
Aditya Jha opens a bright chapter for the Indians of Canada

Project Beyshick

A 'Hindustani' opens a bright chapter for the Indians of Canada

Geetika Bhardwaj and Lisa Kember

Aditya Jha (sitting - centre) with participants

Fourteen First Nations young people from northern Ontario spent a week in Toronto to 'job shadow' corporate executives as part of the Project Beyshick. The program was kicked off in Thunder Bay on August 12th with a pre-event workshop.

Project Beyshick is a vision of Aditya Jha, who immigrated to Canada from India and made his fortune when he sold his Toronto educational software company to Sun Microsystems in 2001. The project was launched in August 2005 with the support of Stan Beardy, grand chief of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, a governance comprising of 49 remote aboriginal communities of Northern Ontario.

"I wanted to give the Canadian aboriginal communities a vision for the future - and a sense of possibility. It is the entrepreneurial spirit and success, which gives the rightful recognition to communities in the mainstream world. It also allows the successful entrepreneurs to become role models for their community," says Aditya Jha.

The budding entrepreneurs and career professionals arrived in Toronto to follow the daily routines of corporate executives at a number of organizations. One executive who has participated for the two consecutive years of this project was Hari Panday, president of ICICI Bank Canada. "This has become an exercise of mutual learning and understanding," he says. "It benefits both, the candidates and the participating corporations. We learn more about Canadian history and how the new generation of First Nations people is making an effort to grow in today's Canada. The participants learn the intricacies of complex corporate structures, management techniques and best practices as deployed by a global company like ICICI Bank Canada."

"Integrating these learnings with the long-standing traditions in their communities will certainly lead to development of some very unique business models. I believe participants' firsthand exposure through Project Beyshick will not only add a new dimension to their knowledge base, but the connections made could very well become lifelong resources in building a brighter future for many remote communities. We are thrilled to be a catalyst in making Aditya's vision a reality."

All of the executives involved in Project Beyshick enjoy similar experience.

Janine Szczepanowski, vice-president of leadership and entrepreneurship development at EllisDon Corporation, one of Canada's largest construction companies, says: "I got a broader appreciation for the challenges that the aboriginal community faces in Canada."

I also appreciated the reminder of how overwhelming it can seem to start out. You forget what that is like. This experience really brings you back to basics. I enjoyed the opportunity to share some of the business experience I've gained and to encourage someone else."

AMJ Campbell, Canada's largest moving company has been partnering in Project Beyshick since its inception. This year, they had the participant - Jason Paul Rasevych - spend time with several different executives, from sitting in board meetings with the CEO to visiting with the CFO and also with the marketing and sales team.

Hilda Anderson with Keith Forde

Stan Loone with Janine Szczepanowski

"The real impact of participating in Project Beyshick is at the end of the program when the participant expresses the value they received in spending time with you," says Denis Cordick, vice-president of marketing at AMJ Campbell. "It's personally very rewarding."

The goal of Project Beyshick is not only to encourage aboriginal entrepreneurship, but also to change the perception of the community within corporate Canada.

"It is critical that we begin to see more interaction between the community of aboriginal people in Canada and the corporate executives and organizations that comprise our economic engine," says Aditya Jha.

Aditya terms success as 'virus'. "When a few members of the aboriginal community become massively financially successful, the mainstream world will see them differently. It will have a viral effect on the whole community - others will want to follow them."

At Toronto Police Services Board, where one Beyshick participant spent one day with Dr. Alok Mukherjee, chair of the board, and the rest of the time with Deputy Police Chief, Keith Forde, Project Beyshick made a deep impression.

"The experience was very positive for me. I talk to young people in presentations and at public events, but this was the first structured program that I had been involved in," says Dr. Mukherjee. "Throughout my life, I have had role models for my success - and I have actively sought them out. I did not succeed entirely on my own. I benefited from people who gave me their time. With Project Beyshick, I was able to do the same for someone else."

That is the essence of Project Beyshick. Those personal connections hold the secret to success in Canada's aboriginal community.

Project Beyshick will be going international next year, thanks to an offer from the president of ICICI Bank Canada, Hari Panday. The plan is to offer similar mentorship opportunities in Canada and also at ICICI global headquarters in Mumbai, India.

Just like its name 'Beyshick', meaning One in the local language of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, the project deserves an applause for being the one that's made a tremendous difference in the lives of these selected participants over a span of just two years.

[Geetika Bhardwaj is a freelance reporter based in Toronto and Lisa Kember is Media Coordinator, POA Foundation.]

Source: