

INDIGENOUS CORPORATE TRAINING INC.



23 Tips on What Not to Say or Do When
Working Effectively with Aboriginal Peoples®

Hi, I'm Bob Joseph, President of
Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.

When working with another culture
there are always areas of sensitivity
that should be avoided. Sometimes the
fear of saying or doing something
that could derail a First Nation
engagement strategy can be paralyzing.

This handy guide is based on content
starting on page 175 of the Working
Effectively with Aboriginal Peoples
book.

[http://www.ictinc.ca/resources/working-effectively-
with-aboriginal-peoples-book](http://www.ictinc.ca/resources/working-effectively-with-aboriginal-peoples-book)



"Better slip with foot than with
tongue"

-Benjamin Franklin

1. Don't use colloquialisms.

Few things will tarnish you faster than the thoughtless use of colloquialisms. Many colloquial expressions used in popular communication carry connotations that may offend at least some of the people you will meet.



Use these 8 colloquialisms at your peril!

- Indian giver
- Circle the wagons
- Low man on the totem pole
- Rain dance
- Too many Chiefs, not enough Indians
- Pow wow
- Indian Summer
- Indian Time

2. Don't use acronyms in your communications.

We have attended many meetings in First Nation communities and have witnessed first-hand the overuse of acronyms by other visitors, which may make great sense to the speaker, but not to those listening. Remember where you are and who your audience is. Not only will many in your First Nation audience be unfamiliar with your acronyms, they might not even want to learn them so don't lace your presentation with them.

3. Don't use too many technical terms in your communications

Much the same as the overuse of acronyms, over use of technical terms will leave the same impression. First Nations people are like audiences anywhere in the sense that they want a presentation that they can relate to and understand. One comment we often hear First Nation community members say is, "How come the presenters have to use such big words?" Use language that the lay person will understand. If in doubt, explain things in plain language that everyone can understand.

4. Don't tell the community you are there to speak to them as stakeholders.

"Stakeholder" is a commonly used business term that should be avoided at all costs when working with First Nations communities. If the 'Rod and Gun Club' (a stakeholder) doesn't like what you are doing they can lobby their MP or MLA to try to effect changes. If a First Nation community doesn't like what you are doing they have the ability to launch legal action putting your project in immediate jeopardy. In this context, First Nations people are not merely stakeholders they have constitutionally protected rights and are used to dealing with Canada, provinces and territories on a Nation-to-Nation basis.



5. Don't tell the community that you have a timeline and that they have to meet it.

Timelines are thorny issues in First Nation communities. A good working rule to incorporate is "our timeline is our problem". At present, most people who go to a community to do business have a timeline. Don't "tar your project with that dirty brush"; you'll just create resistance and in the end stretch your project's timeline. If you push for the sake of your timeline, you may find that it compromises future business opportunities in that community. Conversely, you will likely win respect and a more receptive hearing if you approach the community with an attitude marked by interest and willingness to listen, leaving your timeline back in the office.



6. Don't tell the community that you have to treat them "equally" with others.

"Equality" is another term that should be avoided when working with First Nations people. When they hear the term equality or equal they hear that they have to give up their constitutionally protected rights or they hear we can be equal only if they give up their human rights to be who they are as a people.

7. Don't tell the community what dates to meet.

Your meeting is just one of many and may not be a priority for the community leaders who are very busy managing and addressing the needs of their communities. There are also traditional and cultural pursuits such as hunting and fishing that only happen at certain times of the year and will take precedence over your meeting. It would be a more respectful strategy to ask which dates would work best for their community.

APRIL 2014



MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30 Working Effectively with Aboriginal Peoples™ Toronto, ON				

8. Don't name drop other communities.

Many people assume that it is okay to name drop as they move from community to community in their work. Such assumptions are risky and can be outright destructive when working in communities. Everything can change as we move from community to community, even when communities are in close proximity to one another. Ask yourself where the value is in adding this to a conversation. We have a great article on the pitfalls of this on our blog. Click this link.

<http://www.ictinc.ca/blog/first-nations-name-dropping-dead-cat-bounce>

9. Don't tell them that
you prefer a municipal
style of government.

This is extremely disrespectful to the
lineage of hereditary chiefs and
elected ones alike. Your preferences
are yours and they should stay yours.

10. Don't assume a Band is necessarily in its own territory.

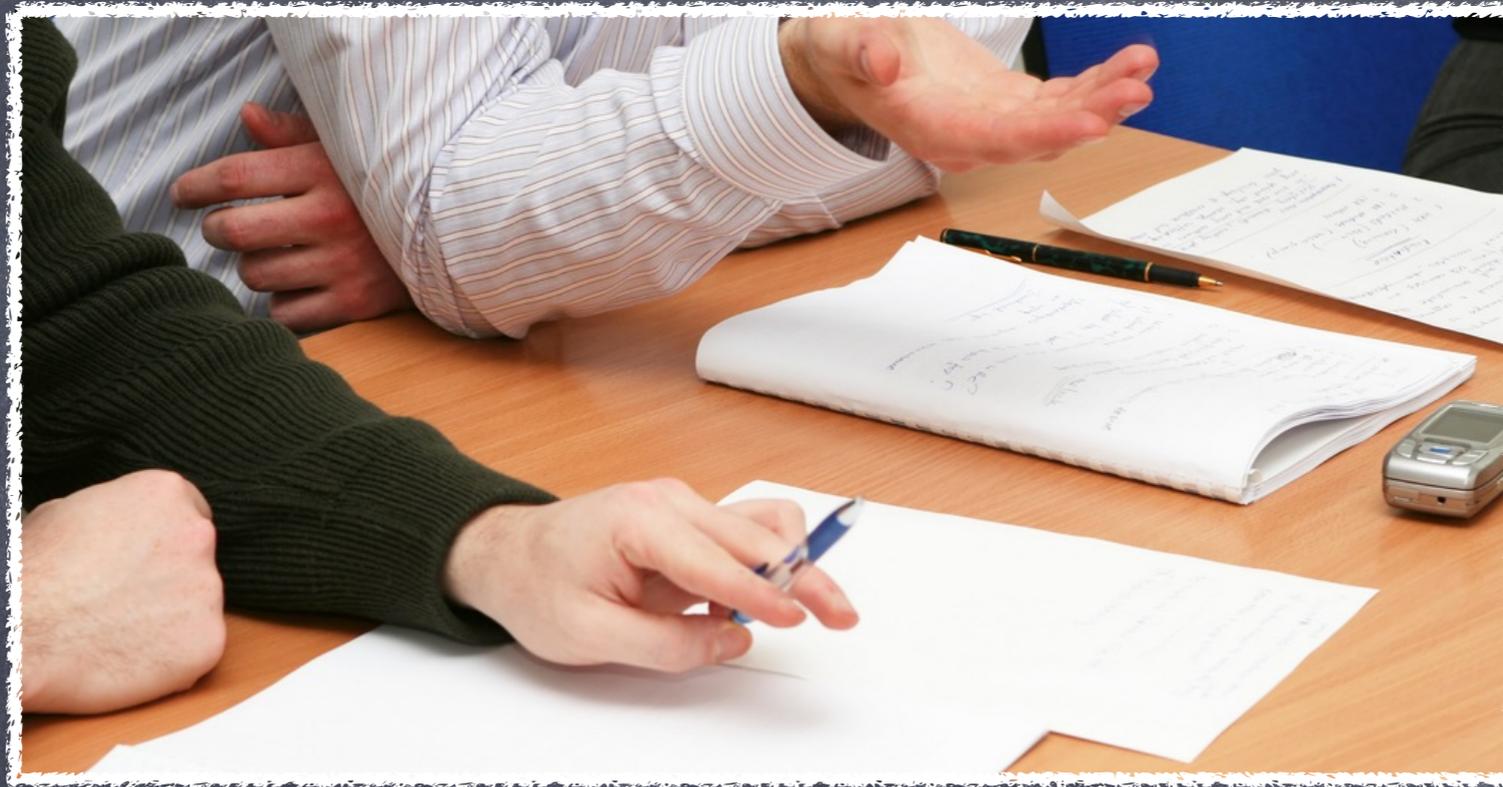


Throughout Canada, many bands' reserves have been relocated from their traditional territories for different reasons. Be sure to talk to the ones who were there first and not the relocated ones.

11. Don't assume that the Band Chief and Council are able to make land use decisions regarding other Peoples' territories.

The rights of Aboriginal (Indigenous if you prefer) peoples are collectively held in law and consultation with the community maybe required by the chief.

12. Don't go to them with a completed draft plan for your project before consultation has started.



This signals to the community that your project is a done deal and you are meeting with them only because it looks good - an item to be checked off on the list. Insincerity is easily detected.

13. Don't assume that the community has a male leadership structure.

Some communities have a matriarchal leadership while others have a patriarchal leadership structure.



14. Don't expect to consult with the same community in the same way on different issues.

Different issues will have different concerns and impacts. Take the time to learn the critical concerns of a community - it could be providing employment or preserving culturally significant areas - and modify your approach to respect the individual issue. It's always good to avoid the cookie cutter approach when working with First Nation communities.

15. Don't expect to consult with different communities in the same way on similar issues.

What I did here should work over there. Again, the cookie cutter, one size fits all approach is to be avoided. Each community has its own history, culture, traditions, challenges. Do your research or due diligence into each community you want to work with.

16. Don't confuse potlatch with potluck.



. **Potlatch** is an ancient, traditional gathering held by many coastal First Nations that survived the best attempts of the government to banish it. It is a primary means for the communities to bear witness, to confirm in public any changes in status such as marriages, birth, death, and coming of age. The word itself is a Chinook Jargon word that means "to give". A **potluck** is a gathering of people who each bring food to share like chicken wings and Rice Krispie squares.

17. Don't confuse reserves with reservations

Reserve is the Canadian term.

Reservation is the American term or used in booking hotels and restaurants.

18. Don't refer to individuals as Indians or Natives

Some people are really proud and others are deeply offended you call them Indian or native. Instead use a term they are comfortable with. Go with what they are calling themselves.

Free Download!!!

Do you need a handy reference that explains the different terms and their usage??

Download our popular
"Guide to Terminology"
www.ictinc.ca/aboriginal-peoples-a-guide-to-terminology

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JUSTICE IS PROMISED WE ARE STILL WATCHING!

Simpcw First Nation

GUIDE TO TERMINOLOGY

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19. Ask them if they are going to be Canadian when this is all over.

Good question if you are trying to start a bench clearing brawl. Do your own research rather than risk it. Treaties are attached to the Constitution. Court Cases are fought in Canadian Courts most of the time. Many understand that to be Canadian. A small number take a sovereignty perspective.

20. Don't impose or expect direct eye contact.

Many non-Aboriginal people believe that it is important to maintain eye contact during conversation. For many Aboriginal Peoples, continuous eye contact may not be expected or even accepted as a courtesy of conversation.

For Residential School Survivors, eye contact with school or church officials often led to physical punishment. When you have the opportunity to attend an Aboriginal community event, look at where the eyes go - they are usually not on the speaker. This is not a sign of disrespect. An Aboriginal listener is usually more interested in following the speaker's words than where s/he is gazing.



21. Don't overdress.

Along with any assumptions, you should also leave behind the business suit, Gucci or high heel shoes. This attire can send two wrong messages:

- 1) you have lots of money
- 2) your attire indicates a "defender of the empire" attitude.

Both of these messages can have serious ramifications for your meeting by setting a tone that may not accurately reflect you or your organization.

22. Don't obsess about duration of a meeting

Sometimes meeting agendas aren't adhered to if some topics take longer to discuss or new ones arise. Be present in the moment. When you book a meeting with a First Nation, try to keep a buffer of time between the expected ending of the meeting and your next appointment. Don't check your watch, and definitely turn off your phone.



23. Don't feel that you must answer or fill the silent periods during discussions.

These silent periods can be longer than you are accustomed to, and may be needed for thought formulation. Try to ensure that the speaker has finished before you contribute to the conversation. And remember the saying "There is a reason we have two ears and only one mouth."





Training Services

At Indigenous Corporate Training Inc. we provide a full range of training services specifically designed to help individuals and organizations work effectively with Aboriginal Peoples.

Learn more here: www.ictinc.ca/

3 Great Courses!!!

Our courses are derived from decades of personal and professional knowledge, experience and from workshop participant evaluations. www.ictinc.ca/



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We are here to help you develop successful First Nation engagement strategies. Our courses, our blog, our ebooks and our newsletter are all effective resources that will build your knowledge and ability to work effectively with Aboriginal Peoples. Just give us a call at 1 888 986 4055, visit our website www.ictinc.ca or send us an email at info@ictinc.ca