

Greg Reiffel Employee Relations News

Edition 50

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"My business grows by referrals. I would appreciate it if you would let me know if you have any colleagues, clients or associates who could benefit from my skill-set."

I also would greatly appreciate if you could pass this newsletter on to your business contacts. Thank you.

Reflections on my most recent consulting project (working with an aboriginal health service)

Hi, and welcome to my 50th edition. Over the past nine weeks I have been assisting a regional aboriginal health service with issues relating to quality (as in ISO:9001 and DHHS:2011) and OH&S. As a predecessor to this assignment, I attended a two-day Cultural Awareness training course.

Having concluded this assignment, I have had a chance to reflect on my learning and experiences (including a smoking ceremony).

In summary, two words describe what I have learnt, both apply equally today as they did yesterday and is happening all around the world.

In the workplace we might call it "bullying", or in my experience, just because you say it loudly and with conviction doesn't mean you are right.

Arrogance [ar-uh-guhns], noun:

1. offensive display of superiority or self-importance; overbearing pride.

Subjugate [suhb-juh-geyt]:

1. To bring under complete control or subjection; conquer; master.

2. to make submissive or subservient; enslave.

Putting the shoe on the other foot, I highly recommend you put your feet up and enjoy this light-hearted 30-minute gem via You Tube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUMpPgMGCe8>

Anyway back to my story. To this day, the aboriginal peoples have a high distrust of “gubba’s” – non-aboriginals. This can be tracked way back to white men in the name of some religious purpose taking away aboriginal children to be institutionalised as god-fearing souls, to work at the beck and call of god-fearing whites. This was no isolated event -being Government policy from the late 1800’s to 1969. Think of this when you are outraged by the news of carjacking’s and children being mistakenly taken in the process. In all cases, these children were returned unharmed to their parents.

Here’s some “fun” facts for you:

- The aboriginals were introduced to diseases such as small-pox via donated blankets and other means, that decimated whole communities.
- Calling an aboriginal person an “abo” (apologies) is akin to calling you the c*** word.
- The aboriginal peoples have a recessive gene. This means that they can be “bred-out”, and once discovered, became an official Government program. That’s right, our governments were arrogant enough to attempt to “breed out” the first Australians. So next time you here such language, or accuse someone of not being aboriginal – pause for thought. Or even be brave enough to educate these people. Remember: it’s not about DNA; it’s about identity! And under NO circumstance identify an aboriginal as being a half-caste (refer to “A-word” above).
- There are over 250 aboriginal languages, with most aboriginal kids being able to speak four or five. Low IQ – I do not think so.
- Whilst on the subject of education, do you know there are currently about 500 aborigines studying medicine at the moment.
- When thinking of banjo playing hillbillies in the context of in-breeding; the aboriginal peoples enforced (through capital punishment) the rule that to be married the family gap must be at least twice removed.
- Aboriginal lore (not law) was very much based on the land and what it provides. Each area had what is known as its own “cultural truths”. Us gubbas might describe this as a religion. If it is then it would be better than the current lot on offer.
- There are many “tribes”. Within each “tribe” there are various “clans”. Within each “clan”, there are “families”.
- Family is EVERYTHING to the aboriginals, as is their system of beliefs and totems. I could analgise these to populist religions, but I would only succeed in disparaging the aboriginal people.
- When a mother dies, the children are taken care of by the next eldest sister. So it is not uncommon for kids to have more than one mothers. “Uncle, Auntie” are terms of great respect. Elders are held in very high esteem. Sounds a little like our Italian and Greek friends, no?
- Aboriginal justice is fair and swift (spearing’s still occur to this day). This resolves ongoing conflict and settles the matter – for good.
- “Pointing the bone” is true. The aboriginals thought so much of their lore, that they would will themselves to death within hours of this serious punishment being meted out.
- Until 1967 aboriginals were counted as fauna for the purpose of the census.

- And my personal favourite: A group of gubbas went up to an aboriginal mob with the idea of having an annual celebration. The Gubba's enquired of the mob "we want to hold an annual event and want an aboriginal name that means 'let's get together and have a good time.'" The mob advised "Moomba". Real translation: "Up your bum", in the context of "nick off".

And a real-life story that occurred in my recent experience. The aboriginal health service with the help of the local aboriginal community prevented a mother being separated from her five children because of the house was so full of rubbish (read "hoarding"). The Child Protection mob deemed her an unfit mother. The kids would have been separated and traumatised if not for the advocacy of the health service. The community cleaned up the house, and the health service provides ongoing support.

Why weren't we taught this in school? An inconvenient truth?

As HR professionals, we can make a difference. Make "**Cultural Awareness**" training mandatory. It also has broader applications towards workplace development.

If you hire people of aboriginal backgrounds (and why shouldn't you?), make sure your workplace is "culturally safe".

Further information on this training can be obtained from VACCHO at: <http://www.vaccho.org.au/about-us/who-we-are/our-units/etu/>

[Please note that I have any connection with this organisation].

Arrogance. Subjugation.

Note: Many thanks to Professor Marlene Drysdale and Hilton Gruis.

Until next time...

Greg Reiffel
Principal Consultant