

# INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT

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## EDUCATION

## COMMITMENT

## HONESTY

## TRAINING

## REWARD

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I was the Purchasing/Supply Manager for Bamaga Island Council on a 12 month contract. In the first instance it was difficult to get Indigenous staff to attend work on time and on a regular basis. Once they could see that I was always there and on time the majority of them followed suite. One staff member was always not turning up for work or turning up drunk, I noted that when this person was at work he was very good at what he did. I approached him and said why don't we make a pact/deal, you turn up for work everyday on time and sober for the next three months and I will see that you become a Supervisor (he had previously attended Purchasing/Supply/Supervisors and WH&S courses). His reply was, they will never allow you to make a "blackfellow" a supervisor, my reply was, you leave that up to me. He kept his part of the deal for the three months, so I approached my Colleagues in Senior Management and said I was going to promote this Indigenous person to a supervisor; well did they put on a turn, it took me another six weeks to get this approved and this person became the first Indigenous supervisor with Bamaga Island Council (and went on to be Chairman). Not all Indigenous people wish to climb the management ladder and should not be forced to do so, but those that do, should be given the opportunity. This person had the required EDUCATION, wanted to make the COMMITMENT, was HONEST, had received the required TRAINING and was eventually REWARDED.

I then moved to Saibai Island as their Enterprise Business Manager which encompassed businesses including the Canteen, fast food takeaway, ice creamery, guesthouse, fuel farm and the variety store, total Indigenous staff employed on arrival was five (5) and the only business earning a profit was the Canteen.

When I left nearly two (2) years later all businesses were earning extremely good profits and a total of eighteen (18) Indigenous staff were being employed through the Enterprises. The Island people were buying from their own shops because the prices were fair and reasonable and the businesses were employing Islander people on a five (5) day week basis (not just 2 day CDEP).

All staff over a period of time had appropriate training in their specific areas, some achieving Certificate III in Business (Administration) and some Certificate IV in Workplace Trainer; I promoted two (2) people to supervisor status. From time to time I funded morning teas for all staff and put on a Christmas function for all Enterprise staff. This was a small reward saying thank you for your efforts during the year.

All this could not have been achieved without the dedication of the Indigenous people themselves. However, no one on the Island wanted to take on the responsibility of the Enterprise Business Managers position.

Having listed EDUCATION, COMMITMENT, HONESTY, TRAINING and REWARD as a prerequisite for Indigenous Employment it should also be STRONGLY noted that these are also requirements for Employers.

Taking into consideration the facts above, I consider a stronger emphasis should be placed on the promotion of small and medium business in remote areas which would in the long term enhance local employment, create sustainable prices for goods and services to Indigenous/Local people and would increase training including Apprenticeships/Traineeships for Indigenous people, all these things would over time also create self pride.

Another major problem for Indigenous Communities is of course Schooling (high school). Listed below are some of the communities and their approximate population numbers, these Communities do not have High School facilities

Aurukun	1100
Hopevale	720
Injinoo	400
Lockhart River	510
Mapoon	140
New Mapoon	350
Pormpuraaw	600
Umagico	240
Wujal Wujal	400

All these Communities have primary school facilities, why, can't we come up with an idea that would see ONE High School teacher put into each area and allocated a classroom. This would also overcome the problem of students leaving their families and I am sure there would be enough students in each area to occupy one teacher, it would also save on airfares and accommodation for the students. I am sure Indigenous Australians would then feel like Mainstream Australians. Locally Educated, Locally Trained and Locally Employed.

**By implementing/incorporating some or all of the above, it will improve Indigenous employment opportunities by;**

- **reducing the overall level of disadvantaged Indigenous Australians in the workforce.**
- **increase the level of Indigenous Australians participation in the workforce.**
- **improve the outcomes for Indigenous Australians by increasing the provisions of accredited employment based training such as traineeships and apprenticeships.**
- **creating opportunities for small and medium size business.**

**It is my belief that economic independence is essential to increasing the confidence, wealth, economic status and community empowerment of Indigenous people. There are currently a significant number of Indigenous people running their own businesses in agriculture, tourism, arts, retailing, transport, building and maintenance, and service to mines and farms.**

**It is therefore imperative that we implement business and employment programs aimed at overcoming the disadvantages experienced by many Indigenous people. Business development funding is required in Indigenous/Remote areas and to support this, there needs to be provisions made for advise on financial planning and management, marketing, training, monitoring and facilitation of access to other public and private sector services.**

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