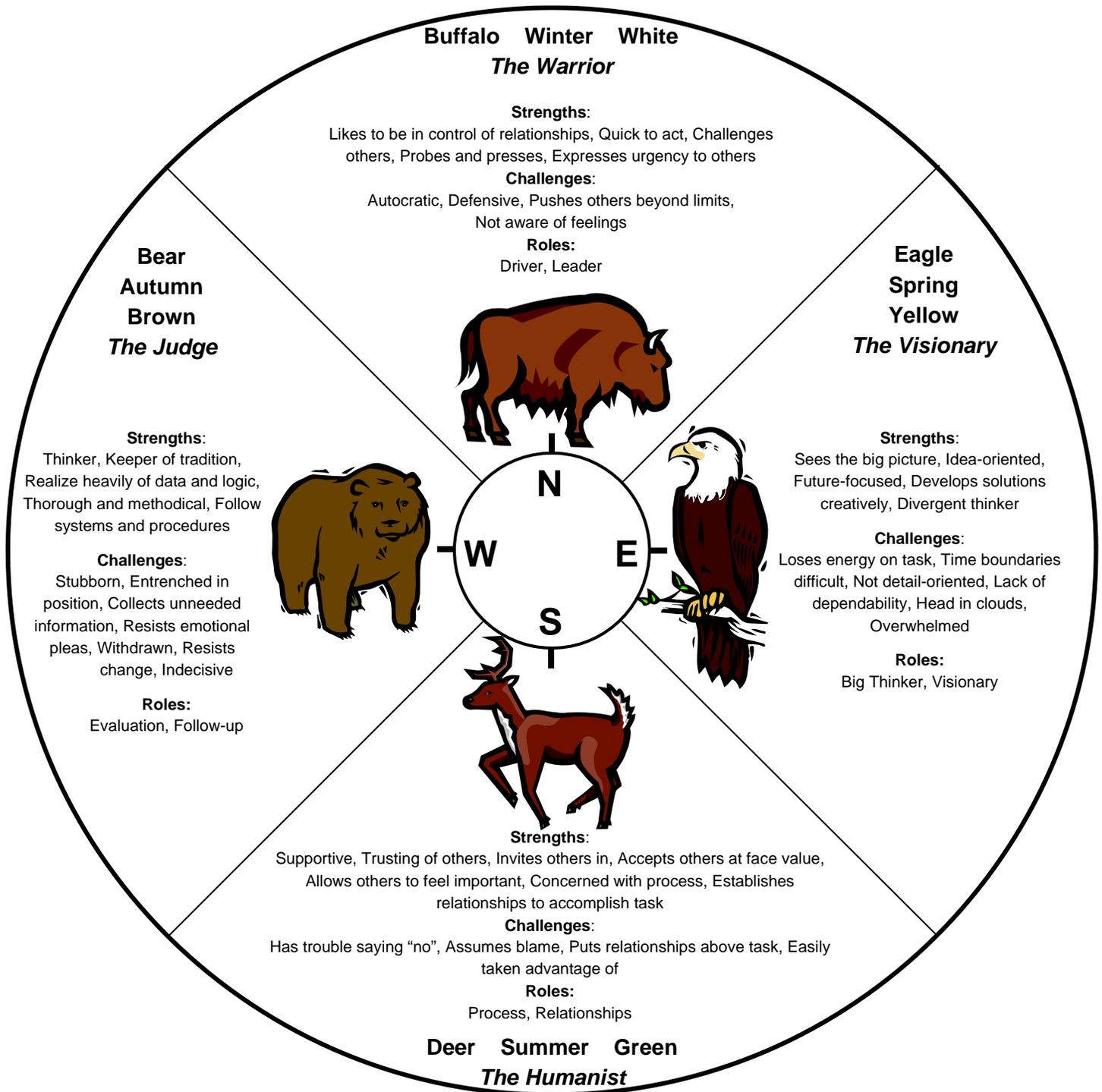


# The Medicine Wheel

## A Design for Understanding Individual Differences and Group Strengths



# The Medicine Wheel

## A Design for Understanding Individual Differences and Group Strengths

The Medicine Wheel is a way of looking at individual differences which come to us from the 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 teams.

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

The *Lakota* believe that each of use 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 a strength rather than an impediment.

## The Four Directions/Styles Are:

### **North – Buffalo – White – Winter:**

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

### **East – Eagle – Yellow – Spring:**

These are people of creativity and innovation, 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 a vision, ignoring the details of follow-through.*)

### **South – Deer – Green – Summer:**

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

### **West – Bear – Brown – Autumn:**

These are people who are analytic, methodical, and introspective. They are careful 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 may 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.

