



JENN FARRELL

Roberta Stewart (left) is co-ordinator of First Nations programs and services at the Justice Institute in New Westminster, where Bob Joseph (right) delivered a broad introduction to Aboriginal relations to a corporate audience on Oct. 28. Joseph has been offering corporate training programs in Aboriginal relations for a decade.

Companies study Aboriginal relations

BY JENN FARRELL
Raven's Eye Writer

NEW WESTMINSTER

There is no shortage of guidebooks and instructional seminars for the international business traveller, but they don't spell out how to work with Aboriginal people, a Justice Institute spokesman claims.

When preparing to negotiate with clients from other parts of the world, it's common practice to learn as much as possible about their culture, government, lifestyles and religious back-

grounds. And there are always a few critical "do's and don'ts" that can help make or break successful communication in foreign cultures. Here in Canada we have a similar situation—except the "foreign" culture is the one that's been here for about 9,000 years.

It's a dreary day in New Westminster, but here at the Justice Institute, the conversation is anything but as Bob Joseph leads a one-day seminar entitled "Working Effectively with Aboriginal People."

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BUSINESS

Justice Institute training culturally sensitive

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Touching on a wide range of topics, from the history of Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia and Canada, to modern-day treaties and major court cases, the class is a crash course for those seeking to gain a better understanding of First Nations people and communities.

This knowledge is useful to the businessperson, to those in health-related fields, corrections and justice staff and, as Bob Joseph said, "basically any group or organization that is interested in relationship-building with Aboriginal people."

Joseph, a member of the Gwa-wa-aineuk Nation (one of the Kwakwaka'wakw tribes on the eastern coast of Vancouver Island), has been providing training in Aboriginal relations since 1994 for numerous federal and provincial government agencies, including the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. His career path began at BC Hydro in the Aboriginal relations department, where he eventually became the manager of cultural relations and corporate training. His awareness training programs were originally intended only for the 5,500 employees of BC Hydro,

but word of mouth led him to present his program to more than 100 government and private-sector organizations across Canada and internationally.

The Working Effectively With Aboriginal People seminar is one arm of a larger body called Indigenous Corporate Training (ICT), of which Joseph is the founder. ICT bills itself as a "global consulting and training services company", offering a variety of programs from one and two-day seminars to immersion for those organizations and individuals wishing to participate on a deeper cultural level with Aboriginal people.

On a break from the seminar, Joseph was animated when he talked about the program and its role in the future of communications. "Canada is a role model in the international business community," he said. "Amazing things are happening in Canada and especially in B.C. right now, in terms of revenue sharing, the airing of historical grievances and compensation."

He acknowledged that, with the approach of the 2010 Olympic Games and the attorney general's goal of resolving treaty negotiations as quickly as possible, the rationale for mending bridges may not be

entirely noble. "The government isn't doing this for social reasons, but I really don't care about their motivation. The results are what's important."

Back in the classroom, Joseph pointed out that smart businesses and organizations understand the importance of risk management. Working hand-in-hand with First Nations communities, the effectively managed organization involves Aboriginal people early in business dealings, building relationships and lessening the risks. Joseph affirms that because Aboriginal people have constitutionally protected rights, they present what is known in the business world as a "credible threat."

"Strike the word 'stakeholder' from your vocabulary," he insists, "when dealing with First Nations people. Their constitutionally protected rights, and their ability to generate negative media campaigns, blockades, and legal action means that they have a far greater role in the success or failure of your work than the average 'stakeholder'."

Joseph advised that organizations move from the consulting model ("send a letter to the band, wait 30 days, then do it anyway"), to the accommodating model, which means

engaging band and tribal councils in the decision-making process before permits and funding are even secured. Joseph also points out that while the costs of change are financially high, these costs must be weighed against the costs of not changing. Think about the overall investment in the future, he advises. "To this point we've only managed problems, now we need to resolve them."

The seminar and its related take-home materials define often misused terminology, provide do's and don'ts, explain common misconceptions about First Nations, provide a checklist of potential questions to ask and parties to communicate with, and suggest further study.

For those seeking further education, the Justice Institute offers a number of additional options. Shelley Rivkin is the director responsible for Aboriginal programs at the Justice Institute, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary, and offers numerous options for learners in its Aboriginal programs and services section, including one- and two-day seminars, certificate programs of up to 20 days, and the new Aboriginal leadership diploma, a two-year, part-time program.

Rivkin credits much of the programs' success to Joseph. "Bob's a real link for us because of his work, and we utilized him to develop and market the diploma program."

The courses at the Justice Institute offer Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students the opportunity to build skills for their communities or agencies, and cover a diverse range of topics that take into account First Nations' cultures and history, as well as the most current legislative information. Acknowledging that the best leaders come from within Aboriginal communities, these programs seek to equip students with the leadership they need to work for positive change within those communities.

In the meantime, the 30-plus students from the one-day seminar have nothing but praise for Bob Joseph and the Justice Institute. "I can't believe how much we learned in one day," said one participant. "I wish we could have had more time, but I was so impressed with it overall."

For information about this program or others at the Justice Institute, see <http://www.jibc.bc.ca>, or contact Roberta Stewart, coordinator of First Nations' programs and services.