



Collective Resilience: We Rise Podcast

Episode 02 Show Notes

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TITLE: Honoring Elders and Greeting the Morning with Tony Skrelunas

EPISODE DESCRIPTION

Welcome to the second episode of the We Rise Podcast. Today, Tony Skrelunas joins to share about the importance of ancestral wisdom and rethinking the future.

Tony helps communities move forward while rooting into their history. Holding an MBA and a partner of [Navajo Power](#), a utilities solar company, Tony is also a motivational speaker, inviting people to look back at their values and teachings to help overcome challenges.

In this conversation, we explore how to reconnect to your ancestral roots with gratitude, how to cultivate resilience in your community, and the importance of rekindling longevity in a modern world. Enjoy.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Reconnecting to your ancestral routes to become your authentic self.

Tony is from Big Mountain on Black Mesa in Arizona. Much of his family worked in mines, including his father who worked in a power plant, which supported Tony through college. He was raised by his great grandparents in a traditional Navajo way, herding sheep and living off the land, but heading off to college, he found himself pulling away from his Navajo roots. After failing out of college, Tony chose to spend time living with his grandparents in the Navajo (or Diné) community.

Taking part in a 10-day ceremony known as “The Fire Dance”, Tony began rekindling and embracing his identity. Consciously relearning his culture, he found himself grounding into his community with a deeper sense of gratitude for the ceremonies, customs, and elders. Learning from his Navajo culture, he began understanding the depth and value of connecting to ancestral wisdom.

Returning to college with a newfound strength, Tony became president of their Business Association, and eventually earned an MBA.

The Navajo culture teaches the importance of prayer, gratitude, humor, and mindfulness. Through prayer you express gratitude for provisions, wisdom, family, and life. You pray for your thoughts, intentions, and words to be harmonious and wise. In humor, there is celebration for the joys of life and laughter. In mindfulness, you learn how to stay focused on positive thoughts acknowledging the power of words. It is through these practices and reconnection to his ancestral roots that Tony found identity, purpose, and guidance.

Every human has ancestors and with that comes culture, history, guideposts, and wisdom. When you rekindle a connection to your past, it can reconnect you with your most authentic self.

Cultivating Resilience Within Your Community.

Fighting against acculturation, Tony explains how the Navajo community is leaning into its history and wisdom while creating a new future. A mark of their resilience has been staying true to their traditions while incorporating Western culture in ways that align with their community and values.

Resting on the wisdom of the elders and incorporating the business knowledge from community members, Tony is seeing his Navajo community shift focus, creating a new, nurturing economy that holds true to its ancestry and culture.

To create a new and abundant economy for all requires honoring your heritage and values. Historically, Western culture has viewed themselves as superior to the Navajo Nation. The government implemented policies aimed toward acculturation, imposing Western ideals and systems upon the community. Fresh out of grad school, Tony was responsible for creating new structures for the [Navajo Nation](#). In this project he sought to maintain respect for elders and mitigate opponent maligning, commonly seen in Western political culture.

The Navajo Nation livelihood primarily stemmed from the resource extractive industry. Tony explains how the Peabody Coal Company came into Black Mesa and for over 30 years pumped water out of the region, to the detriment of the land and the community. Some of these communities will run out of water in five years.

Tony has witnessed and participated in the movement toward renewable energy, sustainable farming, and local food sources. This rethinking of economy and community, and the restoration of the importance of culture represent the resilience of the Navajo Nation.

Restoring the past through means of the future.

Throughout the COVID pandemic, the Navajo community has shifted toward the use of technology and virtual platforms to maintain tradition. This resilience has enabled them to continue celebrating and participating in rituals and ceremonies. These adaptations happened to protect the elders of the community, the leaders, the storytellers, and the language holders. Utilizing these modern tools has preserved culture that was being lost due to the pandemic.

Two years ago, Tony's grandfather passed away at 103 years old. In the hospital, nearing the end of his life, nurses were in awe of the peace he had for what was happening. Tony's grandfather represents a desire for all people to live a long, fulfilled life. Through studying [Blue Zones](#), the world's longest-lived cultures, Tony has become increasingly invested in helping the Navajo community rekindle this longevity in the midst of a modern world.

As The Navajo Nation has become more integrated into Western culture, more children have moved away from the community, people have chosen corporate jobs over sheep herding and working on the land, and elders have been put into rest homes in their old age.

Tony works to rekindle the contentment of life and peace his grandfather had for others in his community. He emphasizes the importance of being in nature and out in the sunlight. He promotes the use of traditional medicine, such as burning sage. Physical exercise and an active lifestyle was a natural part of life for the Navajo Native people as well, and Tony says this activity helps heal the body.

Restoring culture, tradition and values in the modern age will not only lead to preservation of history, it will also restore deep purpose and create possibilities for the future.

NOTABLE QUOTE BY TONY SKRELUNAS

"I think we're missing the point of life. We need people that are of the land still and of tradition still. And so a lot of my teaching is that: redefine what success means to our people."

LINKS/RESOURCES MENTIONED

To learn more about Tony and the work he is doing, go to the [Tribe Awaken Website](#)

[Navajo Nation Government Website](#)

[Navajo Power](#)

[Blue Zones Website](#)

[The School of Greatness: Interview with Rob Murgatroud](#)

Collective Resilience: We Rise is produced by [Dialogue + Design Associates](#), [Podcasting For Creatives](#), with music by [Drishti Beats](#).

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