

QTIC Case Study - The Key Ingredient

The Capta Group (Capta) is based in Tropical North Queensland and consists of nine separate businesses trading under the CaPTA banner. The company predominately works in nature based tourism attractions and has a large, well-credentialed tourism training arm managed by Penny Cleland who has the Human Resources responsibility for a diverse staff numbering 192.

One of Penny's 'learnings' after twenty years of being involved in the employment of Indigenous people, is the important need for support by both the employer and more importantly an Indigenous mentor.

Penny reflects,

'What could we have we done differently; we could have employed an Indigenous Mentor earlier. The Woodward family (Directors of the CaPTA Group) have been supporting the employment of Indigenous people for over thirty five years. We have had some great success stories and equally quite a few challenges. The last five years things have worked better for everybody because we have had the services of an Indigenous mentor named Joy Harris. Joy is employed at least day a week, more if required, and is a key ingredient in CaPTA's continued understanding of her people's employment, cultural and social needs. CaPTA now boasts a workforce that consists of sixteen per cent Indigenous employees, a growth of eleven per cent in the last four years.

We have learnt that at times, Indigenous people need other Indigenous people to help them get to where they need to go. A 'white' face does not always have all of the answers.'

Joy is a quietly spoken and intuitive Indigenous lady with an incredibly varied background. Originally from the Quandamooka tribe on Stradbroke Island, she has spent a large portion of her life in Cairns. Her experiences and strong, supportive, no nonsense demeanour create an instant bond with Capta's wide age and experience ranging employees.

Joy's background includes, however, is not limited by:

- Women's Shelter support (domestic violence, housing, health – dependency and children's services)
- Eighteen years' service in the Drug and Alcohol Authority (Certificate 3)
- Rape Crisis Counsellor
- Legal Advocate for Indigenous peoples

She provides the 'link' for CaPTA. A link, that extends far and wide throughout the state of Queensland. Not only does she have a connection with Elders from all tribes, Joy often uses creative networks to help communicate with disengaged Indigenous people. Art has played a significant part in individual's expressing themselves, together with establishing a common ground around trust.

Joy's refreshing philosophy is well grounded and simple, 'My job is to guide them through what they want, not what I think they should do. I present options, they choose on their own and I walk with them and ensure they follow it through. They learn best from their mistakes. In my opinion welfare is more of a hindrance than assistance and has impacts on not just the individual but the wider community as well. My role is about bridging the gap, empowering the non - confident ones and working with all facets of Indigenous people's lives, to ensure they are supported through the networks I have built up over the years. Communities play a big role in Indigenous people's lives – sometimes this is positive and sometimes this is negative.'

Joy and Penny commend the support extended by Charles Woodward throughout their tenure. He has allowed them to 'run their own show' and not been caught up on short term tangibles or the 'checks and balances' in terms of outcomes.

As Penny encapsulates succinctly,

'Building trust is not like a commodity. It does not have a defined time and space. People move at different paces, relationships are critical, no matter where we are in life's journey. Honesty is the best methodology. Sometimes it needs to be brutal to be effective and other times the subtle approach works.'

I asked Joy, a person of few words, what is it she would say to Indigenous people seeking employment in the Tourism Industry, she replied,

'Have a go at anything. You will not find your niche until you have a try. Know your stuff and enjoy what you do – find something you really enjoy and stick to it.'

From people that have been supported by Joy, three personality traits resonate:

- Non judgemental
- Always available and approachable – reassuring to know that she is there
- Supportive and honest

In 2008 the CaPTA developed and implemented an Indigenous Employment Strategy (IES) to increase employment for local Indigenous people. This is implemented across CaPTA. The IES is specifically tailored to assist Indigenous employees with long term employment goals, whilst at the same time, providing them with the support of an Indigenous Mentor and linking into many Indigenous community organisations to assist in developing their career pathway.

