will learn some of the things that we need in order to take on this tsunami of meth that is coming, as well as the other drugs and alcohol that are with our people.

We talked to some Elders awhile ago and they said, “Tell the Indian people, don’t declare war.” They said to declare healing on alcohol and drugs instead. Even though the dominant society is a war declaring entity, we don’t do that. Not for this one. Not for our children. We declare healing. We must demonstrate the right way to solve problems. When something huge comes along that’s a threat to us, we provide healing. So for example, when we arrest someone and they are incarcerated, we provide healing. Our *Wellbriety for Prisons* effort does that. We try to help them. We try to heal in that way. It’s within our power, it’s within our culture, its within the Elders’ teachings to turn our thinking from war to healing. We can resist harmful behaviors, reach out to one another, and recover as Indian people.



Don Coyhis, Mohican Nation, is founder and president of White Bison, Inc. and in inspiration behind the Wellbriety Movement. He is author of **Meditation with Native American Elders** and co-author with William L. White of **Alcohol Problems in Native America: The untold story of resistance and recovery, “The truth about the lie”**



# Breaking the Silence

By D.J. Vanas © 2006

**H**umility is: a traditional virtue, being respectful to others, a sense of modesty.

Shyness is: shutting down and not sharing ideas, not speaking on your own behalf or allowing others to make your decisions for you.

Being humble is a revered cultural tradition for many of our Native American / Alaskan Native tribes. But somewhere along the way, we've allowed the virtue of humility to morph into the detriment of shyness. Being humble means we are respectful of others, not putting ourselves on a pedestal or above anyone else (that's arrogance) but it still allows us to be confident and courageous. Shyness can be a severe handicap in the world. We see it in our youth when they blow interviews for college or allow grades to suffer because they won't ask questions in the classroom. We see it when our Native professionals miss promotions because they don't share their ideas or aren't respected because they feel it's not right to speak up on their own behalf. We see it when our Native communities don't stand up for their rights and values because leaders falsely believe that our traditions prohibit us from speaking out. When you look closer, you'll find shyness substituting poorly for humility.

The worst stereotypes in Indian Country are oftentimes the ones we hold against ourselves as Native people. Sometimes we play into the stoic, cigar store statue Indian stereotype, the strong and silent type or the shrinking violet and say, "That what it is to be Indian." Don't buy it!

Our greatest leaders in Indian Country were (and are) some of the best, most powerful and eloquent communicators the world has ever seen (Tecumseh, Sitting Bull, Wilma Mankiller, etc). They were humble, but *they weren't shy!* They spoke up and stood up for their people – for us. We should honor that example in our behavior today, whether it is in our communities, the classroom or the boardroom. Standing up and speaking out is not breaking tradition – it IS tradition!



D. J. Vanas

If we want to succeed as Native people, we've got to equip ourselves with the tools to do so and stop promoting shyness as a cultural value in place of humility. Our lives depend on it, literally. Our success in our careers, relationships or education depends on us standing up for ourselves and our ideas and expressing our needs. When we don't share our



voices, our visions, our expectations or wants with others, we get the leftovers in life. If you're not expressing yourself in your organization and with those around you and you don't get what you want, whose fault is that? Modern corporations, government and tribal agencies are large machines and it's easy to get lost in the shuffle if we're not communicating our needs.

Here are a few more ideas to consider as you stand up:

**Always be respectful** – our Native traditions asked us to be humble, not shy, and they implored us to be respectful at all times. If you let this principle be your guide, you should never be inhibited or bashful about standing up for your ideas. We sometimes worry that we'll offend others if we express ourselves, but when we are always respectful, that worry will melt away. If you have a disagreement with someone, try to better understand their point of view and get them to understand yours. If that still doesn't create progress, agree to disagree, don't argue. I've never seen anyone "win" an argument – but I have seen them ruin relationships, get folks fired or create long-term animosities. Don't go down that dark road. Choose the higher path of always respecting others and at the end of the day, you'll be much happier you did. Plus, when you are willing to stand up and share your ideas or express your needs, you are showing a high level of respect – for yourself.

**Face the fear** – We often fear rejection or criticism when we share our ideas with the world around us. We can get through this fear

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by conducting small acts of courage. Speaking up at meetings, sharing an idea with teammates, asking a question in the classroom or communicating a need to a friend or spouse – these small steps will grow our confidence over time. Sometimes we feel that expressing views or standing up for our ideas is arrogant. When we express ourselves, share our ideas or speak up for ourselves, this is not arrogance. Arrogance says we're better than others. Humility says we're *not better* than anyone, but we're *just as good* as anyone!

**Let it out** – One of the downsides to not expressing ourselves is that this pattern can cause us anger, animosity and frustration. Suffering in silence or biting your tongue gets frustrating quickly and can lead us to become bitter and resentful over time. It's like a pressure cooker with no release valve. Instead, let it out. Share your ideas and stand up for yourself *before* this happens.

Expressing our thoughts keeps us healthy and open to the world around us. When we're able to do this, we're much more likely to get what we want in life.

**Lead by example** – We all know that our children might not listen to all we say, but they are watching and learning everything we do. What example do we want to instill in them? If we want them to walk a path of success in today's world, then we must lead by example and show them how we express our ideas with respect and humility to those around us. Once they see us do it, the next generation won't be hampered by the hang ups we have in our communities today.



We can be humble and still let our visions and voices be heard. If you don't communicate clear ideas about what you want, you'll get whatever is left over. It's happened to our people so many times in the past. It doesn't have to happen anymore...

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If we want to succeed as Native people, we've got to equip ourselves with the tools to do so and stop promoting shyness as a cultural value in place of humility.

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D.J. Eagle Bear Vanas (Odawa) is a nationally acclaimed motivational storyteller, success coach and the author of the celebrated book, "The Tiny Warrior: A Path to Personal Discovery & Achievement" and audio CD series "The Warrior Within". D.J. uses traditional warrior concepts and wisdom to inspire people to achieve their best in life, school and career and owns Native Discovery Inc., a company dedicated to "building the warriors of tomorrow...today." He can be reached at (719) 282-7747 or at <http://www.nativediscovery.com>



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