

THE MEDICINE WHEEL

A DESIGN FOR UNDERSTANDING INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND GROUP STRENGTHS

INTRODUCTION:

The Medicine Wheel is a way of looking at individual differences which comes to us from Native American culture. This particular presentation of the Medicine Wheel is based on the traditions of the *Lakota* Indian people, interpreted so as to assist us in understanding how diversity impacts on team work.

The Medicine Wheel calls on elements of the natural world which describe four different styles of interacting with each other and our own work. The major compass directions differentiate the styles, and each has an animal, a color and a season associated with it.

The *Lakota* believe that each of us is "born into" one or another of these directions. As each season has a different "feel" and each animal a different "personality", the four directions become descriptive of the varied ways in which human beings experience the world and operate in it. Understanding these differences helps the working relationships we have with others. We begin to see why we experience confusion, discomfort or frustration when confronted with persons whose ways of seeing the world and operating in it are different from our own. *Lakota* tradition calls us to see the Medicine Wheel (the wheel of life) as complete only when all four directions are included. If we value all skills and styles as important contributions to a group's work, we can experience diversity as strength rather than an impediment.

THE FOUR DIRECTIONS ARE:

North – Buffalo – White – Winter

These are people who like to take control of a task and act quickly through it toward the goal. Full of courage and endurance, they take risks and are good motivators of others. *(North people may be autocratic and unaware of others feelings, pushing them beyond their limits.)*

East – Eagle – Yellow – Spring

These are innovative, creative people...visionaries with new ideas. They are expansive thinkers, easily able to see the big picture. *(East people may lose track of the practical steps toward accomplishing a vision, ignoring the details of follow through.)*

South – Deer – Red – Summer

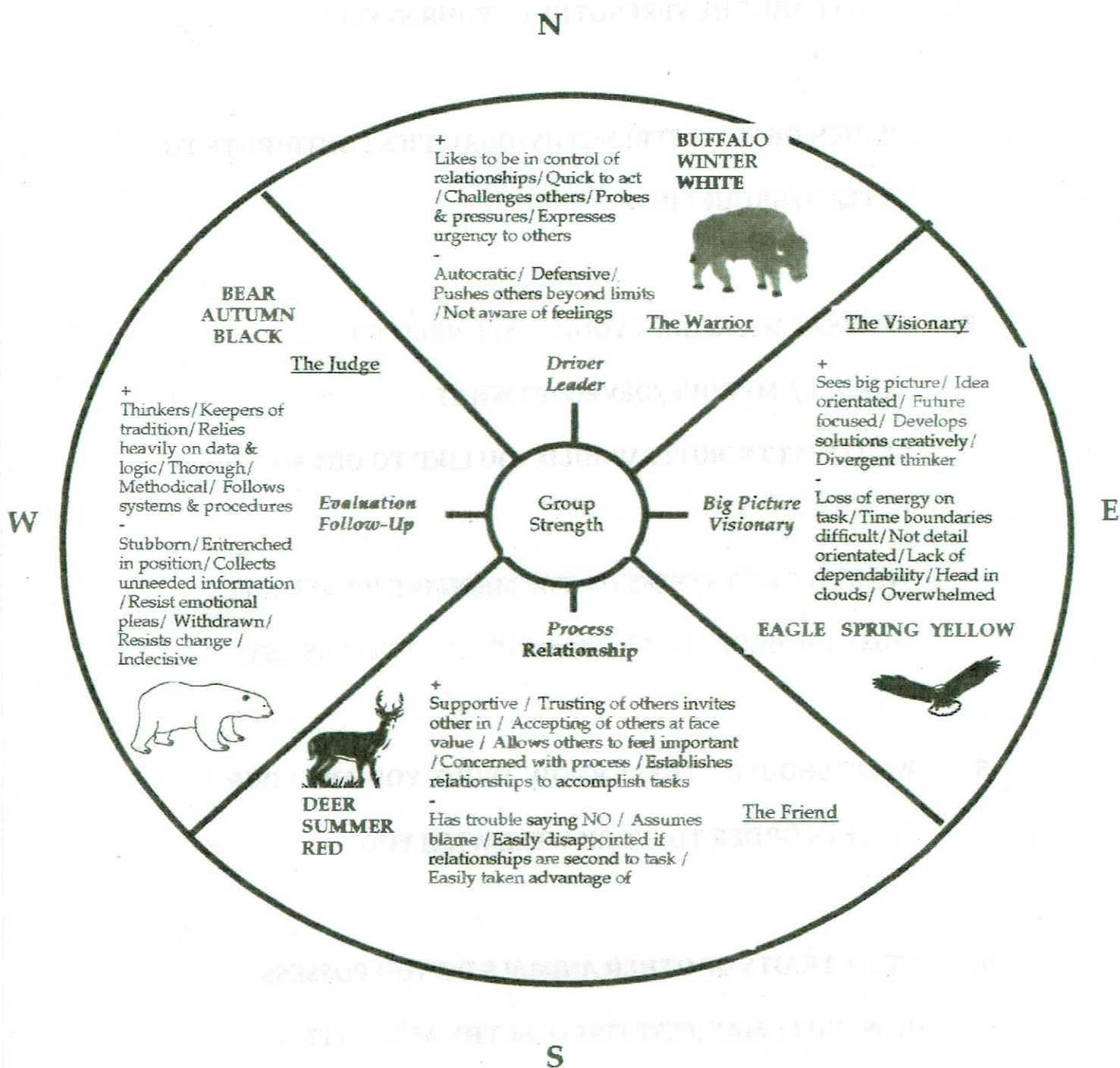
These people are known to be collaborative and supportive. They are trusting, sensitive to others' feelings and concerned with creating positive work environments. *(South people may mire themselves in interpersonal relationships, losing track of the task at hand while they busy themselves "saving" others.)*

West – Bear – Black – Autumn

These are people who are analytic, methodical and introspective. They are practical and pragmatic, basing their decisions on data and logic. *(West people may fall prey to "analysis paralysis" and be unable to make decisions. They may be stubborn and unwilling to accept new ideas.)*

While we are born into a direction on the Medicine Wheel and will feel most comfortable living in that style; we may travel around the wheel during our lifetime learning to use elements & skills of the other directions as we grow or as situations demand.

Medicine Wheel



THE MEDICINE WHEEL

- 1. WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS OF YOUR STYLE?**
- 2. WHICH OF YOUR STRENGTHS/QUALITIES CONTRIBUTE TO A TEAM/GROUP? HOW?**
- 3. IN WHAT WAYS DOES YOUR STYLE NEED TO CHANGE/IMPROVE/DEVELOP? WHAT SKILLS/ATTRIBUTES WOULD YOU LIKE TO OBTAIN?**
- 4. WHICH OTHER STYLES ON THE MEDICINE WHEEL IS IT MOST DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO WORK WITH? EASIEST?**
- 5. WHAT SHOULD OTHERS KNOW ABOUT YOU AND YOUR STYLE IN ORDER TO WORK WELL WITH YOU?**
- 6. WHAT TRAITS OF OTHER ANIMALS DO YOU POSSESS? HOW DID IT MANIFEST ITSELF IN THE ACTIVITY?**