

Talking about Justice in Nunavut, Episode 3: Creating a Healthy Workplace:
PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

HOST: Welcome to Talking About Justice in Nunavut, a series of audio interviews presented by the Law Society of Nunavut. I am Gloria Song, and I'm an access to justice co-representative and project coordinator for the Law Society of Nunavut. This is Part 2 of Episode 3. In Part 1, we learned about workplace violence and harassment, and what to do about it. We also heard from Joe Karetak and Shirley Tagalik from the Aqqiumavvik Society in Arviat about what we need to think about to support a safe, healthy, and respectful workplace that is informed by an Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit approach. In this Part 2, we are going to continue this conversation.

This can be a difficult topic, and you may find the information to be upsetting. As always, take care of yourself. This means that you might want to take any steps that you need to emotionally prepare yourself and also think about what care you might need after listening to this program. We will share some resources for support in this program. Now let's turn to Joe and Shirley.

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HOST: I really appreciate how it seems like both of you are describing what you call a paradigm shift, a cultural shift that needs to happen to be able to have these IQ values play out at work. Now, if someone is dealing with a problem of harassment at work, do you have any wellness advice on how they can rely on Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit to deal with the issue? Perhaps any general overall advice?

[TIME STAMP: 1:28]

JOE: I think a lot of the teachings that Inuit people try to promote are recognizing that life has many difficult situations that one can encounter and that with certain situations that are hard to change, if you look at it holistically, you can pursue the solution. The problem I think most people have is that we think we can solve the problem just like that. I think there are certain things that you can certainly problem solve just like that. But I think there's a lot of them that are more impacting, need to be continually worked on, or prevented. Because when none of those things are being done, then you just have to ask someone up there how to put up with all of this stuff and still be in harmony and peace? And just put up with the abuse, just put up with the difficulties, and just be happy, no matter what's going on, just be happy? And that's very difficult to do. I think that individually, I think one would hope to be able to either have experienced a situation of healing, so that you can, at least, no matter what's going on, deal with the situation, without the burden of oneself adding to the weight of the problem you're encountering.

And I think that's part of the theory of Inuit people. You're going to encounter difficulties, especially starvation in a hunter-gatherer society system, where everything is uncertain. Nothing is in your control. Your best chance of dealing with anything will be if you're in a good place yourself.

And so there's always going to be, I think, something we can do individually. And I think if we want to try to cope with all that is, in our case, recovering from colonization – one of the difficulties of that is that it becomes trauma-based. Like, it's a trauma-induced lifestyle. Anybody who has gone through what we have gone through, even us unaware have to deal with trauma. And so what we're trying to promote in Aqqiumavvik is that anybody and anybody that is going to do research, that's going to try to help people up here, you need to know the historical events of what Inuit have gone through.

Again, I keep going back to the dog team story. I had dogs that were given to me by other dog owners and I could tell they were heavily traumatized. And so, because I understood that they had been traumatized, I was patient with them. I had to build trust. They had to learn to trust me. It wasn't about to happen right away. And so after a while, when they start to recover from that, they become one of the pre-defective dogs on the team. There is that recovery moment that can be achieved. But it's very specific. You have to understand how to deal with a traumatized dog, in order for it to recover from that, and have it no longer be something that impacts it continuously.

And so this is something that we're trying to promote: that you can't look at something that works really well down south and just say, "Okay, we're going to administer this up here." You have to consider the history. You have to consider the setting. You have to consider the means. It's very isolated up here. There's a very limited number of people. Your team is always going to be very small, that has to deal with such a huge situation all the time.

This is nothing new to Inuit people though. The environment has always been that. One of the things is that culture is something that people overlook. You can have an organized culture, or multiple sets of culture, or think you don't have a culture. But that's unfortunately when many people are together, whatever they are doing together is going to create a culture. And so there are things that when it becomes a culture of self-destruction, low self-esteem, pain, trauma... you need to look at the whole thing like that. It's why people commit suicide. It's why people have high addiction behaviours. That's why there's family violence. There are bad decisions that are being made.

And this is something that one explanation I had was like a computer without a virus protection program got a virus, and it's just not working properly. How do you expect that – how can you keep trying to load programs into it, when the motherboard is messed up? So healing is very similar, to me, as that. I mean, we're not machines. We're not just something where you can just switch the motherboard. But you see its concept there. It's something that it's not fair to people who have been traumatized, who have been put through those kinds of things, without considering the paradigm in which they have been encountered.

That's one thing. You can definitely fix that. You can change it, if you're talking about a computer. But if you don't put a virus protection program and the colonization is continuing, it's just going to go right back to being messed up again. So it's not enough to just heal people. I mean, it's a great thing to have people heal. But you have to have

something that's going to protect them from that, that they generate, that they update, that they're able to administer. And when you are able to do that for people, I think you'll see a difference in whatever setting you're talking about where there's more than one person that's going to be there.

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HOST: And what advice would you have, Shirley, for someone who might be dealing with problems of harassment at work?

SHIRLEY: Well, I want to come back to something Joe said, about culture. One of the underlying issues that we really need to consider is that there is a workplace culture. We're not just talking about IQ and revitalization of IQ and how that fits with QQ, and how we negotiate those two things. But we actually have a workplace culture, and that workplace culture is absolutely defined by QQ. So when somebody is facing issues in the workplace, they do not, automatically, they do not have an equal voice. They do not have an equal place. They are facing huge issues of cultural safety.

And so no matter what you try to implement... Joe and I talk about this all the time. You know, we say we're implementing IQ, or we're going to follow this IQ principle, but in fact, it's really just a whitewash over what is an absolutely entrenched QQ way of working. We just throw out the terminology without bringing into play the deep conceptual understandings that are inherent in that IQ principle.

So really, it's about cultural safety. What are we talking about here? Whose system are we working in? What law or what rules are we following? Whose rules are they? Are those rules trusted by everybody in the workplace? How are people in that workplace willing to adjust so that they're inclusive of IQ principles and expectations and ways of being in respectful relationship? How do we consider the essential law of being in respectful relationship? How does that play out in the workplace? I think philosophically there are all kinds of much deeper things that need to be considered, before we're able to effectively deal with specific issues. We have to re-create that culturally safe space where we approach people respectfully and build relationship together. And so that is maybe the starting place that we need to focus on.

[*TIME STAMP: 12:29*]

HOST: That really gives us something to think about. You both have started to go into the last question I had, which was basically about how IQ and the current law that governs the workplace work together or don't work together. Is there anything you want to add about the way IQ and the law do work together or don't work together, when it comes to the aim of creating a healthy workplace? We'll start with you, Joe.

JOE: I think again, with a situation where one of the difficulties we have is that the feeling one has, as an Inuk person as myself, is that at the beginning of my childhood, it was like, we're just wrong for being Eskimos, Inuit. The way we think, the way we do

things, we're just automatically in the wrong category for some reason. And that they felt very obligated, it was their duty to accommodate this, to deal with this situation. I don't know where that came from, so I'm not really going to reflect on that part, but the actual very basic fact that, when someone looks at you, just immediately thinks that you're in the wrong for being different, that's coming from inside people. It's not just coming from the surface, so it's not really anything that I can effectively answer and make it work. But definitely, I think we can point something out here.

One of the things that when the individual... When it's coming from the individual, that's one thing. When it's a collective that becomes a law that goes against that person, that's a different thing. I think that can be changed. And I think that you have to look at the motivations for those laws. Why are they the way they are? Really in their case, it's because they wanted to spread their culture, and I think that's often the very nature-based approach.

Now people are always going to be who they are. We're always going to be the way we are. We always have been and we'll always will be. The only difference is that it seems like it's manageable. There seems to be ways we can do things. We can improve the education system, we can, I think, look at things in a way that can change that. So when the setting, the environment was so harsh, it just became more obvious that when Inuit people raised their children to be human beings, instead of a hardened person or a fragile person, the whole system was easier to manage. And that's how the culture was designed. So when you disassemble the culture, all of those mechanisms of which would have helped someone deal with things, all got left behind. And you see what we have to recover from, and that's what I mean by trauma.

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This understanding may be hard for people to accept, but I think if we all understand it, and decide together that we're going to do something about it, immediately, you could start to create a better outcome. It's when people don't accept that happened, they reject that this is the way it is, and they create false concepts to help them understand or accept a situation that's not true, then that's where things get complicated. Because you can't undo that position. So to me, it's a matter of position of thought.

Now I don't know how to explain that properly because it only makes sense in my head. But position of thought to me is something that my father taught me. If I can't solve the problem, it's because I'm in the wrong position of thought for me to solve it. I have to keep shifting around until I get to the right place. He said there's three ways to do something: First of all, there's the way you want to do it. There's the way somebody thinks it should be done. And then there's the way it should be done. And you should try to shift around to the point of getting at it as to the way it should be done.

So this was an exercise that he taught me because when I go out hunting and I'm on my own, the other two aren't going to work. The only one that is going to work is the one that it says it should be done. Well, how do you get to that though? That's the thing.

How do you get to that? And that's why I think you need a management team that can consistently look at it from that perspective. It is a position of thought for me. And that's the clearest I can make this concept of the position of thought.

And so my position of thought is so easily shifted aside, I could feel, like how do I do it without emotional influence? And I'm a very emotionally driven person. So I'm always having to work very hard to try to get to that position of thought. So when there are other people that are helping me do that, it's a lot easier.

[*TIME STAMP: 18:31*]

HOST: I appreciate that, Joe. How about you, Shirley? Any final thoughts?

SHIRLEY: Just to pick up on what Joe has been saying about positional thought. This is why the IQ principle of aajiiqatigiinni was designed. This is where it comes into play. Because it's about negotiating the common ground. It's about seeking that right answer, bringing the two perspectives together, the multiple perspectives together, in order to achieve the best possible outcome. So the two big areas that we really promote at Aqqiumavvik are inunnguiniq, continually becoming more capable. How do we support each other so that we are continually on that path of becoming more capable? And aajiiqatigiinni, how do we come together to collectively seek solutions, to find common ground, to get us to the best possible place where we can move forward in a good way? I think that those two principle processes are so powerful that if we really try to understand them and look for ways to implement them, we can make a lot of progress in bringing together the kind of differences that people face in kind of juggling an IQ... being grounded in IQ but having to work in QQ systems in a QQ world.

As Joe was speaking about earlier, this is really the challenge when we work in government or when we work in legal systems. Because it's not a comfortable place for Inuit to be. It's not a place that welcomes, and makes space for a different perspective, a different way of being, a different way of understands. And so you're constantly, as an Inuk facing these workplaces or these structures, these systems that are around you, you're constantly being pushed off guard. You're constantly out of your comfort zone. And so it really behooves us in Nunavut to find ways to break down those barriers and to build the strengths of IQ into the way we work, the way we set those systems up in our workplaces, to be much more accommodating of these IQ principles that are so powerful. The answers are inherent in these principles, if we just put them to work, the solutions are already there.

So I think that's a core challenge for Nunavut, is to, like I said earlier, not just whitewash the IQ on top of the QQ, but to look at really re-building the strength of IQ in everything that we're doing.

[*TIME STAMP 22:37*]

HOST:

Those are some very inspiring words. Thank you very much for your thoughts today.

You've heard from Joe Karetak and Shirley Tagalik from the Aqqiumavvik Society in Arviat.

In this program, we've heard from lawyer Odessa O'Dell from law firm Borden Ladner Gervais about what workplace violence is. We've also talked about the laws on workplace harassment. Joe Karetak and Shirley Tagalik from the Aqqiumavvik Society shared their thoughts on what needs to be considered to support a safe, healthy, and respectful workplace in Nunavut, informed by Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit.

We've talked about some serious topics during this audio program, and sometimes that can bring up some difficult feelings. If you need to talk to someone, the **Nunavut Kamatsiaqtut Help Line** offers anonymous and confidential telephone support 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The number is 1-800-265-3333. Again, that's 1-800-265-3333.

This program has been part of the Law Society of Nunavut's project on raising awareness about harassment and violence in the workplace. We are thankful to our funders, the Department of Justice Canada.

If you want to listen to this recording again, this recording can be found on the Law Society of Nunavut's website, along with other resources about harassment in the workplace that we've developed with the support of ilinniapaa Skills Development Centre. For more information about this project or other resources, you can also call the Law Society of Nunavut toll-free at 1-844-979-2330. That's 1-844-979-2330.

It's been a pleasure Talking about Justice in Nunavut with you. We hope you all stay safe and healthy.