



Casino and Educational Partnership Delivers Results Across Business Sectors

by Jim Stanley

It is imperative to train tribal members in a way that is both meaningful to the individual and productive to a tribe's enterprises. A way must be found to better empower our people because for each respective tribe, the best way to assure economic success is to fortify the business environment and allow leaders to grow. The Quinault Indian Nation has developed the Quinault Nation Enterprise Board, which oversees our casino, timber company, seafood plant, and convenience stores, to meet such a goal. This quest into how best to invest in mentorship and education follows the board's directive from the general body and will build a brighter future – faster.

The Quinault Nation Enterprise Board has found a high-value, low-cost solution by collaborating with Lisa Edwards, Dean for Enterprise and Economic Development at Tacoma Community College (TCC), a local two-year community college that focuses on serving tribal members. TCC has developed a tailored program for our tribe's specific educational and enterprise needs. The Tribal Advancement Program at TCC provides customized education and career preparation onsite to tribes in the Pacific Northwest. TCC staff work closely with tribal directors and casino executives to create highly relevant learning programs for tribal members that meet desired outcomes. The expectation is an outcome of energized and engaged employees able to understand better their role within our portfolio of businesses. Hopefully each individual will be able to imagine possibilities for personal growth not seen before entering the program and the enterprises establish, and continue to grow over time, a deep bench of trained and experienced workforce. TCC's Tribal Advancement Program leverages our casino as the foundation for a management-training venue to groom aspiring tribal leaders and is flexible enough to include talent from our non-gaming lines of business.

TCC's work with tribes began in May 2007 with a phone call from Nisqually Red Wind Casino. Executives were seeking career preparation to groom tribal members for leadership positions within the casino. For six months, TCC staff worked with tribal members and casino executives to create learning objectives and learning outcomes for each major operational area of the casino. After focus groups with nearby tribes to validate the curriculum, TCC launched the Tribal Enterprise & Gaming Management program in January 2008 at Nisqually Red Wind Casino.

News about the success of the program spread throughout the Northwest and the Lummi Tribe contacted TCC in the spring of 2009 to create a customized leadership program for their tribal members. The Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis followed in spring of 2010 and will start their second group of participants in October 2011.

What makes this program unique is that curriculum is tailored to the culture, values and enterprise operations of each tribe. So, if the tribe has a hotel and spa, then hospitality and hotel management are included in the curriculum. If the tribe has a smoke shop or food processing operation, then retail management and good manufacturing practices are added. Tribes also have access to services that assess the readiness of tribal members for college level learning. Each participating tribe receives college placement testing, along with college and career advising to assist tribal members in identifying a starting point for their learning. Basic skills courses, tutoring and study sessions are also offered onsite to help tribal members build their confidence in learning. College and career readiness courses help tribal members to train their brain to think like a student again. They also learn study skills, and time management as well as how to maintain a work/family balance while participating in college courses.

At Lummi Silver Reef Casino, tribal members also participate in a three-quarter, 15 credit, on-the-job internship experience by working 150 hours a quarter in identified areas of the casino. The capstone experience for all tribes is a college certificate in Tribal Enterprise & Gaming Management. This 14-credit certificate is offered onsite at the casino or in the community and is taught by industry leaders. Over the past three years, the TCC program has graduated 75 tribal members with a 90% completion rate and an A- grade average.

Going to college can be scary, especially if a tribal member has not been successful in the past. In addition to college and career readiness support, TCC recommends active involvement and oversight of tribal council and/or the enterprise board. It is critical for aspiring tribal leaders to be supported by elders who will encourage and support them as they go through the program. Tribal members benefit from a regular reminder that they are in this special program because they have been identified as the future leaders of the tribe, that the tribe is counting on them to put forth their best effort, and to fully take

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advantage of all the services and learning available in the program.

With all the upside to this program there still lies risk. Managing expectations in career planning after completing the program is crucial. The purpose of this program is to empower committed team members and to build the bench strength of the team by identifying and developing talent. This partnership is a wonderful opportunity to let members know the tribe believes in their productive ability and wants them to succeed. This program is not a venue to immediately replace an existing non-Native employee that is a good team player and performs well. This would undermine the stability of the organization. Instead it gives people the opportunity to take on challenges inside and outside of their current role and transition into advanced positions after demonstrating a pattern of success. It puts people into position to succeed.

The TCC Tribal Advancement Program is a good model for providing education and career support to aspiring tribal leaders. Now more than ever, it is important for tribal members to have access to education onsite that prepares them for a future position or gives them the knowledge to create a new tribal enterprise. Talented tribal members will be successful. The trick is to nurture and keep that talent within the tribal family so they don't have to leave the reservation to seek career opportunities. ♣

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