



Change To Make Your World Better, But Hold On To Your Values!

Chief of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians

Phylliss J. Anderson

Life experiences shape us.

I grew up pretty poor. I am glad that I did, because all of those experiences teach you about what it takes to survive and knowing what you have to do in life. Growing up we did not have much on the reservation. We did not have paved roads, indoor plumbing, electricity, or a gymnasium to play in. Many of our young today do not know what it is like to grow up without these conveniences. It really shapes who you are and what you become.

See the resources and assets in your world that will make a positive change.

Our tribe is unique in many ways. The tribe's economic success story is well-known and studied. But equally as important is the tribe's ability to adapt to the changing business climate while still remaining close to our culture and heritage. It's very important to me to maintain our traditions and instill those values in our young. I am very proud of what we have accomplished. Our language, tribal arts and crafts, and traditions such as social dancing have remained, but we must work hard to not let those things slip away.

I think right now the struggle is the economy. Everywhere we look, people need jobs, which is true for our communities as well. There are tribes in other regions that are struggling just as much, if not more than us. I hear that at United South and Eastern Tribes (USET) and at the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI). In order for us to be progressive as Native Americans, we have to use each other as resources, utilize each other's talents, and work in unity.

Each positive step you take will create a new set of values.

Change in our tribe and communities have been slow at times. Some of our younger generations, not having lived through times as our elders, don't have an understanding of what we didn't have and what they do. I honestly feel that we need to go back and teach our young about the lives we had. The best way we can try to do that, for not only our people but also the people of Mississippi, is to start some type of curriculum within the state that allows us to teach real Choctaw history that tells our struggles and achievements in overcoming the odds. Growing up poor, without the infrastructure of today and living in an era where successes were made from

hard work and perseverance, gives you more of an appreciation for what we didn't have. Our children need that understanding but they also need every available resource we can offer as a tribe. Success starts one step at a time, providing lessons on where we have come from and building on that.

Once you have a plan, making life better for your people takes diligence and strength.

I have learned over the years that you're never going to please everyone. Everyone has ideas, and it's important to hear and consider them. I'm not the type of person that needs to be surrounded by "yesmen." I'd rather have a group that can present alternative options and new ideas that we can measure and implement. I want people that will help challenge me. It takes a group of leaders to get us to where we want to go. I believe the successes we achieve belong to the Choctaw people but any insufficiencies that occur those are mine alone. That's why it is vital to have a long term plan and short term goals. We have been focused on creating more job opportunities, stabilizing our government in these tough economic times, creating new educational opportunities, and providing better health care and housing options for our people. There has to be a balance.

Bringing multiple industries into the fold is important for the economic development of our tribe. Resorts and casinos cannot be our only option. We have to spread out and look for other opportunities in manufacturing and hi-tech fields. It's important to me, that when my job is done as Chief, I leave behind a stable government and a roadmap to the future so our tribe will continue to progress. I made a commitment to my people that I would work hard for them everyday and I have been true to that commitment.

My heart is with the people. I have a great passion for what I do because it is for them that I do it. When I leave this position, I want tribal members to know that I realized every decision I made affects our tribe. I want them to say, "She was a Chief that really cared about the Choctaw people, she worked hard for them because that is what she pledged to do."

(Choctaw, Mississippi) Phylliss J. Anderson has been serving as Chief of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians since 2011. Chief Anderson is the first female and fourth elected Tribal Chief of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians subsequent to the Tribal government's re-establishment of 1945. She grew up on a small portion of the Choctaw Reservation called Red Water in central Mississippi. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians is the only federally recognized Tribe in the state of Mississippi with about 35,000 acres of land in 10 Mississippi counties and a parcel of land near Memphis, Tennessee. In 2003, she began her elected leadership career by being elected to two terms in Tribal Council, where she also served as secretary/treasurer.

