

Business Conference opens hearts as well as doors

Just what can you pick up from a three day inaugural conference on business development, with a delegation of successful Hawaiian businessmen included as guest speakers.

To get a personalised answer you'd have to ask one of the eighty Maori businessmen or women who attended the first ever Maori Business Conference in Auckland in February.

For the generalised answer you could say the participants would have picked up confidence, pride and a sense of belonging to a group that's changing the Maori economic base.

Referred to often during the conference as being 'the cream of the Maori people', it would be fairer to say those attending were successful enough in their varied commercial backgrounds, to find the time off from work to get some perspective on where they were headed as a people.

From the opening at the prestigious Trillos on the Wednesday night it was obvious that this was going to be a 'showcase' conference putting Maori business expertise in the best possible light.

A fair slice of who's who in the board-rooms of Queen Street were represented at the opening banquet. Names like Bob Owen, Hugh Fletcher, Gordon Dryden, Sir Dennis Blundell and then of course the Maori equivalents, Sir Hepi Te Heu Heu, Huia Briggs and up and coming Huarahi company man Claude Edwards.

Dazzling show

If it could be said that Maoris generally lack impact on the commercial world, that wouldn't be true for show business. Delegates and guests at the conference opening were treated to a dazzling show that previewed the Te Kopu Fashion Awards as well as showcasing who's who in the entertainment world.

Billy T. James, Tina Cross, The Yandell Sisters, Robyn Ruakere, and then of course conference co-ordinator Howard Morrison, they all performed well. For those wondering when the fun was going to stop and the business to begin the time came too soon.

Early on Thursday morning came the wake-up call to the first breakfast work session. Fittingly enough it was hosted by a spritely looking Arthur Lydiard defying his 65 years of age. His topic was healthy living and exercise, with the corresponding benefits to business through 'healthy body, healthy mind'.

And then on to the first conference session, 'Technology and its implications', courtesy of two IBM men, John Gunn and J.D. Matheson. These men talked of organisational changes disrupting previous norms in the market place, with the subsequent hardship for those not adaptable. Unfortunately it was noted that most Maori workers are in the areas where jobs are being lost through technology.

Straight shooting

For the businessmen at the conference there was some straight shooting advice.

"Know the business you are in and stay abreast of advancements in the field so that you don't fall behind. Don't be fooled by the technology you use today — this is just a tool to do a job in achieving your business objectives today. There may be a better tool tomorrow. To remain competitive you must have the best for your business for productivity and for cost effective reasons."

The following address by the young successful Hugh Fletcher was probably

best value for money for business-eager delegates. From the outset Fletcher made it clear his business position was partly inherited and partly self-chosen. (Part of his address is published on page 32 of this issue. ED).

However while quick to minimise his own achievements, Hugh Fletcher opened up considerably with pointers on how Maori businessmen might use the team approach in small business. As he put it, "in your own business you can organise the way you want, in a cooperative manner, while in someone else's business you must accept the organisation (until you get to the top and can then change it)."

Some comfort

Delegates would have drawn more comfort from Hugh Fletcher's comments that small business was more suited to the Maori cooperative approach and that this was the main growth area in industry.

The overview by Ngatata Love, from the Massey University Business Course, neatly summed up the day's proceedings. From comments such as likening Maori business to 'winking in the dark at a pretty girl', to synopses of the main paper, it was all covered.

And the presence at the conference of seven students from the Business course at Massey was a source of great comfort and pride to delegates. Of course it was also a chance for students to show themselves and their ideas to prospective Maori employers.

From the feedback I received from the students and employers alike, this was one of the success stories of the conference.

The Thursday night of the conference was reserved for 'social' business with a cruise on the harbour. From some of the faces clocking in at the next day's early morning conference, business looked as though it had been successfully concluded.

