

Tribal Court Judge

Context:

- 12 years on tribal court bench, appointed by Tribal Council
- Law degree from University of Oregon, clerked for federal judge

Daily Reality & Challenges:

- Sentences someone to treatment program, but no tribal treatment facility and state programs won't accept "tribal court referrals" - can incarcerate but can't rehabilitate
- Issues protection order under tribal law - victim takes it to county sheriff who says "we don't enforce tribal court orders" - paper protection with no enforcement

Feelings, Beliefs, & Behaviors:

- Carries weight of every protection order that wasn't honored, every sentence that wasn't enough, every child who should have been home
- Frustrated having judicial authority without judicial power - can make rulings but can't always enforce them

Hidden Connections & Potential:

- Built informal relationship with one county judge who will honor tribal protection orders - relies on personal trust, not legal structure
- Documenting every jurisdictional failure for future advocacy

Quotes:

"I'm a judge without a jail, without treatment and housing programs, without state cooperation. I have a gavel and good intentions. That's not enough to protect my community."

State Legislator (Rural District)

Context:

- Second term state representative, rural district that includes portions of 2 tribal reservations
- District is 15% tribal citizens, 85% non-tribal residents

Daily Reality & Challenges:

- Campaign donors question support for tribal programs: "Why are we funding them? They have casinos"
- Legislative session: 400+ bills, tribal consultation mentioned in 60+ - no time to understand implications, relies on staff summaries that miss nuance

Feelings, Beliefs, & Behaviors:

- Embarrassed by knowledge gaps but no time to learn - session is 160 days of chaos
- Believes in fairness but defining "fair" through non-tribal lens without realizing it

Hidden Connections & Potential:

- Daughter's school did unit on Oregon tribal history - she asks questions he can't answer, making them realize how little they know
- Privately wonders if they're on wrong side of history but doesn't know how to change course without alienating base

Quotes:

"My non-tribal constituents ask why tribes get 'special treatment.' I don't know how to explain it's not special treatment, it's legal obligation. Hell, I barely understand it myself."

Tribal Natural Resources Director

Context:

- BS in Environmental Science, PhD in Traditional Ecological Knowledge systems
- Manages natural resources for large reservation—forests, fish, water, wildlife

Daily Reality & Challenges:

- Tribe's ancestral lands now managed by USFS, BLM, state parks, private timber companies - tribe has treaty rights but no management authority
- "Water is life" - sacred springs and watersheds degraded by industrial use, tribe can monitor and protest but can't protect
- Coordinates hunting, fishing, gathering rights; environmental monitoring; climate adaptation; co-management advocacy

Feelings, Beliefs, & Behaviors:

- Protective of remaining cultural practitioners - last basket weavers, fishers, gatherers facing criminalization for practicing treaty rights
- "Water is life" - sacred springs and watersheds degraded by industrial use, tribe can monitor and protest but can't protect
- Determined to secure land back and co-management - sees it as ecological necessity, not just cultural restoration

Hidden Connections & Potential:

- Building coalition with 6 other terminated/restored tribes - collective advocacy for co-management despite limited land base
- Partnering with conservation groups who recognize Indigenous stewardship prevents biodiversity loss

Quotes:

"Water is life. This isn't metaphor - it's fact. These springs fed our people for 10,000 years. Now industrial agriculture depletes them, pollution degrades them. We monitor, we report, we testify. But we can't protect. That requires management authority we don't have."

State Agency Director of Government Affairs

Context:

- 15 years in state government, last 3 as Government Affairs Director for mid-sized state agency
- Reports to Agency Director who reports to Governor

Daily Reality & Challenges:

- Consultation tracked as "compliance metric" not relationship outcome and boss asks "how many consultation letters sent" not "what did we learn"
- New policy drafted by program staff, then sent to Government Affairs to "add tribal consultation" after decisions already made

Feelings, Beliefs, & Behaviors:

- Frustrated being the "fixer" for structural problems - can't do meaningful consultation with processes designed for speed not relationship
- Exhausted defending agency to tribes ("we're trying") and defending tribes to agency ("they have rights")

Hidden Connections & Potential:

- Built personal relationships with 4 tribal government affairs counterparts and text them directly when formal consultation fails, sometimes solving problems informally
- Proposed tribal liaison position in last budget cycle - cut as "not core mission"

Quotes:

"Every tribal leader I've met has been professional, knowledgeable, and willing to partner. Every barrier I hit is on our side - our timelines, our capacity, our culture. But I'm the one who has to deliver the bad news."

Tribal Behavioral Health Director

Context:

- 12 years in behavioral health, last 5 as Director
- Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), also trained in traditional healing practices

Daily Reality & Challenges:

- Community members don't trust "Western therapy" after generations of forced assimilation through mental health system - but traditional healers are elders aging out with no succession plan
- Substance use treatment: Nearest culturally-appropriate residential program is 300 miles away; client needs 90-day treatment but insurance covers 28 days; family can't visit, client leaves early, relapses within weeks

Feelings, Beliefs, & Behaviors:

- Traumatized by losses - knows every person who died by suicide, attended their funerals, counseled their families
- Protective of both Western and traditional approaches - sees them as complementary, not competing
- Scared about what comes next - waitlist is 6 months long, calls increasing, capacity decreasing

Hidden Connections & Potential:

- Built partnership with 3 elders who co-facilitate healing groups with licensed counselors - integrating approaches
- Training 8 community members as peer support specialists w/people who've been through it supporting others

Quotes:

"My staff is traumatized from the work. I'm traumatized from the work. Who takes care of us? We're supposed to heal others while we're bleeding out."

Tribal Education Director

Context:

- 15 years with tribe, started as teacher, now directs all education programs
- Master's in Education Administration, raised speaking tribal language

Daily Reality & Challenges:

- School districts receive Impact Aid for Native students but spend it on general operations, not culturally-responsive programs for those students - no accountability
- Tribal language down to 30 fluent speakers, all over 65 - language grants cut, can't hire teachers, watching language die in real time

Feelings, Beliefs, & Behaviors:

- Terrified that this generation will be the last to speak the language - keeps her awake at night
- Exhausted by grant writing - spends 40% of time writing grants to fund programs that should be treaty obligations, not competitive funding

Hidden Connections & Potential:

- Built coalition of 9 tribal education directors across Oregon to share resources, advocate together, support each other
- Partnering with tribal elders to document language before it's too late - recording, creating curriculum, training younger speakers

Quotes:

"My students know their family history six generations back, can identify 40 plants and their uses, understand complex kinship systems. But Common Core says they're behind. Behind what?"

State Tribal Liaison

Context:

- Primary bridge between state entity and 9 tribal governments
- Supposed to coordinate tribal consultation and facilitate government-to-government relationships

Daily Reality & Challenges:

- State colleagues bypass liaison and contact tribal leaders directly, then liaison gets call from confused tribe: "Why are we hearing about this project from three different people?"
- Measured on vague metrics: "maintain positive relationships," "facilitate consultation," "reduce conflicts" - success is absence of crisis, not depth of partnership

Feelings, Beliefs, & Behaviors:

- Caught between two worlds - state colleagues expect advocacy for agency priorities, tribes expect advocacy for sovereignty
- Exhausted from being translator, educator, mediator, crisis manager, promise tracker, and blame absorber - rarely gets to be partnership builder
- Frustrated by symbolism over substance - attends ceremonies for photo ops while meaningful consultation remains unfunded

Hidden Connections & Potential:

- Built genuine relationships with several tribal staff who understand constraints and work collaboratively despite system barriers
- Connected with other state tribal liaisons across agencies - peer support group sharing strategies and frustrations

Quotes:

"I educate staff on sovereignty weekly. By next meeting, same questions: 'Do we have to consult ALL nine tribes?' Yes. Every time. Forever."

Tribal Emergency Preparedness & Disaster Response Coordinator

Context:

- 9 years coordinating tribal emergency preparedness and disaster response
- EMT certification, FEMA emergency management training, trained by elders in traditional disaster response
- Reports to Tribal Council, coordinates with county/state emergency management

Daily Reality & Challenges:

- Flood destroys 12 homes on reservation - FEMA says damage doesn't meet threshold for disaster declaration, tribe expected to rebuild without federal assistance
- Wildfire evacuation plan assumes everyone has cars and smartphones - 40% of tribal elders have neither, many live on remote parcels with one dirt road in/out

Feelings, Beliefs, & Behaviors:

- Terrified about what climate change means for community's future - elder predictions coming true, Western science now confirms it
- Frustrated that traditional resilience knowledge (community care, resource sharing, seasonal preparation) dismissed as inadequate by emergency management professionals

Hidden Connections & Potential:

- Built relationships with 3 county emergency managers who understand tribal community needs and coordinate proactively
- Created informal mutual aid network with other tribal emergency coordinators by sharing resources, strategies, support

Quotes:

"State and County calls our members 'vulnerable populations' - elderly, disabled. Don't account for historical trauma, poverty, isolation, cultural needs. Our vulnerability isn't physical limitation - it's system designed without us in mind."

Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO)

Context:

- Federally certified under National Historic Preservation Act
- Manages cultural resource protection for tribe's ancestral lands (reservation plus ceded territories spanning 10 million acres)

Daily Reality & Challenges:

- State highway project: Receives 30-day comment period for project affecting 8,000-year-old village site - needs 90 days minimum to consult elders, review documentation, conduct site visit, prepare response
- Repatriation request pending 7 years - museum has 43 ancestral remains and 200+ funerary objects, says they're "still being studied," NAGPRA violations with no enforcement

Feelings, Beliefs, & Behaviors:

- Carries weight of ancestors - every desecrated site, every unprotected burial, every artifact in museum drawer feels like personal failure
- Angry that sacred sites afforded less protection than endangered species habitat
- Exhausted from being treated as "stakeholder with opinion" not sovereign government with authority

Hidden Connections & Potential:

- Building coalition with 6 other THPOs - sharing resources, legal strategies, mutual support
- Training younger tribal members in cultural resource management - building next generation of protectors

Quotes:

"Developer gets 30-day notice for project review. We get 30 days to evaluate 8,000 years of history. Our elders need time to visit site, pray, remember stories. Thirty days is an insult to time itself."

State Agency Director

Context:

- Agency actions frequently affect tribal lands, resources, or members
- Reports to Governor, accountable to Legislature, judged by public and stakeholders

Daily Reality & Challenges:

- Legislature demands faster project delivery and lower costs; tribal leaders demand meaningful consultation that takes time and resources - caught between competing mandates with no additional capacity
- When tribal concerns conflict with powerful stakeholder interests (agriculture, timber, development), political pressure to side with campaign donors

Feelings, Beliefs, & Behaviors:

- Defensive when tribes criticize agency - feels personally attacked when it's systemic problems inherited from decades of poor practice
- Genuinely wants better tribal relationships but overwhelmed by competing priorities - tribal consultation feels like "one more thing" on impossible list

Hidden Connections & Potential:

- Attended one tribal leader meeting early in tenure - was moved by direct conversations but hasn't made time since
- Sees how consultation failures cost more than doing it right (lawsuits, project delays, reputation damage) but can't get political support for upfront investment

Quotes:

"My performance review: project delivery, budget management, stakeholder satisfaction. Nowhere does it mention tribal relationships. I'm measured on what I'm measured on."

Tribal Indian Child Welfare Specialist

Context:

- Manages ICWA cases for tribe of 4,200 members
- Coordinates with 8 county child welfare offices and state ODHS

Daily Reality & Challenges:

- 17 tribal children currently in state custody – tracks each case, attends every hearing, coordinates tribal services, searches for family placements – alone, with no backup coverage
- State removes tribal child at 2am without notifying tribe – required by ICWA but frequently "forgotten" – discovers removal 3 days later when family calls

Feelings, Beliefs, & Behaviors:

- Personal trauma activated constantly – sees herself in every removed child, fights to give them what she never had: connection to tribe and family
- Scared about children she can't track – some removed years ago, whereabouts unknown, cultural identity lost
- Exhausted from fighting same battles repeatedly – ICWA is law but violated regularly with minimal consequences

Hidden Connections & Potential:

- Built relationships with 3 county social workers who genuinely try to follow ICWA and they call before removal when possible, consider tribal placements first
- Training 2 younger tribal members in ICWA work – building capacity and succession

Quotes:

"I was removed from my tribe at 4. Adopted to white family. Didn't know I was Native until 19. Spent 15 years disconnected from who I am. Every child I fight for, I'm fighting for that 4-year-old me."

Tribal Economic Development Director

Context:

- 14 years leading tribal economic development, last 7 as Director
- Oversees tribal business enterprises, workforce development, small business support, tourism, and economic diversification

Daily Reality & Challenges:

- Economic diversification plans designed – solar farm, aquaculture, value-added timber – all require capital investment tribe doesn't have and banks won't lend to tribal government
- State procurement: Tribal businesses should have preference but lost bid to non-tribal contractor who scored lower – protest process takes 9 months, project already awarded

Feelings, Beliefs, & Behaviors:

- Angry at being called "dependent on federal funding" when treaties promised economic support in exchange for 95% of tribal lands
- Exhausted from fighting for tribal businesses to be treated as equals in competitive markets designed to exclude them
- Frustrated that "pull yourself up by bootstraps" narrative ignores that federal policy took the boots

Hidden Connections & Potential:

- Creating tribal business incubator – supporting next generation of Native entrepreneurs
- Building consortium of tribal businesses across 9 Oregon tribes – collective purchasing power, shared resources, mutual support

Quotes:

"State says 'why don't tribes create more businesses?' We have business plans, feasibility studies, market analysis. What we don't have: capital. Banks won't lend to tribal governments. That's not lack of entrepreneurship – it's structural barrier."