

The National Report On Aboriginal Inclusion

News & Solutions

INSIDE

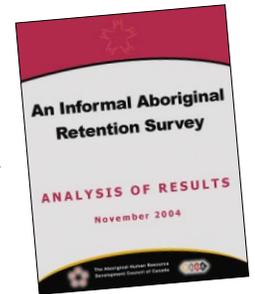
FALL 2004 ISSUE SIX

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Why Do Aboriginal Employees Leave Their Jobs?

Announcing the Results of Our Informal Retention Survey

Why did you leave your last job? This was one of 46 questions posed in the Council's Informal Survey of Aboriginal Retention, conducted over the Inclusion Network between September 4 and October 24, 2004. A total of 222 Aboriginal people – most of them registered jobseekers on the Inclusion Network – contributed to the survey. Turn to page 3 for the full results.



BEAHR's Employer's Guide



Environmental employers can now take advantage of an online resource to help improve recruitment and retention of Aboriginal employees. As of August, an Employer's Guide for the environment sector has been posted on the BEAHR website. BEAHR – Building Environmental Aboriginal Human Resources – is a partnership between the Canadian Council for Human Resources in the Environment Industry (CCHREI) and the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada (AHRDCC).

The BEAHR Employer's Guide has been designed for environmental employers who are committed to Aboriginal employment but need assistance in making it a success. As one focus group participant stated, "Many companies are trying to develop expertise in these areas [traditional ecological knowledge, environmental technology] and this [BEAHR Employer's Guide] will be a really good resource for companies looking to employ Aboriginal people with that background..."

Among the subjects discussed in the Guide are:

- The Aboriginal Opportunity: The business case for committing to Aboriginal employment in the environment sector.
- Before You Hire: Steps to take before the recruitment stage to understand the needs of Aboriginal inclusion.
- Recruitment: Finding qualified candidates and selection and hiring practices.
- Retention: Orientations, coaching, performance management, training, feedback and conflict.

Throughout the Guide employers also have access to helpful tools and templates, resources and case studies.

According to the CCHREI's Environmental Labour Market Study, Aboriginal environmental practitioners make up two percent of the environmental labour market. BEAHR's goal is to increase this number. By giving environmental employers tools that increase their understanding of Aboriginal peoples' perspective in a way that fits with their business practices, BEAHR hopes to have a positive effect on the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal environmental practitioners.

To see the Guide go to: www.beahr.com/employersguide.



A Message From Kelly Lendsay, President: The Slippery Rope

I ran into an old friend recently, who I'll call Diana. When I asked Diana how she was doing, she said, "Not very well." She had, among other things, lost her job. But then she said something remarkable "I keep slipping down the rope. But you know what? I've put a knot at the bottom of the rope. I'm going to hold on."

Now when I speak to employers I like to tell them about Diana and I ask, "What can we do to help Diana, and many others like her?" It's a familiar story: often Aboriginal people can't seem to stay at one job for a serious length of time and whatever job they're in, they receive little training and even less encouragement to rise in the organization. Why are jobs so slippery for people like Diana? Why can't they gain traction? Why can't they grow and advance within an organization?

The most important thing that can be said about Diana's problem is that it's not just Diana's problem. Whenever a talented Aboriginal employee strikes out, an employer loses out. From the employer's standpoint, Diana is another statistic amid the poor retention numbers. What Diana describes as a slippery rope is known among employers as a fragile connection that constantly keeps snapping. I have heard numerous managers say, in effect, "It's hard enough finding Aboriginal talent – but even harder keeping it."

Consider this statement from The Annual Report of the *Employment Equity Act, 2003*: "Hiring of Aboriginal peoples increased this year, as did terminations. However, the net effect was negative as terminations exceeded hires." (p 61) That succinct phrase – "terminations exceeded hires" – carries an enormous weight.

Why is retention such a problem for Aboriginal employees? We don't know. There are no solid studies of this question. We don't even have the early data in place, for example, to establish whether poor retention – that slippery rope – is more fundamentally rooted in Aboriginal life experience or in workplace culture – and how the two are related. Do Aboriginal people move on because discrimination and workplace habits make it impossible for them to continue? Or do they move on for reasons primarily related to family or other personal factors? We don't know. Conversely, we know of workplace successes where retention is not an issue.

What makes these workplaces so successful? We don't know.

The enormity of what we don't know about the retention issue could fill libraries. Is it possible that the current generation of Aboriginal employees – the most educated Aboriginal generation in history – needs to explore its options in a way that is not shared by the current generation of non-Aboriginal employees? We

don't know. Could poor retention possibly be related to innate expectations about performance? For example, in some corporate contexts, nothing is prized so much as cutthroat self-reliance. In an Aboriginal context, performance is sometimes more meaningful when it is part of a community or team. Does this discrepancy undermine Aboriginal employment? We don't know.

We need to find ways to address these questions. Thanks to Scotiabank, the Council has made a small beginning with an informal retention survey conducted on the Aboriginal Inclusion Network. We asked Aboriginal people who had left jobs, why they left. The survey results are spotlighted in this issue.

The Council will continue to explore ways to improve retention and I'll continue to report on those efforts. At the bottom, the issue is simple; how can we transform Diana's slippery rope into a solid footing that allows Aboriginal

people to work successfully and grow into expanded competencies as they rise within an organization?



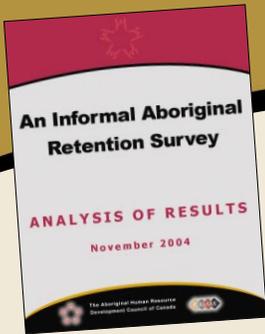
"I would like to thank Michele Baptiste and the Scotiabank Group for sponsoring this issue. It is through contributions of companies like Scotiabank that the Council hopes to make headway into such challenges as Aboriginal retention."

Kelly Lendsay



Special Report On Aboriginal Retention

The Findings of Our Informal Survey



What are the obstacles to improved retention of Aboriginal employees in the Canadian workplace? This was the question behind the Informal Survey on Aboriginal Retention, posted for seven weeks on the Inclusion Network. This survey was not – repeat, not – a scientific survey. Its intention was always to serve as a descriptive guide, an informal probe into the sources of the most common barriers to retention of Aboriginal people. The results have been compiled and analyzed by the Toronto-based polling and market-testing firm Pollara. As Pollara has emphasized in its Analysis, “Due to the methodological approach chosen for this study, results should be interpreted as *directional* rather than statistically significant.”

Why do they leave? One highlight of the results can be found in the most common reasons people left their last job. The survey provided 21 reasons for quitting and respondents could choose more than one answer. The survey shows the complexity of themes that underlie the retention issues. The higher percentages reflect distinctive themes:

- Management Style (12.74%)
- Insufficient Wages/Salary (10.81%)
- Lack of Support (7.34%)
- Unfriendly Workplace (7.34%)
- Workplace Culture (6.76%)
- Discrimination (6.18%)
- Working Conditions (6.18%)

While by contrast the numbers below reflect the variety of individual responses:

- Family Issues (3.28%)
- Unsafe Workplace (2.51%)
- Illness/Disability (1.74%)
- No Specific Reason (1.74%)
- Pregnancy (0.58%)
- Transportation Issues (0.39%)
- Unqualified/Lack of Experience (0.19%)

The Council’s survey also noted that “A slightly higher proportion of male respondents (10%) than female respondents (5%) report discrimination as their reason for leaving. In fact, among male respondents, discrimination is cited as one of the top three most important factors.”

As noted by the survey, overall job satisfaction was low. What could have improved job satisfaction? “In terms of what could have been done to increase their job satisfaction, three-quarters (77%) believe that their manager could have done something to improve

their level of satisfaction, while 17% feel their manager was powerless to improve their job satisfaction.” The advancement issue is particularly acute. “Two-thirds (63%) of respondents report that in their previous job there were no such opportunities, while 30% comment that opportunities did exist. A higher proportion of female respondents (67%) feel there were no opportunities for advancement, compared to 55% of male respondents.”

Many of the respondents came down hard on their ex-managers. Just over one third of those surveyed (37%) said their manager provided enough direction or support for them to be effective at their jobs, and slightly under half (47%) reported that their manager discussed a workplan, performance plan or expectations at the beginning of their job.

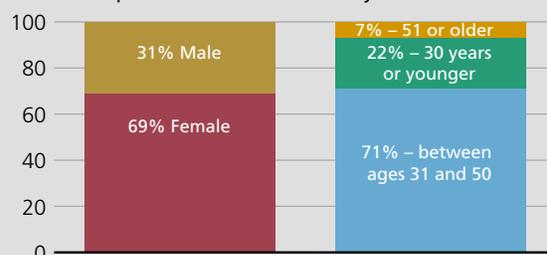
Training and development – or the lack thereof – was a clear source of dissatisfaction for many. The survey notes: “Approximately four-in-ten (39%) report they did not receive adequate training or the tools to do their job. Female respondents (55%) are less likely than male respondents (67%) to say they did, in fact, receive adequate training or tools in order to do their job.” More than half of the respondents (56%) said that at some point they requested additional training and did not receive it. The Council’s survey states: “In terms of being made aware of training opportunities, just over half (52%) report they were not made aware of such opportunities, while almost as many (47%) indicate they were made aware of additional training.”

The work environment and adequate introductions to it received middling grades as well. The Council’s survey acknowledges that “the initial stages of an employer-employee relationship are critical for the success of both parties. Nearly two-thirds (65%) feel they were not provided with any support mechanisms or a support group.” Of the almost one-quarter (24%) of Aboriginal jobseekers who reported that they were provided with support mechanisms, most acknowledged unofficial support networks such as co-workers, supervisors or regular

A slightly higher proportion of male respondents report discrimination as their reason for leaving.

Who Responded to the Survey?

Graph 1: Who Took The Survey



Who Responded to the Survey?

Graph 2: Where They Worked



staff meetings, while others cited such official support as unions, employee assistance programs or a departmental ombudsman.

Did the respondents feel included in, or excluded from, their workgroups? Those who felt they were included in their workgroups (50%) outnumbered those who said they felt excluded (45%). Male respondents (55%) were more likely to say they felt included than female respondents (47%).

For most of the respondents this survey was their first exit interview. Upon leaving the job, two-thirds (68%) of respondents reported that their former employer did not conduct an exit interview when they left their position, while just 22% said that such a meeting was held. Among female respondents, 25% were offered exit interviews; male respondents reported that only 16% received the offer.

If employers are interested in addressing barriers to retention within the workplace, exit interviews are an important step. See page 7 for a sampling of questions to ask in an exit interview.

The survey offered respondents both quantitative and qualitative opportunities to respond. This piece has tracked the important quantitative findings. For a small sample of qualitative results, see "What Respondents Said" on page 6. The full results of the survey, including the Pollara Analysis, can be found at www.ahrdcc.com/retentionsurvey.

'Overall Low Job Satisfaction Levels' From the Survey Analysis Prepared by Pollara

Overall low job satisfaction levels are the crux of the workplace issues uncovered in this survey. Among the respondents in this survey approximately half indicated they were not satisfied with their previous job. More importantly, a majority of respondents reported that, in fact, their former manager could have done something to improve their job satisfaction. Along with concerns about management, fair pay and the potential for advancement are important factors in creating a higher level of job satisfaction. On both accounts respondents to this survey negatively reflected on their experiences. Half of the respondents felt they were not being compensated fairly and two-thirds reported there were no opportunities for advancement in their previous job.

Job Coaching

A Profile of AAAP's Thomas Russell

He is known to call new apprentices in the morning to make sure they get to work on time. He has worked with candidates for apprenticeship to make sure they have the background qualifications. He has sat down with apprentices and bank officers in order to, as he puts it, "help get their lives onto a more regular footing." He has helped arrange transportation for new apprentices and has made sure they go to work with the necessary garb and equipment.



These are typical functions of a job coach but Tom Russell, an Industry Liaison Consultant with the Alberta Aboriginal Apprenticeship Project (AAAP) does not primarily think of himself as a job coach. "If I do a little extra for them sometimes," says the soft-spoken Russell, "they may do a little extra for themselves."

At AAAP, Russell acts as a kind of broker between Aboriginal talent and companies who want to take advantage of that talent. A journeyman welder who has operated from the Edmonton and Fort McMurray area for 30 years, Russell has spent most of those years working with industry and the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Program.

Job coaches, like athletic coaches, work to elicit the best of their charges. This prospect clearly drives Russell. "The biggest thrill of all," he says, "is having a young person who hasn't made more than \$6.95 an hour, going into a job with a starting wage of \$12 to over \$23 an hour."

Since the AAAP began in 2001 the team has guided 112 Aboriginal people into apprenticeships in the trades. He likes to tell employers that through his network of apprentices the team only delivers job-ready employees. "You don't have to spend advertising dollars, you've got the Alberta Aboriginal Apprentice Project team. Just call us."

Asked his biggest success story, he chuckles. "Getting up every morning, going to work." It's a typical low-key answer, and an insightful one, because by getting up every morning and going to work, Thomas Russell, Industry Liaison Consultant, job coach *par excellence*, and a role model to Aboriginal youth, is making sure that more and more Aboriginal apprentices are doing the same.

The Retention Challenge

The Perspective of Dr. Neil McDonald



It was 1979 and Dr. Neil McDonald was collaborating in a study of Inuit schoolchildren in northern Quebec. Along with a sociologist and a psychologist he was going over the responses of the schoolchildren to the questions they'd been asked. One of the questions was the reliable standby:

What would you like to be when you grow up? Assessing the results the researchers were startled to learn that 67 of 69 Grade Three children had answered: "I want to be a janitor." "Of course, when we looked at this result, we did a double take," McDonald recalls. "Grade Three children want to be janitors? Most unusual. Normally they want to be brain surgeons or astronauts. So we asked the psychologist to talk to the principal, who said, 'Talk to the teachers' but the teachers didn't know. One of them said, 'Why don't you ask the caretaker?' The psychologist started toward the janitor's office when the janitor stepped out and of course! The janitor was Aboriginal, the only Aboriginal in the school."

Dr. McDonald, who has a disarming manner of translating Aboriginal issues into potent narratives, uses this story to suggest one of the dynamics underlying the crisis of Aboriginal retention. Are these Grade Three Inuit children so different from Aboriginal employees in a workplace where there are no models for Aboriginal advancement – except perhaps, an Aboriginal supervisor of the custodial staff?

For 30 years Dr. McDonald has been giving seminars to executives, managers and recruiters about the need for a deeper understanding of Aboriginal people by their non-Aboriginal fellow employees and managers.

Education has been a powerful hindrance to Aboriginal employment successes, although today this is shifting dramatically. In 1972 there were 70 First Nations students in post-secondary institutions of learning. Today there are about 44,000 in colleges, universities and technical schools.

A second factor has been the cultural gap. Dr. McDonald compares the situation to that of women working in non-traditional roles, such as heavy equipment operators. "They will say to you, 'My problem is not my skill, training or ability to do the work. My problem is the men won't accept me. If they'd only let me do my work.' Aboriginal people experience the same thing."

Self-fulfilling prophecies are a third factor. "As you believe the world should be, you make it turn out." If managers expect Aboriginal employees to be around only for a short while, this expectation will probably become fact.

A fourth issue is the resentment roused by misunderstandings surrounding Employment Equity. Often an Aboriginal person is regarded with the suspicion that the only job requirement was to be Aboriginal. "Unfortunately, in my experience," says Dr. McDonald, "most managers don't understand the rationale for Employment Equity. They see it as reverse discrimination, a violation of the merit principle."

How can an employer overcome these difficulties? "Education, awareness, understanding," says Dr. McDonald. "The need to educate managers and fellow employees is paramount." He suggests other methods, notably these five:

"There is a need for a deeper understanding of Aboriginal people by their non-Aboriginal fellow employees and managers."

1. *Provide networking opportunities.* One company that Dr. McDonald recalls gave its Aboriginal employees a half hour a week, just before lunchtime, to mingle with other Aboriginal employees. "As women have very clearly shown, networking and support groups can be extremely important."

2. *Encourage Aboriginal employees to become involved in helping their communities.* If the company is launching a joint effort with, say, a nearby Reserve, Aboriginal people from that Reserve should be involved.

3. *Provide opportunities for Aboriginal people to express their heritage.* This could involve a lunch celebration featuring Aboriginal food or a monthly Elder's visit.

4. *Give symbolic recognition to the Aboriginal world* – as in purchasing local Aboriginal artwork for company walls. "I was in a company that operates in an area of five Reserves. I went into the main administrative office. There wasn't one piece of symbolism or anything Aboriginal. I thought, if you work there as an Aboriginal person, how barren it feels."

5. Finally, one of the surest ways to recruit and retain Aboriginal talent is to show how high Aboriginal people can rise in an organization. Are there senior managers who are Aboriginal? Executives? Members of the Board?



What Respondents Said

The Good, the Bad and Other Responses to the Informal Retention Survey

If the employer had asked you why you left, what would you have said? (Question #46)

If I had known my rights, I probably would have blown some sort of whistle on them.

Spent two years in school to get out of construction so I could spend time with my family and not have to work a stupid amount of hours to get ahead financially. Have you seen old construction workers? They're miserable.

I was given no protection against abuse, sexual harassment or harassment and there was no equality in that workplace for women.

I left because I wasn't getting enough hours to pay the bills. But discrimination and unfriendly workplace were the other major factors.

I left due to the hate and their expectations that I was to work hard to "be there" for the manager and fellow co-workers, while they refused to support me in doing little projects that I was really good at and enjoyed.

I really enjoyed working in this position. However, I could not work in an environment that was so hostile, so negative and so extremely competitive.

There was no opportunity for advancement. The pay was not competitive with the industry standards and the benefits were very poor.

The company would be at an advantage if they brought their employees into 20th Century thinking. They can start by abolishing the slave trade!!

If you had a mentor, how would you describe the outcome? (Question #19)

Great! My manager was my mentor.

Most time I figured out things myself.

If I'd had a mentor, I would probably still be there.

The person who was supposed to train me didn't, it was one of the supportive co-workers who gave me training – so someone who is willing to help and give a hand.

Do you feel there were certain policies that were required that may have improved the working conditions? (Question #23)

Management shouldn't be allowed to bully and intimidate support staff. Double standards shouldn't be allowed.

No clear written policies.

Harassment was an issue for myself. They gave us no education or training to spot or handle it.

Polices were communicated but they were not enforced.

Employment Equity and diversity were definitely needed.

Did you ever request additional training and not receive it? If no, please explain. (Question #28)

Asked for numerous opportunities to attend conferences concerning Child and Youth care, denied training on basis of educational background.

Asked to be trained on a different aspect of the workplace...was denied numerous times.

I had requested to take a priority management course with my executive member and did not receive it.

Numerous times training was requested by myself and always ignored by the training coordinator.

Supervisor would not allow for any training that would ultimately leave the staff knowing more than she did. Training was only for her, no one else.

Had to pay for my own training and was often told that the employer could not afford Aboriginal specific training opportunities. Yet my performance review and accreditation were based on continuous upgrading.

Asked for training on a pallet jack and was told to figure it out myself.

Would you work for this employer again? If yes, please say why. (Question #44)

I left due to budget cuts but I enjoyed working with the people at the office and I enjoyed the work I did. I did not leave for personal reasons.

I really enjoyed the job and the staff. Very friendly environment.

I would work for the organization but not the program manager. The overall organization is an excellent environment.

Some items have been slightly edited for clarity. The full results of the survey can be found at ahrdcc.com/retentionsurvey.

Who Responded to the Survey?

Graph 3: Positions They Held



12 Questions to Ask in an Exit Survey

One of the most effective ways to improve retention is to listen to employees who are leaving. Here are some of the questions you may wish to ask.

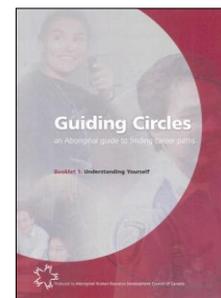
1. How would you describe the environment of the workplace?
2. How would you describe the co-workers in that workplace?
3. Did you feel included in, or excluded from, the work group?
4. Did your manager discuss Workplan, and expectations for performance?
5. Did you work with a mentor? How effective was the arrangement?
6. Were you given adequate introduction and training for the job?
7. Were you given opportunities for advancement and training?
8. Did you ever ask for training and not receive it?
9. Were workplace policies in place? Were they communicated? Enforced?
10. How would you describe your state of job satisfaction?
11. Were you satisfied with the compensation?
12. If exiting the organization was your decision, what prompted that decision?



Growing New Uses of Guiding Circles:

Career Counsellors are Making Guiding Circles Their Own

Over the last year practitioners using the Council's career tool, Guiding Circles, have reported a number of new uses of the book with several developing their own collateral materials to accompany the book. These advances are opening the way to a new segment of the Guiding Circles website dedicated to supporting Guiding Circles with new resources.

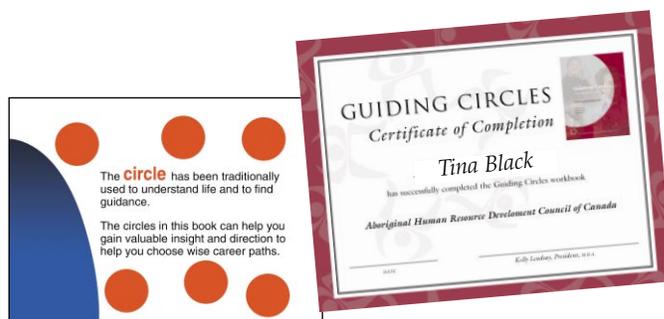


"We are going to make these new materials available to all trained facilitators," says the Council's Trina Maher, Manager, Aboriginal Skills and Learning. "We think it's fantastic that counsellors have gone so far in customizing the Guiding Circles approach to meet their own clientele's unique needs."

For example, Coreen Jenner from the Ki-low-na Friendship Society of Kelowna, BC, has created an innovative PowerPoint presentation of the Guiding Circles activities that helps animate discussion and clarify the exercises. "Her slideshow clearly shows her interest for this approach," says Maher. "We look forward to working with Coreen to refine the concept to make it a powerful new resource for helping other Guiding Circles facilitators. Thank you Coreen for your creativity!"

Another innovative idea comes from June Howse, Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement, of Caslan, Alberta. Last year June approached the Council to create a "graduation certificate" for students who successfully completed the workbook. The Council collaborated in creating a certificate (seen above). This certificate will be made accessible to all Guiding Circles facilitators.

Contact the Guiding Circles website for more information (www.guidingcircles.com). If you have been using Guiding Circles and have fresh ideas or tools to share, contact Trina Maher at trina.maher@ahrdcc.com.





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