

Remarks by:

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to the

*Inclusion Works '09
Recruitment Fair*

**The Difference Your Difference Makes:
*The Power of Inclusion in the 21st Century Workplace***

Sheraton Vancouver Wall Centre
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Kelly, thank you very much for your kind and generous words...what a pleasure to be introduced by both a colleague and friend, not to mention, one of Canada's chief innovators of Aboriginal diversity in Canada. Kelly is an exemplary role model to every student and graduate in this room...yes, he has earned a degree in Physical Education and a MBA, but it's how he translated his education and community leadership into career success that should equally impress you – from being the first director of Aboriginal Business Education programs at the University of Saskatchewan to becoming the first President/CEO of the Aboriginal Human Resource Council. Kelly is a man synonymous with “firsts” – and now, this first-of-a-kind Aboriginal recruitment fair in Canada. After today's agenda, you know that Inclusion Works '09 is about bridging the great disconnect between Aboriginals, Canadians and employers. You also know it's about employers understanding how to work with Aboriginal students and communities, and Aboriginal students and graduates showcasing the potential benefits that come with the inclusion of Aboriginal talent in Canadian workplaces. Kelly, thank you and the Council team for creating this signature event!

In the next few minutes I will highlight key perspectives and trends about the current landscape and the power of inclusion in the 21st century workplace...and then reinforce how all of you – Aboriginal students/graduates and employers – can make this day and entire event, as well as the weeks and months ahead, your call to action. Ultimately, it's all about the difference your difference makes.

First and foremost, I am delighted that British Columbia – Vancouver – was chosen to host Inclusion Works '09, as it's a reminder to all of us that the world will see Canada's Aboriginal talent in play in 2010. The Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games has committed to “achieving unprecedented Aboriginal participation in the planning and hosting of the Games.” As you see on the slide, The Winter Games emblem is a contemporary interpretation of the traditional Inukshuk, a stone sculpture used by Canada's Inuit people as signposts across the northern lands of snow and ice. Over time, the Inukshuk has become a symbol and expression of the hope, friendship, strength and hospitality of a nation that warmly welcomes people around the globe – that signifies we're on the right path and the value of strong relationships and diversity.

And this is where we must truly begin...with the landscape of diversity, as diversity encompasses acceptance, *inclusion* and respect. It means understanding and celebrating that each individual is unique and recognizing individual dimensions (race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs or other ideologies). Diversity is also a set of conscious practices that involve appreciating the interdependence of humanity, cultures and the natural environment; and building relationships and alliances across differences so that we can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination. Needless to say, diversity is a journey. Companies, organizations and communities that embrace diversity, undoubtedly embrace inclusion. And like most change issues, it comes down to the right leadership at the right time and the right action – and I'm not simply referring to leadership at the top (although this is critically important); I mean the right leadership difference at every level – and this means each of us in this room too – the difference your difference and our collective difference makes.

Speaking of differences...last Friday night, I got back from an amazing month in Southeast Asia where I came to further appreciate the value of the “diversity difference”...did you know that in the vibrant, hip and chaotic city of Hanoi, close to 50% of the people there are under the age of 35? I've always found it invigorating to be among young people so I was in heaven in Hanoi!

So from heaven in Hanoi, to heaven in this room...it is exciting to be among First Nations, Métis and Inuit young people who are part of the ongoing transformation of Canadian society – young people who celebrate cultural diversity and represent the strong contribution of Aboriginal peoples that is shaping Canada’s culture, new economy and 21st century workplace – young people who “get it.”

There’s no going back when it comes to advances in public policy and corporate practices revolving around diversity – and that’s why it’s also exciting to be among leading-edge employers – employers that understand it is essential for our cities and workplaces to attract diverse, talented people from all walks of life because of the vibrancy that successful pluralism brings – employers that recognize the potential of Aboriginal peoples – employers that also “get it.”

The cost of not doing enough with workplace diversity is significant. In RBC’s 2005 report, “The Diversity Advantage: A Case for Canada’s 21st Century Economy, it was stated that workplace diversity could add up to \$174-billion increase in personal income. It also stressed the need for all sectors to stay in tune to the value of hiring for diversity and how it is paramount to Canada’s economic future. “Smart employers recognize the benefits of diversity in gender, race and national origin, building a skilled workforce with a variety of cultural backgrounds, and that this will become even more important in the years ahead...this same diversity must be extended to our political and cultural life and our social institutions. But for most Canadians, participation in society will start with successful employment. This is why all stakeholders must work together to remove artificial barriers and improve the pathways to success for all of our people whether they are born here or come to Canada to build new lives as future citizens.”

Without a talented and diverse workforce, Canadian businesses will be unable to achieve corporate strategies for innovation and growth. In light of labour shortages, employers will miss out on incredible opportunities. No country in the world stands to gain as much economic benefit from diversity as Canada. If we succeed, we have an unrivalled advantage. If we fail, we pay a heavy cost in lost opportunity. We need to understand the social and economic benefits of diversity – that diversity has become a strategic imperative in our 21st century economy and workplace, as well as in Canadian life. Aboriginal students and graduates need to own, promote and manage the difference your difference makes!

What else do we know about the current landscape that has a bearing on today’s workplace and inclusion? Here are some “we know’s” to consider...we know that:

- Globally and locally, the balance of traditional power and influence is shifting – that change is occurring at mega-speed;
- Digital technologies and the Internet are transforming the operation of the Canadian economy, as well as economies and workplaces throughout the world;
- Young people are growing up with instantaneous electronic communication (e-mail often seems so passé now...we’re talking Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, to name a few); on April 2, it was reported that research from Melbourne University in Australia concluded watching movies on YouTube, playing games online, chatting up on instant messenger, updating one's status on Facebook and “twittering” could actually increase workers' productivity. The author of the paper, Dr Brent Coker, suggested that “workplace internet leisure browsing” or WILB, could help sharpen workers' concentration as “people need to zone out for a bit to get back their concentration” (I’m wondering what the employers in this room think about this research).

We also know that:

- Young people increasingly expect to spend considerable periods of their lives working and travelling the world;
- Education – an individual’s knowledge, skills and ability to learn – is fundamental to chances in life and the reduction of poverty;
- Aboriginal peoples are the fastest-growing source of labour in Canada. The Aboriginal labour force group is growing about six times faster than the Canadian labour force.

What does all this mean? As globalization, technological change, human capital and advances in education drive societies, how successfully Canada continues to manage the challenges and opportunities associated with diversity and inclusion will have an important bearing on the “recession recovery” of social and economic success in Canada, the quality of our communities and the success of our workplaces. This is why the “we knows” are so critical – knowledge and understanding is power for all of us!

The *inclusion* landscape could be referred to as the *2020 advantage* – with a focus on economics, culture, gender and age dimensions – a transformational landscape that Aboriginal students and graduates right here and across the country can and should be a part of cultivating:

- Picture Canada where barriers to full and effective labour force participation by Aboriginal peoples are more or less eliminated and opportunities for participation enhanced – the economic advantage.
- Picture the top 100 companies in Canada recruiting increased numbers of young and educated Aboriginal men and women – the cultural advantage.
- Picture Canadian employers reforming apprenticeship programs in the skilled trades that will facilitate greater participation by Aboriginal women – the gender advantage.
- Picture a Canada where significant education funding and other supports (including help by the private sector) – from early child development to post-graduate studies and the workplace itself – translates into an increased number of highly-skilled young Aboriginal men and women plus improved systems of lifelong learning – the age advantage.
- And picture a Canada where this signature event doesn’t need to be held – where accessing the vast pool of Aboriginal talent is part of ongoing attraction and recruitment activities in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors – where *Aboriginal talent for hire* is business as usual – the diversity advantage. I urge everyone to step up to the plate for the *2020 advantage*.

Today has been a full one for all of you...AFN Regional Chief in BC – Shawn Atleo – shared important insights to guide you along in an “uncharted world” – insights that may have helped you in the first round of interviews. Then there was the networking lunch, “mentorship” wisdom from Dr. Alike Lafontaine and the final round of interviews. Now you can take a deep breath and reflect on what you learned in the last eight hours – and I say this to students/graduates and employers alike.

To the students/graduates...I’m confident you made some valuable connections today and that job opportunities are around the corner. Of course, there’s always room for continuous improvement in preparing for interviews with prospective employers, so here are some tips that you may find useful on your career search journey (which I’ve heard have been of interest to several employers too) – and by the way, if I see a few smiles in the group while referring to various tips, I’ll assume you read page 19 of the Council’s recruitment fair portfolio and are well ahead of the game! Let’s get started...

- Check out a company's web site to find out if diversity, and as a result inclusion, is a high priority. Then do a Google search on the company to see what's been said about diversity and inclusion. Commitment and communication of that commitment makes a difference.
- Check out the leadership. Look at the makeup (diversity) of the top leadership and board of directors.
- Check out the corporate culture. Is it a culture that values differences and diversity? Is this reflected in learning and training? Ask people in targeted workplaces if they feel employers advocate and support diversity and inclusion?
- Check out the faces in workplaces that you are interested in working at? Do you see a number of Aboriginal faces and other groups represented?
- Check out where a company recruits and also if it recruits Aboriginal students at a variety of colleges and universities.
- Check out supplier-diversity relationships. For example, does a company encourage use of businesses owned by Aboriginal peoples etc?
- Check out the mirror. Remind yourself every day that you're in charge of your destiny – you represent the new 21st century workplace and leadership. Do the research, seek out a mentor, update your CV, write letters, prepare yourself for interviews and always know your target. As for your interviews today, always remember that first impressions last – if you want the job, initiate the follow-up. Show the leadership difference your difference makes. Be the change! The power of inclusion is everybody's business and your call to action!

To the employers...I want to share some thoughts with you about building on the culture of inclusion in your organization – you should be aware that one of my key influencers on this subject is Canada's Senator Donald Oliver (from Nova Scotia). A few years ago, the Senator asked me to deliver his speech on inclusion (he unexpectedly had to manage an urgent matter in Ottawa and couldn't fulfill his speaking commitment at a conference where I was also a keynote). To this day, many of his ideas have impacted my thinking, "reason to believe", call to action and what you're about to hear...

If your organization hopes to achieve a culture of inclusion, you must take regular temperature checks and examine where your organization stands with respect to diversity. "How many {Aboriginal} people are applying for jobs within your organization and at what levels? How many are successful on the job, how many are promoted and how many leave through the revolving door? How many complaints do you receive about unfair treatment? Do you routinely conduct exit interviews with those who leave your organization? If so, do you ask questions about the inclusiveness of your organization? Do you know if they are leaving because of any perceived biases or barriers to their advancement?"

"You must establish effective diversity measures, such as a zero-tolerance for racism policy, an organization-wide diversity training program and a robust accountability framework. And you must also tear down the barriers facing {Aboriginal peoples} in the workplace {for example, different cultures also have different perceptions of time, learning styles or work habits – often how you manage the little things will matter the most}, and replace these barriers with new support structures, such as networks and mentors. And above all, {senior} leaders must appreciate and embrace their role as champions of diversity. They must actively demonstrate that diversity is not just the nice thing to do or the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do."

Throughout your organization's journey towards a culture of inclusion, be brave, be bold, stay the course – and spread the word to other employers. The rewards will come. Your culture of inclusion will attract valuable new talent (including the Aboriginal talent you met today), fuel innovation and stimulate creativity. It will also drive bottom-line results. In other words, all your hard work will pay off in big dividends. The total package is nothing less than a strategic and competitive advantage. The power of inclusion is everybody's business and your call to action!

There's no doubt that CIBC, IBM Canada, Flint Energy, Thrifty Foods, Loblaw Companies, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, MGM Communications, National Defence, Natural Resources Canada, Scotiabank Group, SNC-Lavalin, Syncrude Canada, TD Bank Financial Group, TransCanada Corporation, Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, the Aboriginal Human Resource Council and of course RBC, invested time and dollars in this event because there is a "reason to believe." Perhaps part of this reason lies in the words of Kathleen Sawdo, one of our students from Grant MacEwan College. Kathleen said to Bill Mah for the recent Edmonton Journal story: "Being Aboriginal myself, racism isn't as bad as it used to be, I guess, but it's very much still there. This kind of thing (Inclusion Works '09) for Aboriginal people is such a wonderful opportunity to change the stereotypes and let people know we are educated. We do contribute to society and we have a lot to give." Talk about the pride in her words that gives us all more reason to believe! Thank you Kathleen and to all the students, graduates and employers for being champions of the inclusion call to action!

In closing...etched in my mind forever is a particular lesson I learned from a Cree elder in Manitoba – an 87 year-old woman who understood, more than most, about the power of inclusion. "Listen," she advised. "Or your tongue will cause you to go deaf."

Good luck to all – I expect many of your names will appear on RBC and other employer rosters across Canada this year. And you may want to remember what I call the 3 P's – the power of inclusion, the power of the difference your difference makes and the power of the Inukshuk!

Meegwetch/Thank you.

