

Meet Chris, a 35 year old HR Aboriginal recruitment specialist, employed by a leading Canadian resource company. Her mandate is to recruit talented new Aboriginal employees as part of the company's Aboriginal initiative under the overall diversity and inclusion policy and mandate. Reaching out to Aboriginal talent is good for business as it is important that the diversity within the company reflects the communities where it works. It is also part of the overall corporate human resources strategy that acknowledges that cultural competencies and Aboriginal awareness are key elements of this plan. Chris, a Cree woman, from northern Manitoba faces many challenges to reach her goals:

Competitive market place. As the Canadian population ages, employers are looking to Aboriginal people and new Canadians to fill the growing demand. The Aboriginal population of Canada is the most rapidly growing segment. In 2006, the median age for Aboriginal people was 26 versus 41 for non-Aboriginal people. By 2020 Stats Can reports that there will be one million Aboriginal people of working age. It is also reported that Aboriginal university graduates are employed at about the same rate as non-Aboriginal graduates. However there are significant barriers to that route including high school completion and entry into apprenticeship programs and strategies need to be developed to overcome them and to increase the number of employment ready Aboriginal people. As Canadian companies seek to fill positions within their organizations they have turned to recruiting Aboriginal talent but this is challenging as many companies are competing for the same people. In order to not only successfully recruit and retain Aboriginal people; the organization must be positioned as a welcoming and good place to work with career opportunities and respect for culture and traditions. To earn the allegiance of Aboriginal peoples, companies have increased their financial contributions to social, educational and other Aboriginal causes in recent years with a goal of building their profile as a recognized, respected and trusted member of the corporate community and a good place to work.

Resource Industry. The resource industry in Canada comprises oil, gas, mining, forestry and energy. Typically the operation base is located on traditional lands that are also home to five hundred (500) Aboriginal communities. Other considerations include the rapid growth of Aboriginal business ownership that might supply goods and services to various projects, the billions of dollars in land claim settlements, and the more than 500 natural resources projects representing over \$500 billion in new investments make it essential that corporations The recruitment strategy across Canada's vast territory made it expensive for Chris to travel to recruitment fairs at colleges, technical institutes and universities. Career fairs in targeted communities both urban and rural along with sponsorship at various targeted Aboriginal events such as the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council (AHRDC) are expensive and not very cost effective. Travelling so often also exerted its toll on Chris and her family. She was becoming increasingly concerned with having to be away so often from her growing family. As an Aboriginal employee she was seen as the face of the company and while she was proud of her role she knew that despite her efforts, sporadic contact wasn't very conducive to developing relationships of trust over time. Chris needed a 'better way' a *cost efficient method to deepen her firm's relationships with Aboriginal people* and their talent pool. The trust of Aboriginal people in the brand had to become strong enough to favourably dispose her potential employees towards her company.

The dilemma. Chris knew that she had to figure a way to increase her brand's competitive differentiation. Her knowledge of Aboriginal culture told her they had to enter into a collaborative dialogue with her Aboriginal audience if trust was to be developed over time. For her *trust was another way of saying leadership*. ShT also knew that to capture the loyalty/allegiance of her audience a good place to start was by helping Aboriginal people enhance their quest for sustainable economic well-being, meaningful employment and an opportunity to contribute to their community. Chris's inability to create this competitive edge more efficiently was costing her company the talent that sought.

Meeting ICN. At Chris's suggestion, Robin (Director of Human Resources) met with the Idea Connector Network. ICN specializes in facilitating dialogue among members of Aboriginal communities, corporations and all levels of government on issues affecting business relationships and influencing economic development opportunities for Aboriginal people and their communities. Robin was impressed to see how much ICN knew about the challenges facing her industry and with the fact that ICN had standardized processes, a holistic process that resulted in the alignment of Robin's corporate goals and objectives with her selected audience's needs, marrying products-services and topic.

The team realized that it was on that foundation that ICN would create tailored solutions to help her team meet their business engagement needs: *a collaborative partnership focused on enhancing successful, long-term Aboriginal recruitment and re capabilities while increasing corporate competitive differentiation*. Although ICN would provide a turnkey solution, their corporate talent at all levels of the firm also needed to engage very effectively in the dialogue with their selected audience with minimum impact on their busy schedules.

A day in the life (after). Robin's and Chris's first priority was to promote their image or brand as a welcoming workplace for Aboriginal people. Several options had been identified. The first was recruiting; successful on-boarding for new Aboriginal employees, high performance and retention. The second was a learning opportunity for current employees to increase their understanding of Aboriginal peoples, their history, culture and traditions in order to create a welcoming workplace. Finally, the third goal was to promote the company as a positive and trusted partner of Aboriginal people. An ICN solution was designed to their specific needs. A plan for implementation over the next twelve-months identified topics to be explored by ICN hosts with the help of invited experts. The selected audience would be engaged, using a combination of webinars, peer advisory groups, corporate talent, and outreach activities (PR, social media, traditional media and e-mail campaigns) complemented by white papers, articles and corporate information needed for audience self-actualization. While the solution was rolled-out and viewers registered to participate, ICN pulled its chair closer to viewers and started to ask feedback questions, track answers and other metrics to compare them to pre-set KPIs. ICN reported back to Robin on a regular basis, together they reviewed KPIs; as the program was rolled out dots were connected and the plan tweaked and adapted as needed. After a couple months, at a regular review meeting, Robin said: "*Hey what you guys are doing is awesome. I have told our corporate communication folks about our partnership and they would like to meet and see if you might help them with building our brand in a way that resonates with Aboriginal people.*"