



Focus on Fellows & Advisors

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[Link to John Castillo's Web site](#)



Quick Fact: Last year John helped over 20,000 American Indians receive medical and dental services that might not have gotten assistance otherwise; two lives were saved because of these services.

For more information, please visit this [Fellow's entry in the Fellows Only section of the Web Site](#)

How have you, through your leadership, made a difference in one of your communities?

I enjoy taking concepts or ideas and making them reality. In Los Angeles, for example, people have talked about developing an elders' program for Indian people for 20 years or longer. There were always hopes but never any outcomes. I was able to go there and bring something to fruition. It all comes together at the proper time. The stuff's out there, it's just a matter of connecting the dots. It just needs that individual to link up different resources to make it work. I've been lucky enough to be a catalyst. Sure, it's a struggle sometimes, but it's worth it at the end, at least I think so.

What sustains you in your practice of leadership and your commitment to change?

What keeps me going is not forgetting my purpose here as a human

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being. It's a destiny kind of thing. Plus, I try to keep things as much as possible in some sort of harmonious balance. I do gardening. For me, it brings a sense of balance. You've got to touch the earth.

What is your passion?

Helping those less fortunate in ways that really make a difference on a large scale. For example, our holiday program helped 60,000 young people. Walking Shield is such a great program; it affects so many people, even entire reservations. [FYI: The Walking Shield American Indian Society dedicates itself to improving the quality of life and creating positive futures for American Indians who live on our nation's Indian Reservations by providing shelter to the homeless, medical assistance to the sick, food and clothing to the needy, educational support for the children, community development assistance and humanitarian support. For details, go to www.walkingshield.org/home.htm]

How do you practice good self-care?

Always being grateful in the morning for waking up and thanking whoever you need to thank – the creator, grandfather, god. That's really important. Just being happy that you're alive. That gardening thing. Hanging around with family and friends. I know when the sun's about to come up because I can hear the birds singing. I listen to that stuff. It's important.

How do you measure success?

I measure progress against the goals that have been set forth, whatever they may be. For me, in years past, it was to get a Ph.D. and to develop an elders program in Los Angeles. My current goal is to bring a change in health conditions to Indian people on a national level. If I can harness the resources – and they're out there – together we can change the health conditions of a group in the U.S. who live with the worst health conditions of anyone in the country. It shouldn't be that way. I've never given up on trying to change the world. In 1980, I started a group called Circle of Friends. It didn't work out, but I've never given up. If I can do just one little piece, and other people are doing their pieces, hopefully it will all come together and make the world a better place.

If you had to give an aspiring leader one piece of advice, what would it be?

To be humble. That's really important. You shouldn't get a big enough head where you can't relate to yourself anymore...or get

through doorways. And be persistent. I believe in efforts that affect large numbers of people, and that takes a lot of persistence.

How are you different or what do you do differently as a result of your experience as a Kellogg Fellow? Why?

The Kellogg program allowed me to visit other parts of the world and develop a more global view. I got to visit with leaders of indigenous peoples, and I saw the same conditions affecting people here that affect the Aborigines in Australia, Maoris in New Zealand, Quechua in Equador, and many other peoples. I also developed a sense of the importance of working in your own backyard first.

Are you a better leader than you were five years ago? How do you know?

I think I'm a better leader every day...365 times five. I'm that many times better. It's an internal feeling, a spiral that goes up. You're always going forward, you're always learning.

Can leadership be invisible? How and why have you practiced invisible leadership?

Yes, a lot of times it is. If you're in the background, you've empowered people to implement a program, and you're there watching it, providing guidance. That's the best way. I don't have to be the person up there with the microphone. I can watch somebody else in that role, but I'll always be there to provide help.

Comments

I think the development of the Kellogg Fellows Leadership Alliance is one of the best things I can think of. The Kellogg fellows represent such huge potential. A vehicle like the Alliance creates a tremendous resource to get together and do great things. A lot of us are doing great things on an individual basis, but it's great to complement that with lots of people joining forces to make change. This is a very important vehicle. I hope it keeps going.

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