

10 Canoe Rules

1. EVERY STROKE WE TAKE IS ONE LESS WE HAVE TO MAKE

Keep going! Even against the most relentless wind or retrograde tide, somehow a canoe moves forward. This mystery can only be explained by the fact that each pull forward is a real movement and not a delusion.

2. THERE IS TO BE NO ABUSE OF SELF OR OTHERS

Respect and trust cannot exist in anger. It has to be thrown overboard, so the sea can cleanse it. It has to be washed off the hands and cast into the air, so the stars can take care of it. We always look back at the shallows we pulled through, amazed at how powerful we thought those dangers were.

3. BE FLEXIBLE

The adaptable animal survives. If you get tired, ship your paddle and rest. If you get hungry, put in on the beach and eat a few oysters. If you can't figure one way to make it, do something new. When the wind confronts you, sometimes you're supposed to go the other way.

4. THE GIFT OF EACH ENRICHES ALL

Every story is important. The bow, the stern, the skipper, the power puller in the middle – everyone is part of the movement. The elder sits in her cedar at the front, singing her paddle song, praying for us all. The weary paddler resting is still ballast. And there is always that time when the crew needs some joke, some remark, some silence to keep going, and the least likely person provides.

5. WE ALL PULL AND SUPPORT EACH OTHER

Nothing occurs in isolation. When we aren't in the family of a canoe, we are not ready for whatever comes. The family can argue, mock, ignore each other at its worst, but that family will never let itself sink. A canoe that lets itself sink is certainly wiser never to leave the beach. When we know that we are not alone in our actions, we also know we are lifted up by everyone else.

6. A HUNGRY PERSON HAS NO CHARITY

Always nourish yourself. The bitter person, thinking that sacrifice means self-destruction, shares mostly anger. A paddler who doesn't eat at the feasts doesn't have enough strength to paddle in the morning. Take that sandwich they throw at you at 2.00 A.M.! The gift of who you are only enters the world when you are strong enough to own it.

7. EXPERIENCES ARE NOT ENHANCED THROUGH CRITICISM

Who we are, how we are, what we do, why we continue, flourish with tolerance. The canoe fellows who are grim go one way. The men and women who find the lightest flow may sometimes go slow, but when they arrive they can still sing. And they have gone all over the sea, into the air with the seagulls, under the curve of the wave with the dolphin and down to the whispering shells, under the continental shelf. Withdrawing the blame acknowledges how wonderful a part if it all every one of us really is.

8. THE JOURNEY IS WHAT WE ENJOY

Although the start is exciting and the conclusion gratefully achieved, it is the long, steady process we remember. Being part of the journey requires great preparation; being done with a journey requires great awareness; being on the journey, we are much more than ourselves. We are part of the movement of life. We have a destination, and for once our will is pure, our goal is to go on.

9. A GOOD TEACHER ALLOWS THE STUDENT TO LEARN

We can berate each other, try to force each other to understand, or we can allow each paddler to gain awareness through the ongoing journey. Nothing sustains us like that sense of potential that we can deal with things. Each paddler learns to deal with the person in front, the person behind, the water, the air, the energy; the blessing of the eagle.

10. WHEN GIVEN ANY CHOICE AT ALL, BE A WORKER BEE – MAKE HONEY!

The Ten Rules of the Canoe were developed by the Quileute Canoe contingent for a Northwest Experimental Education Conference in 1990.