

Bob Joseph

Sometimes, it's easy to forget that what seems natural and right today might have met with resistance only yesterday. Such is the case with Canadian businesses that are building positive relationships with aboriginal peoples.

Bob Joseph, manager of cultural relations and training for BC Hydro, a major utilities firm whose power lines cross aboriginal lands, explains:

"Prior to the 1980s, Canadian companies focused only on protecting their business interests on Indian Reserve Lands and thought they needed to deal solely

IGUARD NEWGUARD Bob Joseph/Manager, Cultural Relations and Corporate Training/
Department of Aboriginal Relations/BC Hydro/Vancouver, British Columbia/Age: 37

So many fish,
so little time

"My tribal community are canoe people, and I'm at home on the water," says Joseph, who is a member of the Gwawaenuk tribe. Even though he has access to many great places to fish, Joseph doesn't get to pursue this pastime as frequently as he'd like.

"I usually fish over the Christmas holidays and for a week during the summer. In winter, I fish a type of trout called steel head. In the summer, I fish salmon."

Joseph describes the lure: "By the time the boat pulls away from the wharf, I turn off the rest of world. Part of the adventure is never knowing what's going to happen. But if something bites, I'm a hero and there's something delicious to eat—like last summer when I caught a 42-pound salmon and I was only in a little rowboat!"

with government officials. But in the 1980s, certain changes occurred in Canada's Constitution that made consulting with aboriginal peoples not only good public relations, but also a legal requirement.

"Until the time that the rights of First Nations peoples were constitutionally protected, there wasn't a lot of incentive to devote any effort to facilitate relations with aboriginal communities. But in 1991, BC Hydro recognized the importance of fostering cooperative relations and established the department of Aboriginal Relations."

About the time that BC Hydro was launching its then one-person department, Joseph was working as a sports fishing guide and had just completed a two-year program in business administration at Camosun College. "I was always focused on a business career because as the heir to a hereditary chieftainship, one of my major responsibilities was to generate wealth and redistribute it to my community."

One day in 1991, Joseph set off with a gentleman on a fishing trip. "On the first day out, the man asked me what I did when I wasn't working as a guide. Then every few hours over the next several days, he barraged me with questions: *What can you offer a company that it would be interested in? What kind of education do you have? What kind of computer courses have you had?* and so on. At the end of the trip, the man handed me his card. He was the senior human resources manager for BC Hydro, and he asked me to call to arrange for an interview the next time I was in Vancouver. I learned later that the preliminary interview had been



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Once the decision-support tool had proved successful, the next step was to create knowledge management tools around e-learning. "We wanted our groups to understand what it means to attend a virtual classroom, to create engaging learning experiences, to know who in the company has done those things successfully, and to know where the best outside information sources are.

"One of the key results of this strategic approach is that now all 14 groups are reading from the same training page. Once we had buy-in, we could begin to implement the plan, select a learning management system, and choose a particular e-learning authoring platform."

What Jones and his team have accomplished has generated a lot of outside interest from companies that haven't been able to achieve such a smooth integration, even though they don't have as many separate and distinct divisions. Jones shares his e-learning insights: "To make an e-learning venture successful, 1) determine how well the content matches your organization's culture; 2) determine whether the content actually teaches somebody something; and 3) determine how to communicate and market it well."

Taking the strategic path doesn't necessarily culminate in overnight success. "An organization can't be afraid to make some missteps along the way. I also tell people that in that first year of trial and error and implementation, the *e* in e-learning sometimes can stand for expensive. But that's just part of the whole process."

Jones credits his background in psychology as contributing to his present success. After earning a master's in counseling from Columbia University, he spent two years counseling students and adults. "The work was personally satisfying, but it left my wallet very empty. I decided to take my skills and apply them to the corporate world." In 1995, he became a training manager with Manufacturers Hanover Trust. Next, he was offered the job of technology training manager. Three mergers in a row brought him to his present position.

"My background in counseling has proved invaluable for what I do now. I've come to understand that e-learning requires both technology and people skills. No matter how terrific you think your e-learning program is, many people will not automat-

ically love it or use it. You have to get people motivated to use it and help them get beyond their fears about technology. I consider myself an interpreter—someone who can translate the needs of the technology department to the HR department and vice versa."

Right now, though, Jones and his team have their hands full with merging two distinct platforms. But they're already looking beyond that task. "In five years, one of our goals is to have an integrated learning platform, not just around e-learning, but also around instructor-led training, self-study, mentoring activities, meetings—everything so employees are able to learn when they want to and how they want to." **TD**

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conducted during those three days on the water!"

The rest, as they say, is history. The HR manager hired Joseph to work with him on a special project for about six months. Next, Joseph spent a year in customer service and some time in the advertising and displays department. In 1994, he was introduced to the manager of Aboriginal Relations, who hired him to make cultural awareness presentations to Hydro employees as well as to groups across British Columbia and other provinces.

"A large focus of the program," says Joseph, "is helping employees understand aboriginal peoples and their issues as they relate to BC Hydro. Aboriginal peoples are different from mainstream Canadian culture. For example, aboriginal lineage can be matriarchal or patriarchal, which influences who makes final decisions. An especially egregious faux pas is to make a presentation to a matriarchal community and focus on the male counsel members who are gathered around the table and not pay attention or respect to the elderly woman sitting back in the corner. She just happens to be the head of the community."

BC Hydro has made a significant commitment to fostering cross-cultural relationships, and its leadership has paid off. Says Joseph, "Our reputation in this area is such that now more than 100 other Canadian organizations, including huge, multinational corporations, have come to us to adopt our model for developing aboriginal relations."

At some point, serious profits began to be realized from the department's outside cultural awareness workshops. "That's when we went to BC Hydro's

board and pointed out that the profits were being made from information supplied by aboriginal communities, our subject matter experts. We didn't think that the money should go into general revenue. We asked that, after subtracting operating costs, the profits be used to fund more cultural training initiatives and to help aboriginal groups develop the necessary skills to be able to work for BC Hydro, or one of its major contractors." The request was granted.

Amid the offices of Aboriginal Relations adorned with tribal masks and other regalia, Joseph sits at his impossibly clutter-free workspace (save for a few photos of his family) overlooking the sweeping Vancouver landscape and muses: "I feel gifted in a special way because there aren't many people who can go to work and be able to help their company, their community, and their country—as well as make a nice living doing what they love to do." **TD**

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people were unhappy, under tremendous stress, and lacked leadership.

"Just like in the manufacturing division," says Maddocks, "I identified where there was bleeding, and I chose to fix and innovate at the same time. This isn't a one-person job. I partnered with my peers, and together we established our priorities."

In that case, the focus was the Cisco Partner Recertification process, which was uneven and lacked quality. The subsequent innovative solution goes beyond the confines of the customer training department and will no doubt firmly fix Cisco on the e-learning map within three years. Maddocks and her dream team instituted an entirely new development process in the use of learning objects, which are authored once and then delivered in many formats.

Maddocks explains: "We've taken our eight certification courses—averaging 1,000 pages each—and grouped them into learning objects and authoring tools. The result: We now have about 15,000 learning objects—40,000 information objects, counting graphics. Those are in a database—written, edited, and illustrated. We're very excited about this project because of its self-serve flexibility. People company-wide have the opportunity to take objects from the

database, rewrite them, and put them back with a different title."

Although costly to implement initially, reuse of the objects is expected to deliver a healthy ROI this year and reduce development cycle time by at least 50 percent.

"The reason our process is different," says Maddocks, "is that in most companies, the entire lesson is an object. If you want to change something, you have to take the whole lesson out and re-post it. But in our case, you can replace any small element and not have to rewrite the whole course. It truly is object-based."

So, what happened to Maddocks's dream of being a director?

"Well, training is a lot like theater, and I do feel like a director sometimes. I love it when I'm given a project, can work with a team on creating business solutions, and then have the desired results actually come out!" Of course, there's always more to aspire to.

"Right now I'm just making documentaries, but someday I'll do a *Star Wars*." **TD**

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Collectively, the alliance organizations have trained and placed more than 600 adults from urban areas into Web-development jobs. Says Margolis, "We saw the role of CitySkills as the needed bridge to connect industry with the thousands of U.S. job training programs that are eager to prepare urban adults for high-tech jobs. Its role as a catalyst will help create a national voice and agenda for this movement."

Although CitySkills is still in the startup mode, Margolis hopes to affect the status quo. "We want to change the misperceptions that exist about who can and who can't participate in the increasingly technology-driven economy. If a training organization can bring qualified talent to the marketplace, then that completely transforms the typical relationship between a not-for-profit training organization and a potential employer."

Lest one think social responsibility is his first motivator, Margolis quickly dispels that impression. "We're talking legitimate economic value here. This isn't about corporate charity work or a handout. The graduates coming out of these programs want to be judged by the same criteria