



# UNLOCKING ABORIGINAL POTENTIAL IN THE WORKFORCE...

National Aboriginal Recruitment, Retention & Advancement Conference

## HR CONFERENCE UNLOCKS ABORIGINAL WORKFORCE POTENTIAL

During the first week of April 2007, more than 300 human resource professionals from every region of Canada gathered in Ottawa to share their knowledge and insight into Aboriginal recruitment, retention and advancement.

The *Unlocking Aboriginal Potential in the Workforce* conference was sold out and represented a national first – bringing together delegates from the government sector, the private sector, the Aboriginal community and training institutions.

Over a three-day period, the conference hosted a total of 55 speakers, including five keynote speakers and three Aboriginal entertainment acts which performed for conference attendees at a gala event.

Considered a resounding success, the conference's main objective was to help employers develop better understanding and competencies on Aboriginal recruitment, retention and advancement.

"The advancement of Aboriginal people in the workplace is a complex issue that cannot be solved without thoughtful strategic consideration for the realities of the Aboriginal community and mainstream workforce," says Kelly Lendsay, president and CEO of the Aboriginal Human Resource Council (AHRC) and conference host.

"It gives me great pride to say that, even in the face of much adversity, the transformation of solutions and proof-of-concept for Aboriginal inclusion in the workplace is evident in Canada and at this conference," he says.

One of the major themes of the conference was the role of an Aboriginal workforce in Canada's future growth, and while the country currently enjoys a period of unprecedented wealth and prosperity, there are troubling signs ahead in the form of staffing shortages.

With skilled labour shortages already impacting business growth, Canada's Aboriginal peoples are poised to fill this void – provided that supportive training initiatives and career opportunities exist.

"To increase Aboriginal participation in the economy, more business leaders in Canada need to develop a better appreciation of the business case for hiring Aboriginal people," says Lendsay.

"They must encourage and adopt new policies and strategies... an investment is needed in the short and long-term development of an Aboriginal workforce."

By bringing together like-minded HR practitioners, conferences such as *Unlocking Aboriginal Potential in the Workforce* will help foster strong networks of change as organizations and communities consider new ways to work with employers to prepare Aboriginal candidates for the future workforce.

"Focus on economic development is critical to Canada's productivity," notes Chief Clarence Louie, Osoyoos Indian Band Development Corporation and AHRC board member.

"However, attention must be given to the key driver of productivity – human resource development," he says.

As delegates left the conference with a better understanding of how the Aboriginal workforce could be accelerated into Canada's growing labour market, many commented on the positive outcomes of an event that promoted a better understanding of the role of human resource development in general.

For those who missed the conference or for those who want to revisit favourite sessions or take advantage of missed seminars, keynote and workshop PowerPoint presentations are posted on the AHRC website ([www.aboriginalhr.ca/HRconference/](http://www.aboriginalhr.ca/HRconference/)) as they become available.

Delegates will be notified by email when the conference proceedings are available to view on-line. As well, the conference will be offered again in 2008.



Independence doesn't end with having a job but that's where it starts  
– Chief Clarence Louie

Some of the thoughts of some of the presenters at the conference: ○ ○ ○ ○

"Systems today have the same devastating effect on Aboriginal peoples that smallpox had in the past."  
*Dr. Trent Keough, Portage College*

"Integrity means who I am as a real person shows on the outside."  
*Gray Poehnell, Co-author, Guiding Circles*

"We focus on high potential Aboriginal candidates, hoping to bring them into management."  
*Shana Bradley, Suncor Energy*

"Australia has reformed its approach. The key aim of the new strategy is to support the economic independence of indigenous families."  
*Jody Hamilton, HRSDC (Seconded from the Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations)*

"Many of the injustices that occurred only a generation or two ago would be unlawful today."  
*Chief Ian Davidson, Sudbury Police Force*

"We're trying to bring science and technology classes to the North so they can experience post-secondary education."  
*Darwin Roy, Cameco*

"Getting the right people into the right jobs also means getting the right mix of people."  
*Denise McBride, Shell Canada*



“  
I'd rather be hated for what I am rather than be loved for what I am not.  
”

*Farley Flex – Judge, Canadian Idol*



“  
Of the nearly nine billion dollars the federal government gives out [to Aboriginal people], only four percent goes to economic development.  
”

*Andrew Popko – VP, Aboriginal Relations, EnCana*

"The most useful ideas I learned and will apply from this conference are too many to list."

– George Webber, Aramark

"I learned a lot about barriers and solutions, the importance of the interview and the pre-interview process."

– Lisette Richard, Health Canada

"It is nice to know many companies are facing the same issues and coming up with different ideas to address them."

– Stacy Lefevre, DeBeers Canada



“  
If you want to leave footprints in  
the sand, put on work boots.”

Chief Clarence Louie – Osoyoos Band

“You have your own identity  
because you have the support  
of people around you.”  
*Dr. Norm Amundsen*

“Government is so complex, we  
hire consultants to figure out  
how we can use government  
funding to help Aboriginal  
people.”

*Andrew Popko, EnCana*

“What would this workplace be  
like if ‘Susan’ (a female) were  
not there?”

*Farley Flex*



“  
Turn off the lights, we are all  
equal. The only race worth  
talking about is the human  
race.”

Dr. Neil McDonald – Cross-Cultural  
Consulting

“You don't have to be  
prejudiced to discriminate.  
Self-interest is enough.  
For example, it's easy to  
discriminate against people  
from First Nations if you  
believe everything they get is  
for free.”

*Dr. Neil McDonald*

“We seem to be able to recruit  
and retain our Aboriginal  
woman employees more  
than Aboriginal employees  
generally.”

*Shana Bradley, Suncor Energy*



“  
Meeting the needs of employees  
has become as important as  
meeting the needs of customers.”

Dr. Norman Amundsen, Professor, UBC &  
Co-Author of Guiding Circles

“It's not just a job – it's a  
person.”  
*Denise McBride, Shell Canada*

“I always tell people, the most  
important counselling you give  
should end in employment  
counselling.”

*Chief Clarence Louie,  
Osoyoos First Nation*

## When the Laughs Were on Everyone

Whether it was the competitive efforts at throat-singing by two halves of the audience, or the stunning rhythms and dances of an Inuit trio, or the uncanny reawakening of Kermit the Frog, the evening's entertainment was engulfing, invigorating and easily the equal of any evening of entertainment anywhere in Canada. We're so pumped about these performers we encourage you to book them for your events; contact information is on page 6.



Inuit cultural performers sang and performed with a bracing combination of grace and gusto



Recently the Disney Company announced that Derrick Starlight will be the new voice of Kermit the Frog – a better-than-suitable choice, according to the audience's reactions.



Métis singer Sheldon Elter acquired a following as a performer on Canadian Idol; with the brio and wit of his singing, he expanded that following at the night's gala.

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## Watch for the 2008 National Aboriginal Recruitment, Retention and Advancement Conference

The council is planning to host a second national conference in Aboriginal recruitment, retention and advancement in the spring of 2008. We will announce a call for papers and more pertinent information about the upcoming conference in the fall. Watch in the council website ([www.aboriginalhr.ca](http://www.aboriginalhr.ca)) or in the *National Report on Aboriginal Inclusion*, Issue #12, due in November.

## Psst – want to book a great entertainment act?

One worthy and long-established tradition of Aboriginal employment is entertainment. We would like to see more Aboriginal entertainers hired, particularly such fabulously good ones as were heard the evening of April 4th in Ottawa. Booking sources for Kendra Tagooona and her group are 613.889-0765; for Sheldon Elter 780.217.1979; for Derrick Starlight 780.217-1979.

## WHAT THE NEWS HEADLINES SAID

National Post –  
"Employers hungry for workers,  
Human Resource Minister says"

The Vancouver Sun –  
"Labour shortage benefits  
aboriginals"

Montreal Gazette –  
"Red-hot job market opens to  
immigrants, aboriginals: Solberg;  
Minister sees upside for other  
minorities, too"

The Edmonton Journal –  
"Solberg sees boom benefits for  
aboriginals; Other unemployed also  
stand to gain from hot job market"

The Leader-Post, Regina –  
"Labour shortage benefits aboriginals"

The Windsor Star –  
"Northern industrial boom good news  
for aboriginals"

The Daily News, Nanaimo, B.C. –  
"Businesses finally reaching out to  
aboriginal workers"

The Star-Phoenix, Saskatoon –  
"Society to benefit from shortage of  
workers: Solberg"