



Calumet National Heritage Area Initiative

18TH ANNUAL CALUMET HERITAGE CONFERENCE | OCTOBER 28, 2017

KEYNOTE SPEAKER | TED CABLE, PHD

INTERPRETING INTERPRETATION

based on | *The Gifts of Interpretation: 15 Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture* |
by Larry Beck and Ted Cable :|: Sagamore Publishing, Urbana, IL

:| INTERPRET |:

:|: [SELECTED DICTIONARY DEFINITIONS](#) :|:

to set forth the meaning of; explain; explicate; elucidate | to bring out the meaning of by performance or execution | to translate | to explain something; give an explanation

:|: [WORKING DEFINITIONS FROM SELECTED EXPERTS](#) :|:

An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experiences, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information. :| Freeman Tilden

An interpreter is someone who works to convey the meaning of our cultural and natural landscapes and the features that make up these landscapes.... So this is interpretation. Helping people to see. :| Larry Beck and Ted Cable

The helping of the visitor to feel something that the interpreter feels - a sensitivity to the beauty, complexity, variety and interrelatedness of the environment; a sense of wonder; a desire to know. It should help the visitor develop a feeling of being at home in the environment. It should help the visitor develop perception. :| Harold Walin

Not having interpretation in a park is like inviting a guest to your house, opening the door, and then disappearing. :| William H. Carr

Interpretation is the communication link between people and the resource. :| Grant W. Sharpe

The job of interpretation is to open the minds of people so they can receive – on the world's best receiver, the human brain – the interesting signals that the world is constantly sending. And the messages sent, when added up, tell what the world is all about. :| Yorke Edwards

Interpretation is the revelation of a larger truth that lies behind any statement of fact. The interpreter goes beyond the apparent to the real, beyond a part to a whole, beyond a truth to a more important truth. :| Freeman Tilden

*Interpretation is a communication process that forgoes **emotional** and **intellectual** connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource.* :| NAI



:| INTERPRETATION IS A PROFESSION OF GIVING |:

You give little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.
:| Kahlil Gibran

The joy of the gift, for the interpreter, is in the giving. The profession is a noble one in that we are serving others by providing them life-enriching gifts. We do so with very little expected in return – mostly out of joy from giving the gifts...Our gift is in helping others to see and in so doing we gain resolution in our own vision. We are blessed with gifts and it is our blessing to share them with others. :| Larry Beck and Ted Cable

:| SEVEN PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE INTERPRETATION |:

1. **To spark an interest, interpreters must relate the subject to the lives of visitors.**

Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something with the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile. :| Tilden

Do not try to satisfy your vanity by teaching a great many things. Awaken people's curiosity. It is enough to open minds; do not overload them. Put there just a spark. If there is some good inflammable stuff, it will catch fire. :| Anatole France

2. **The purpose of interpretation goes beyond providing information to reveal deeper meaning and truth.**

Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information. :| Tilden

3. **The interpretive presentation - as a work of art - should be designed as a story that informs, entertains, and enlightens.**

The story is the thing...Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts...Any art is in some degree teachable. :| Tilden

4. **The purpose of the interpretive story is to inspire and to provoke people to broaden their horizons.**

*Let us probe the silent places,
let us seek what luck betide us;
let us journey to a lonely land I know.
There's a whisper on the night-wind,
there's a star a gleam to guide us,
And the Wind is calling, calling...let us go.* :| Robert Service



The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation. :| Tilden

Interpreters have, at different levels of commitment and approach, a responsibility to broaden horizons and provoke a more sensitive, a more caring attitude toward our cultural and natural resources. To do anything else would be an act of professional irresponsibility. :| Beck and Cable

5. Interpretation should present a complete theme and address the whole person.

A cardinal purpose of interpretation, it seems to me, is to present a whole, rather than a part, no matter how interesting the specific part may be. :| Tilden

Of all the words in the English language, none is more beautiful than 'whole' . :| Tilden

The dictionary offers the words 'healed' and 'restored' as synonyms of 'whole.' Interpretation toward a whole seeks to restore the whole person. By meeting personal needs, interpretation can enhance the visitor's well-being. Furthermore, interpretation can lend itself to the cause of restoring our planet to environmental health...By knowing our visitors and our interpretive place, we may best interpret a 'whole' that will be meaningful and enduring. :| Beck and Cable

6. Interpretation for children, teenagers, and seniors - when these comprise uniform groups - should follow fundamentally different approaches.

Nothing you do for children is ever wasted. They seem not to notice us, hovering, averting our eyes, and they seldom offer thanks, but what we do for them is never wasted. :| Garrison Keillor

Age is not all decay; it is the ripening, the swelling, of the fresh life within, that withers and bursts the husk. :| George MacDonald

Interpreters can meet the needs of people throughout the lifespan - from the tender stem of young growth, to the budding flower, to the green formative fruit, to the ripe fruit bursting with new life. There has been tremendous growth in segmenting and serving children over the past few decades in interpretive-related ventures. We expect to see similar growth in segmenting and serving teenagers and older persons in the future. :| Beck and Cable

7. Passion is the essential ingredient for powerful and effective interpretation - passion for the resource and for those people who come to be inspired by the same.

THE PRICELESS INGREDIENT. I feel certain that the single principle must be love. - Tilden

What I fear and desire most in the world is passion. I fear it because it promises to be spontaneous, out of my control, unnamed, beyond my reasonable self. I desire it because passion has color, like the landscape before me. It is not pale. It is not neutral. It reveals the backside of the heart. :| Terry Tempest Williams



THE INTERPRETER'S CREED

:|: ..as a Practicing Interpreter, I shall.. :|:

- SEEK** to serve visitors;
 - to be an ambassador for the place I work;
 - to instill in visitors the ability and desire to sense beauty in their surroundings.

- SEEK** to respect all the visitors with whom I come in contact and welcome them as I would welcome guests in my home; and to share equally my knowledge and passion regardless of the visitor's age, gender, interests, physical abilities, or cultural differences.

- SEEK** to be agreeable, look good, have a polished presence, speak in a well-modulated voice, and be genuinely friendly.

- SEEK** to see the good, or the humor, in any situation and answer repetitious questions with enthusiasm, as if they were asked for the first time.

- SEEK** to convey only well-documented, accurate information.

- SEEK** to be an exemplary role model for environmentally responsible behavior by word and example.

- SEEK** to structure interpretive design and programming in such a way as to minimize the impact on cultural and environmental resources.

- SEEK** to improve my mind, continue learning about the resource, and expand my learning about the principles and processes of interpretation that will ultimately benefit visitors to the site.

- SEEK** to help other interpreters achieve their interpretive goals, particularly assisting new interpreters to develop confidence and abilities.

- BELIEVE** in myself;
 - give my best to the world and expect that the world will give its best to me.

from *Interpretation for the 21st Century*,
by Larry Beck & Ted Cable. 2002.