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Dear National Basketry Organization,

I am a member of your organization and a practicing teacher and worker in basketry. For the last five years, I have devoted myself full time to the field, taking classes, teaching classes, weaving tons of things, and even serving as president of the Columbia Basin Basketry Guild (Portland, OR). In the past few years, I have begun to show my work in exhibitions and I have extended my class taking and teaching to include conferences and gatherings as far away from Portland, OR as Maine and Michigan.

In the course of my work, I have met quite a few basket weavers and I believe they are some of the kindest, gentlest, most generous people I have ever met. However, when I get together with these basket friends, a particular set of questions usually comes up, often accompanied by flared tempers and, sometimes, even tears. These questions begin with how much and when it is OK to charge for our work (e.g., teaching, selling patterns, selling baskets, etc.) and quickly lead to questions of ethics. How do we proceed as professionals, doing and enjoying our work and accepting payment for good work done when appropriate, with the confidence that we are justly honoring our art and our fellow artists? The ensuing discussions can become so emotionally charged, that many of us seem to change from being kind and gentle artists into insecure, hurt, aggressive, territorial, paranoid, smug and/or angry beings.

The question of ethics is one that is close to many people's hearts and currently there is nowhere to turn, other than within, for guidance. This becomes a difficult task as each person has a different concept of what is OK to do and what is not. Perhaps we just need a little guidance? To remedy this situation, I propose that an Ethics Code be developed that gives guidance on these matters. The National Basketry Organization seems perfectly suited to take on such a task.

Here are some of the questions that seem to come up on a regular basis:

If you learn to make a basket in a class (or from a book), is it then OK to make more of those baskets to sell or should you ask permission before selling them or giving them away? When is it OK to teach a pattern? Is it OK to see a photo of a basket in a book or magazine or see it in a museum and create a pattern for it? Is it OK to buy a basket from an import shop and then create & teach the pattern? Is it OK to claim a pattern as your own just because you don't know the original artist? Really, how different is that from seeing someone's basket in an exhibit or from taking a class and doing a similar design for sale or for a class? When can we call it our own design? When do you have the right to tell others not to teach something? Is it OK to tell people

that they can't teach something you are teaching even if the pattern is not yours originally and is widely available for free? Do I need to ask permission to repeat anything that anyone ever says to me (basket tips)? Do I need permission to teach the same technique as someone else? When is a basket "different enough" to be "mine"?

Generally I tell people, if you are in doubt about teaching or selling something derived from someone else's work, ask that original artist/teacher, but even that isn't always that simple. I, for example, have taken classes from dozens and dozens of teachers and trying to remember who taught me what and how to contact them in order to ask if I could make a similar basket would be time consuming at best. (And more than one person has taught the same thing, so how am I supposed to know the lineage of the "true origin"?) And honestly, after so many years, I often sometimes don't know if a piece I make is something I have come up with on my own or inspired by something I saw somewhere at a retreat, store or museum

My intention is to weave what is in my heart and teach others what I know. My intent is to share the joy and wisdom of weaving while helping to carry on the tradition. So, how do I go about it without accidentally and unintentionally hurting or offending others?

I know I should "be myself" and "do my own thing", but change or "being different" is often not readily embraced, so to be successful in teaching I have found it a necessity to be more like others, while still trying to bring my personality and style through. On the one hand, I feel this is selling myself short, but on the other hand, I don't live in an isolated world, so why should I be ashamed of being like others? I live in a community and as such, everything I do is a celebration of that community. Maybe what is in my heart today that wants to be woven is something you have told me. Is it wrong to be inspired by and wish to share the messages from those around me? I'd like to give credit to every teacher that has inspired my baskets and patterns, but there have been so many.

To resolve this dilemma for myself, in addition to getting permission from others when I feel it is appropriate, I have taken to writing a "lineage" or "words before all else" section (inspired by a Thanksgiving Address given by Tekaronieneken Jake Swamp, a sub-chief of the Wolf Clan of the Iroquois Confederacy, which came to me through the Wilderness Awareness School) at the top of my patterns to explain where my ideas came from (if I know) and to honor and thank those who have most directly inspired the pattern. In reality, every life I have touched has influenced my work, and sadly, I cannot list each by name in my patterns, but I believe strongly in showing gratitude and honoring those who have come before.

Still, I wish there were at least some sort of code of ethics for teachers and workers in the community of weavers. Below is a first attempt at writing one. It is inspired by the International Center for Reiki Training's Code of Ethics which can be found at:
<http://reiki.org/ReikiClasses/EthicalStandards.html>.

Basketry Teacher's Code of Ethics:

1. Be in agreement with and work to fully express the purpose of promoting basketry, the art, skill, heritage and education related thereto.

2. Respect and value all basket weavers regardless of lineage or organizational affiliation. Refrain from making negative statements about other basket weavers.
3. Actively work to create harmony and friendly cooperation between all basket weavers regardless of lineage or organizational affiliation.
4. If teaching, encourage all students to use their own inner guidance in deciding whom to study with including the possibility of studying with more than one teacher.
5. Openly encourage all your students to do the best job possible with the basketry styles they are guided to use.
6. Always work to empower your students and to encourage and assist them in their personal growth as well as in the development of their own skills as a basketry weaver, teacher, & seller.
7. Always treat your students with the greatest respect. Never engage in any illegal or immoral activity with your students.
8. Practice Truth in Advertising. Be willing to openly discuss the subjects covered in your classes, the fee that is charged, and the amount of time spent in class with any prospective students.
9. Never use another person's copyrighted material in your classes without permission and giving credit.
10. Be open to the continuing process of enhancing your professional qualifications, training, experience and skills.
11. Be actively working on your own development as a weaver so as to embody and fully express the essence of basketry in everything you do.
12. Acknowledge that basketry works in conjunction with other forms of art. All things are connected and as such other art forms can inspire basketry just as basketry can inspire other art forms.
13. Traditions are important and should be honored. Also, new ideas and techniques should be honored if we are to keep this art form, this way of life, thriving.

I know the above code does not address all of the issues that I have brought up, but it seems like a good starting point and I encourage the National Basketry Organization to work towards creating a spirit of unity and cooperation among its members and to remind us that when one of us succeeds, all of us succeed. Let us work together to celebrate this beautiful craft and each of our roles in spreading it throughout the generations!

Sincerely,

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