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BY: ATSIA

Hi there,

Since July 2005 I have been a partner in a very successful joint-venture Indigenous tour operation, launched in 2003 . I helped Willie Gordon develop Guurrbi Tours, and wrote about the lessons learned in my PhD thesis so that others could learn from our experiences. Willie and I later co-wrote a book chapter about it, which was drawn from the thesis.

Ref:

Bennett, J and Gordon, W. (2007) "Social capital and the Indigenous tourism entrepreneur" in J. Bultjens and D. Fuller (eds) *Striving for Sustainability: Case Studies in Indigenous Tourism*, Southern Cross University Press, Lismore, NSW, pp 333-370.

Principal lessons learned....

- 1. Focus on developing entrepreneurs, not businesses.** Find the person with a passion and then help them build their business. If people don't have a passion then they simply won't last the course. You have to love what you're doing.
- 2. Start small** and grow with the business. In the tourism industry it's been found time and time again that the sustainable Indigenous businesses are those that started small and did NOT have government funding. If you're going to stuff up (as we all do to start with) do it without the world looking at you - and without mega-bucks owing at the bank.
3. Successful Indigenous enterprises have been found to be those that have a non-Indigenous partner, or very **strong non-Indigenous networks**. This could be a marriage partner - business partner - or simply a strong working relationship with a non-Indigenous business. Whichever type of partnership it is, this has to be an EQUAL partnership, with each learning from the other, and a great deal of trust. Willie calls it a 'buddy-buddy' system.
- 4. Learning by doing together.** We all learn best this way. Consultants (who tell don't teach), endless workshops (which talk instead of doing) do very little - and in the case of consultants who tell and don't teach, can be positively detrimental. People need to be given as much information as possible, and encouraged to make their own decisions. You can't run a business without making decisions dozens of times a day!
- 5. Allow people to make a wrong decision!** This is how we all learn!!
6. WHO you know (rather than WHAT you know) is known to be fundamental to business success. Government needs to encourage **Indigenous participation in mainstream networks**. The value of Indigenous-only organisations such as Indigenous Chambers of Commerce, Aboriginal Tourism Australia is extremely limited - they provide moral support, but do not help people move forward.

All the successful Indigenous micro-enterprises in this area have got off the ground because of the points above.

Best regards
Judy Bennett

Dr Judy Bennett

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