

Speaking notes- Shruti Nigam

The Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce Member's Luncheon

Speaker: Jamie Wilson

Wednesday, September 25, 2024

1:00 p.m.

RBC Convention Centre

RECONCILIATION FOR BUSINESS

[Slide 1- “Building Strong Foundations”]

Raise your hands if you're married, in a committed relationship or have a partner. *[raise your hand as an example]*

Relationships can be challenging, right?

Sure, sometimes it can be easy too... but every relationship comes back to its foundation—the roots that holds the relationship tree together: respect, trust and understanding.

All three are very important. We respect our partner for who they are, trust them for what they're capable of and try to understand their past and why they are the way they are.

But, of course, every marriage or relationship comes with a risk.

Risk that your partner might change.

Risk of not knowing what the future might turn out to be like especially if you have kids. Speaking of which—raise your hand if you have kids, like I do. *[raise your hand as an example]*

Kids are something else, right? *[chuckle]*

As parents we learn a lot from them.

Just the other day, my daughter told me she is anti-Canada. I asked her...
“Why?”

She said it’s because of Canada’s history with the Indigenous people and how they are treated.

For me... it's the opposite. The more I educate myself on Canadian history, the more I appreciate it.

But I understand her feelings and many others who share the same concern.

And I want to tell them that I do see change happening.

Her feelings reflect a broader sentiment in our society. Many people, especially younger generations, are educating themselves more on reconciliation, and are seeking acknowledgement and change.

They want their voices to be heard, and they don't see history as something to forget, but something to learn from.

I'll share one experience of mine.

When I used to teach kindergarten to grade 12 students about Treaties and Aboriginal rights, often students would say, “Hey none of us are Indigenous, so why should we learn about it?”

But then one time two grade 11 non-indigenous students from private school were speaking on The Indian Act.

One shared their story of how their grandmother made a racist comment about an Indigenous person... and they said, “I have the tools to respectfully educate my grandmother and others, so why not do it?”

Other said they wanted to go into Indigenous law, so they wanted to learn more.

Those students impacted me.

[pause]

Sometimes it's okay to give the mic to someone else for validation.

In this case a non-indigenous person speaking helped us see progress.

[pause]

[Slide 2- "Businesses Making a Difference"]

We can also look at the sports industry.

Like how the Winnipeg Jets celebrate Indigenous culture through their partnership with the Winnipeg Aboriginal Sport Achievement Centre, WASAC.

They created Indigenous-themed jerseys to support inclusivity, and the sales of their merchandise have been reported as highly successful, outselling regular jets merchandise.

They put their money where their mouth is.

Just like these students and organizations, businesses too have a role in making reconciliation a reality.

You don't have to start big. Small actions can be meaningful too. And in reconciliation, it's better to make mistakes of commission—taking action, even if imperfect—than to make mistakes of omission... that is, doing nothing at all.

Because just saying that you support reconciliation is not enough.

Just like we put effort into our personal relationships, we must put the same effort to bringing reconciliation to our business practices.

[Slide 3- "Procurement as a Powerful Tool"]

One way to do that is through procurement.

When it comes to purchasing, for example, orange shirts for Orange Shirt Day, it is important to decide *where* we buy it from.

Procurement isn't just about purchasing...it's about who we choose to support and invest in.

When we buy from Indigenous-owned businesses, we're not only actively supporting its growth, but we're also showing our clients, our employees, and our community that our business is very much committed to reconciliation.

We're putting our money where our mouth is.

[Slide 4- "Opportunities"]

We can also support reconciliation by ensuring Indigenous people have fair access to your jobs, training and education opportunities.

For example, in a relationship, you want to make sure your partners opinions are being heard and vice-versa before taking a major decision.

It's the same with Indigenous people...it's about commitment to building mutual respect, and mutual understanding.

For my father and many others who endured the hardships of residential school... reconciliation is about healing.

When we talk about supporting Indigenous businesses or considering Indigenous voices in hiring and procurement...we're taking meaningful steps to heal those wounds.

[Slide 5- “Call to Action”]

Incorporating Call to Action #92 into our business practices is like committing to regular date nights in a committed relationship.

It's an active choice to nurture that relationship and keep it strong.

And that's what we're doing here with reconciliation.

Every small step shows we genuinely care.

Just as I strive to honor and support my family's and other Indigenous people's history *and* make my daughter proud of her father... each of us can contribute to strengthening our relationship with the Indigenous community.

I encourage you today to take action.

Think of one thing you can do to bring reconciliation into your business and this time *[pause]* make your kids proud of you.

Thank you very much for listening.