

TI TRIBAL IMPERATIVE

(short version selected excerpts)

by Tom Grimes

Tribal Imperative

"The fewer answers the era of rational knowledge provides to the basic questions of human beings, the more deeply it would seem people . . . cling to the ancient certainties of their tribe." - Vaclav Havel

The **"Tribal Imperative"** is the innate drive in humans to band together in Tribes (groups) ... and for individuals to adopt "tribal behavior" strategies. In short ... people behave radically differently based on the social context. We are in fact a different person when we are with different people. Man is a social creature and will adopt behavior strategies based on this. This is what we call the **"Tribal Imperative"**.

Why We Do What We Do

People cluster into groups ... it is instinctive. When an individual joins a Tribe it usually becomes the most powerful influencer of behavior. *Tribe trumps Personality* when it comes to predicting and influencing behavior. In fact much of an individual's identity is derived from their membership in a Tribe.

Tribes

How Tribes work ... here is a simple explanation.

Draw a circle
Inside the circle is US
Outside the circle is THEM

*Our behavior will be based on whether we are **IN** the circle. Rules apply **IN** the circle. Status matters **IN** the circle. Social forces exist **IN** the circle. If we are **IN** the circle there are few rules dealing with the people outside the circle. If we are **OUT** of the circle, we are **THEM**.*



RELATIONSHIPS

"It's all about Relationships" – Russell Friedman author of "When Children Grieve"

The most potent influencing factor is **Relationship**. The best expression I've heard is borrowed from my friend Russell Friedman ... here's a paraphrase

"If you like someone they can spill hot soup in your lap and you won't get upset, but if you don't like somebody, just the angle of their hat, will piss you off."

Humans are complex web of relationships: *affiliation, alliance, amalgamation, assemblage, association, band, brotherhood, bunch, cahoots, circle, clan, clique, club, cluster, coalition, colony, combination, combo, community, commonwealth, company, confederacy, confederation, congress, cooperative, corporation, coterie, crew, crowd, family, federation, fellowship, fraternity, gang, guild, herd, hookup, horde, knot, lot, league, mob, nation, neighborhood, order, organization, outfit, pack, partnership, party, pool, public, rat pack, ring, set, shift, squad, society, state, syndicate, team, tie-in, tie-up, tribe, troops, troupe, union, workers, zoo ...*

Relationship Circles

Researchers believe that the size of a primate's brain is indicative of the number of social relationships they can have. Chimpanzees organize in communities that are made of interconnected relationships. Humans are vastly more communal, interconnected and relational.

There is a functional limitation to number of relationships a person can manage. The size of the human brain suggests we can have approximately 150 intimate relationships. This seems to be the natural size an organization can get before it is just too cumbersome.

Relationships in a community are complex, inter-related and intertwined. You can't isolate relationships; cliques, circles and clubs form. A simple way to look at the complex world of relationships in the Tribe is to see them as **Social Circles**.

Social Circles of Relationships ... If you stacked plates of smaller and smaller diameter you get a sense of what happens in a Tribe. Tribes are all about relationship circles. We tend to group in small relationship sub-groups; groups within groups within groups. These little circles are the working *nuts & bolts* of Tribal life. The more involved a person is in our daily lives the more they are a part of our social matrix.

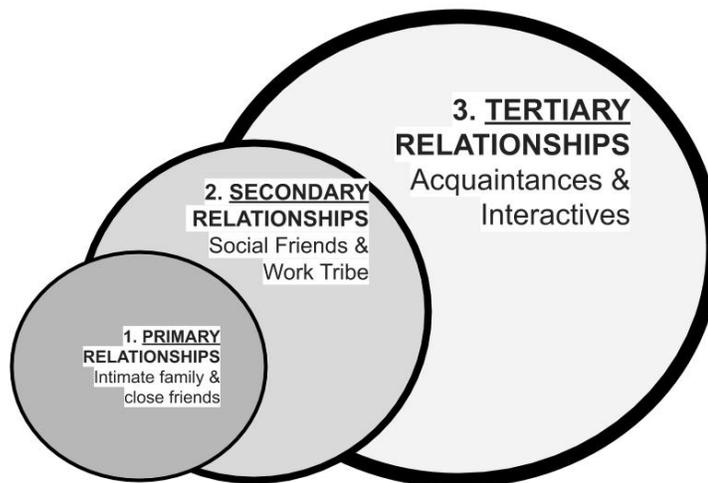
1 Primary social circles consist of those people you are most intimately connected to. It could be a spouse, children, best friends, siblings, parents ...etc. These primary circles are built on deep personal bonds.

2 Secondary social circles consist of people that we are connected to by circumstance. This can be co-workers, distant relatives, acquaintances and the key here is usually proximity. They are important to us because we are in contact with them on a regular basis;

like the people you work with (physical proximity). The others are connected to us through a relationship and an example is your in-laws (social proximity).

3 Tertiary social circles consist of people we have contact with or a have a mild relationship with. For example this can be people that attend the same church. Despite the social distance these Tertiary social circles can be extremely important for networking. Even a small connection can make a big difference. We are much more likely to do business with people we know; even if we don't know them that well. This is why recommendations and referrals are so important.

RELATIONSHIP CIRCLES



Relationship Circles 9/16/20

Types of Tribes

ANCHOR Tribes ... The Tribe that defines you.

This is the source of IDENTITY ... **Anchor Tribes** have more to do with cultural connections. A Mexican for example shares a place, a history and a language which is his cultural heritage. He might belong to his local Catholic parish. His type of job may indicate which work Tribe he is anchored to (*a Mexican Bricklayer from the city of Guadalajara*). He could also be a huge fan of the futbol team, **Chivas de Guadalajara** and it helps define him. People belong to multiple Tribes but one Tribe is usually dominant in defining who they think they are ... this is the **Anchor Tribe**.

INTIMATE Tribes ...

Familial Tribes is the bond is blood. These relationships are rooted deep into our biology, culture and psyche.

The Intimate Tribe is the people that are the most involved in our daily lives. The core of the intimate Tribe can be family but extends out to include close friends. This is the inner circle, the people you forge bonds that are stronger and deeper.

One Hand Tribe this is the close inner circle of people that you could count on two hands and still have fingers left over. We become like the people we spend time with and have the most intimate bonds. The people on your **One Hand Tribe** will define you ... pick wisely.

CONDITIONAL/TEMPORARY Tribes ...

Temporary Tribes form all the time. When you attend a seminar for a couple of days or go on a trip a temporary Tribe forms. If you play on a sports team you are in a potent, but temporary, Tribe. The **Work Tribe** is the most common conditional Tribe. We definitely function as a Tribe in these circumstances. These Tribes can have a powerful influence over us while we are members.

ANCESTRAL Tribes ...

We may think that the only people who might be concerned with ancestors are primitive peoples ... and we would be wrong. Did you have parents, grandparents, aunts or uncles that influenced you? Did you ever have a teacher or coach who inspired you or taught you lessons you apply today? Have you ever read a book that left a deep impression on you? These are Ancestral Tribe members who continue to shape our views and attitudes.

Fact is that we are profoundly influenced by the stories we've heard or read. Even if these are characters in a book or movie ... even if they are mythical (fairy tales, religious figures). These characters and stories exist in our collective minds and they come to life when we gather as a Tribe to talk.

The Power of ONE – Leaders, Missions & Enemies

There has to be something that glues the Tribe together. Tribes have rules, rituals, rites, religion, tradition, costumes, masks, music, Meccas ... all these created a shared identity and focus but the most powerful forces are **Leaders, Missions & Enemies**. In fact nothing pulls a Tribe together like an **Enemy**.

In the comic book mythology of Super Heroes there is always an Enemy ... in fact it is the colorful enemies and their diabolical plans that make the story. There may only be one Spiderman ... but damn that boy does battle a lot of bad guys in bizarre costumes.

The POWER of ONE ... One King, One Mission, One Enemy ... this focusing **Power of One** is vital for a Tribe to coalesce in a competitive environment. Here are some of the "Ones" a Tribe will wrap itself around:

Tribes have one Language
Tribes have one Mission
Tribes have one Enemy

***Tribes have one Home
Tribes have one Faith
Tribes have one Flag***

Tribe Talk ...

*I heard it through the grapevine
not much longer would you be mine.
Oh I heard it through the grapevine,
Oh and I'm just about to lose my mind.
Honey, honey yeah.*

"I Heard It Through the Grapevine"
by Norman Whitfield and Barrett Strong for Motown Records in 1966

TRIBE TALK

GOSSIP, Rumor, Hearsay, Slander, Scuttlebutt ... Gossip has a bad reputation. We tend to dismiss it and try to believe that we don't engage in gossipy chit chat. Gossip is a great deal more than that ... it is an important and vital component of Tribal interactions and relations. People talking about people is a vital part of Tribal Behavior.

Gossip ... *This is a very old word with a much more modern meaning. It comes from the Old English godsibb, meaning a godparent or baptismal sponsor. It comes from god + sib (meaning blood relation as in sibling). It dates to at least 1014. By 1362, the term was being used to mean a close friend; one you might chose to be godparent to your children. It was applied to both men and women, although in later uses it came to be applied only to women. By 1566, the word was being used to mean a flighty woman, one who would engage in idle talk. From there it came to mean the idle talk itself.*

Scuttlebutt ... *This term for gossip and rumor has a nautical origin. The scuttlebutt is an early 19th century nautical term for an open cask of water kept on deck for use by the crew. The term comes from scuttle (to cut a hole in) + butt (a large cask). Sailors would gather about the cask and trade stories and gossip, much like modern office workers do at the water cooler or coffee pot. By the turn of the 20th century, American sailors began using the term scuttlebutt to refer to these sea stories and gossip. And eventually the term became associated with any gossip or rumor and divorced from its nautical origins.*

Schadenfreude \SHAHD-n-froy-duh\, noun : A malicious satisfaction in the misfortunes of others. comes from the German, from Schaden , damage + Freude , joy. It is often capitalized, as it is in German.

Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language by Robin Dunbar. In his book ... *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language* he gives gossip a different spin. Dunbar tells us that "Talk" holds groups together. It was vital to hunter-gatherers and is vital in our families, in the workplace and in our social circles. Dunbar suggests that language evolved in response to our need to stay connected to friends and family.

TRIBE TALK, a Better word for Gossip ... We need a better word than gossip ... *Tribal dialogue?* ... *Social talk?* ... *The underground sound?* ... *Socio-Verbal-interconnectivity?* ... *Verbal grooming?* I will simply call gossip what it is ... **TRIBE TALK**.

TRIBE TALK is a vital communication ... Through gossip we learn "what's going on". We discover how others feel about another person. We forge relationships, plot strategies, anticipate problems, plant seeds ... etc. This is the rich humus of Tribal life ... People talking with other people about other people. People talk about people that they care about or are concerned about. A friend, an enemy and a rival will surely garner the most attention.

TRIBE TALK is normal ... Gossip in and of itself is not bad or good. It can be used for either purpose. It can be used to slander another, undermine relationships and spread inaccurate information but it can also function as a social barometer, help us anticipate a problem and help us forge alliances. Talking about others is in fact a healthy normal function in any group.

TRIBE TALK is the dress rehearsal ... Sometimes we need to hash out something with another person before we confront another. Gossip can act as a regulator ... it can keep us from saying things that are inappropriate.

WHO WE TALK ABOUT: STATUS matters ... What the Chief is doing matters more than what is happening in the *rank & file*. This is why we talk more about the Boss than others. He is the "Tribal Big Man" so he engenders lots of conversations because of his position. (*This is closely related to the social attention we afford **Celebrity**.*)

WHO WE TALK ABOUT: INTIMACY matters ... Gossip is usually about a third party that the gossipers know. The closer the relationship to us the more likely we will talk about them. Basically you talk more about a family member (brother, sister, daughter, son etc...) than about people you have less connection to. Relationship intimacy increases the gossip intensity and importance.

DEVIATIONS & VIOLATIONS ... We are more interested when people are violating taboos. Stepping outside the acceptable code of behavior will create a lot of buzz. We may applaud the folks who are happily married but it is the scandalous behavior of the adulterers that we talk about. Talking about the social violators stimulates intense interest in a Tribe.

BAD NEWS ... Bad news travels fast and lasts longer. But nobody wants to be the bearer of bad news. Ever noticed how the last person to know about an affair is the person who is being cheated on. Friends will talk about rumors of infidelity to others but don't want to be the bearers of bad news to the victims.

UNFILTERED: Tribe Talk is RAW ... Talking about a third party allows us to speak in the rawest terms. It is unfiltered dialogue that allows us to express our most direct and passionate sentiments. We are more likely to judge others in the *court of gossip* than in public discourse. This raw honesty can be corrosive but occasionally it can be cathartic. It feels good to verbally piss on our enemies and dump obscenities on them without fear of retribution. It's one of the dark pleasures of gossip.

ANONYMITY increases the unfiltered and ugly in communications. We don't have to weigh our words or be cautious about the impact of what we say to a person face to face. The most salacious stories are disseminated behind the cloak of anonymity.

SECRECY amps up RUMOR ... If we can't talk openly, we whisper in the dark. Trying to bury gossip just makes it more interesting. We have a built-in bias for *Conspiracy Theory*. Being open and transparent may take away some of the fun ... but it will tone down the gossip nonsense and scuttle the rumor mill.

ADDICTS & ADEPTS ... Let's face it, some people like to gossip more than others. It may be the power of the powerless. It may simply feed internal needs in a person they can't get any other way. Some folks just like the drama. There are social needs to gossip ... sometimes it is used to attack enemies ... sometimes it's used to befriend another person and pull them into our secret little circle. The other interesting side note is that we tend to SHUN people who are excessive or abusive gossips ... but we still want to know what's going on.

JARGON & SLANG ... Humans create new terms and adapt language for group specific applications. In small cohesive groups a special set of words and shared experiences are used inclusively by members. Mechanics, for example, have shared technical jargon that is related to their job. There are also social implications ... basically when you are IN you understand and are allowed to use the Tribes code, jargon, slang ... etc. Some of us old geezers can even remember when "groovy" ... was groovy.

SMART PHONES & SOCIAL MEDIA ... Smartphones and Social Media have changed the game. All the new technological tools have expanded the speed and scope of Tribe Talk. And it is dramatically impacting society today. It's connected people without regard to geography or even language expanding our ability to link up into loose Tribes. It's also accelerated and intensified TRIBE TALK and much of it has become *TOXIC TALK-SH#T!*

WRITE vs. VERBAL ... Social media is primarily written word. Writing tends to come across harsher since the subtlety of speech is not possible. People often misinterpret what we write and read things into it we did not intend. Write very very carefully and then ... DON'T SEND!

TRIBE TALK around the WATER COOLER ...

We talk at work. We build our social networks in the private little conversations that we have around the "water cooler". It is also the source of inside information that we need to navigate the, sometimes treacherous, waters of office politics. *Rank & file* talk about the boss. Leaders discuss the *rank & file*. People are more likely to believe what they hear from personal sources (the "water cooler" queen) than from official company memos.

As a business owner I have experienced time and time again the aftermath of letting a person go and suddenly everyone has tales to tell about the person ... how they screwed up this or that ... stories of disastrous behavior. I always ask "why didn't you say something" and the inevitable answer is "... it wasn't my place to say" ... "I don't like talking about a fellow employee". Fact was the talk had been going on a long time, but I and my senior staff had not been privy to it. The social code forbids the workers to "rat" out other employees even if they are creating problems.

It's important to have a shared *gathering place* that lets the staff, regardless of rank, to casually mingle, and engage in *chit-chat*. The "Water Cooler" is where the Social Bonds of the Tribe are strengthened. "Heard it through the grapevine" isn't just a catchy old tune, it's an essential component of every Tribe, including the Work Tribe.

NOTE: I think a company crosses an ethical threshold by intrusively monitoring employees with modern technological devices. It tends to push the talk deeper underground and contributes to an atmosphere of distrust.