



FRONTIER CENTRE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

Profile Series

Profile of:

LEE TIMUTIMU

" work hard, but work smart "



Ideas that change your world / www.fcpp.org

No.15 / Sept 2018

Lee Timutimu, 43, is leading the ideal life of an Indigenous entrepreneur by combining his love for Māori storytelling with his experience in information technology (IT) into a successful business.

Timutimu is the founder and CEO of Arataki Cultural Trails, an IT firm based in Tauranga, the largest city in the Bay of Plenty region, located on the North Island of New Zealand.

The tech startup company was founded in 2016 and is unique in that it is wholly owned and run by Māori tech entrepreneurs, all of whom bring their combined experience in Māori culture, information about the various tribes in New Zealand, and not to mention IT experience.



Arataki offers a combination of traditional Māori storytelling and modern technology by providing a smartphone app (the Arataki app is available on Android and iOS) that features an immersive cultural experience by allowing users to access relevant Indigenous cultural information about various locations they travel to. Upon arriving physically at

a point of interest, the app provides the user with relevant Māori place names, landmarks, history, proverbs, as well as songs associated with that area.

Appreciating and sharing the beauty of New Zealand is certainly not alien to Timutimu who grew up in a beautiful coastal region of the North Island of New Zealand with a very nice climate.

Growing up in a single parent household, many of his early influences were from strong women in his family. His mother came from a large family and many of his first formative influences were from his grandparents. He inherited a sense of humility and of not being vocal from his grandfather.

His Māori identity was formed early. His earliest memories were of attending St. Stephen's School, a boarding school for Māori boys that was originally run by the Anglican Church in New Zealand.

Now with three boys and one girl of his own, he said he tries to teach them to be resilient, both culturally and emotionally. Māori people today, he said, must carry all the cultural baggage of their past marginalization in society, as well as the social problems they face today.

Being a tech entrepreneur would not have been his first goal. After his early schooling, he was known for being pretty laid back and did not have any particular career ambitions to speak of. In terms of a

future in one of the professions, he did not have any plans at that time. He recalled that some of his teachers steered him towards courses in accounting and business. His teachers saw the potential in him, but he knew back then that he did not want a traditional career in either accounting or business.

He later enrolled in the prestigious University of Auckland and studied business and commerce. However, that path did not work well for him at the start. He failed two years straight and decided to drop out of school and travel. He travelled in the United Kingdom, as well as other places in Europe. Upon returning to New Zealand in his early 20s, he still felt “direction-less and without motivation.”

It wasn’t until he started a job in Indigenous Māori broadcasting that he started to find his way.

“That field started me on a path of self-discovery,” he said, in an interview via Skype. “I had always been close to my culture. I had never lost it in life, but I saw it differently then.”

He eventually found a fulfilling job as a sports producer with the Māori news service in New Zealand. Hired without much experience, he had his own Saturday sports show that launched him into his producing role. He ascended into managerial roles within that world until he reached his early to mid-30s where he started to get tired of working for other people.

“I was getting sick of the 9 to 5 grind and following other people’s philosophies at work,” he said, with a laugh.



When he started to think about embarking on working for himself, he said he had to deal with problems of self-confidence, a phenomenon he said that affects many young Māori as a community. Māori people still struggle with the highest rate of suicide among any group in New Zealand, similar to the situation in other Indigenous communities around the industrialized world.

“I really had to challenge myself, my own self-belief, to go out and

form my own company," he said, pointing out that for Māori as a marginalized community that are often told they cannot do certain things, such as starting their own business. Many Māori, he said, think of themselves as only suited for manual labour work.

"Eventually, you even start to believe these things," he said.

Being passionate about Māori cultural values, Timutimu entered the field of publishing Māori tribal stories, a tradition that was quite prominent in New Zealand given that the Māori have an oral tradition. He began his business by publishing books of the various tribes.

"We would turn their stories into an illustrated print book and then give it to the tribes as a keepsake."

His next major business undertaking was a partnership arrangement where he formed a collective of Māori storytellers. The collective's model involved partnering with library organizations across New Zealand who provided the collective with space to deliver Māori stories.

His passion for traditional Māori storytelling and cultural travelling, combined with experience in the IT industry, led him to develop the first cultural content delivery platform, which would lead to him founding his cultural trails business. His app allows non-Māori people to discover relevant information at culturally-significant sites across New Zealand using GPS technology and

beacons.

Since his company has enjoyed such success and attention, he and his business partners have decided to take the immersive technology globally. They are also working on building relationships with other Indigenous communities around the world to adapt the technology.

As far as advice for other aspiring Māori entrepreneurs, Timutimu said, "work hard, but work smart." As he says to his children often, nothing is ever handed to you on a silver platter.



In 2017, media observers in New Zealand took notice of how Arataki Cultural Trails, among other Māori businesses, has helped promote New Zealand tourism, as well as help preserve Māori culture, not to mention provide meaningful work for young Māori. These business ventures have also been noted for promoting the conservation of New Zealand's natural beauty.

FRONTIER CENTRE FOR PUBLIC POLICY



203-2727 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada R3J 0R2

Tel: 204-957-1567

Email: manitoba@fcpp.org

The Frontier Centre for Public Policy is an independent, non-profit organization that undertakes research and education in support of economic growth and social outcomes that will enhance the quality of life in our communities. Through a variety of publications and public forums, Frontier explores policy innovations required to make the prairie region a winner in the open economy. It also provides new insights into solving important issues facing our cities, towns and provinces. These include improving the performance of public expenditures in important areas such as local government, education, health and social policy. The authors of this study have worked independently and the opinions expressed are therefore their own, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the board of the Frontier Centre for Public Policy.

Copyright © 2018 by the Frontier Centre for Public Policy.

Profile Series No. 15 • Date of First Issue: March 2018.

Reproduced here with permission of the authors. Any errors or omissions and the accuracy and completeness of this paper remain the responsibility of the authors.

ISSN 1491-78

Ideas that change your world / www.fcpp.org



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Joseph Quesnel is a research fellow for the Frontier Centre for Public Policy who mainly focuses on Aboriginal matters and property rights. Presently based in eastern Nova Scotia, he is from north-eastern Ontario and has Métis ancestry from Quebec.

He graduated from McGill University in 2001, where he majored in political science and history. He specialized in Canadian and U.S. politics, with an emphasis on constitutional law. He also has a Master of Journalism degree from Carleton University, where he specialized in political reporting. His master's research project focused on reformist Indigenous thinkers in Canada.

He is currently studying theology at the Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax.

In the past while as a policy analyst, he was the lead researcher on the Frontier Centre's flagship Aboriginal Governance Index, which is measured perceptions of quality of governance and services on Prairie First Nations.

For over two years, he covered House standing committees as

well as Senate committees. Quesnel's career in journalism includes several stints at community newspapers in Northern Ontario, including in Sudbury and Espanola. He also completed a radio broadcasting internship at CFRA 580 AM, a talk radio station in Ottawa, and the well-known Cable Public Affairs Channel (CPAC).

He is a past editor of C2C Journal, an online Canadian publication devoted to political commentary. He wrote a weekly column for the Winnipeg Sun and contributes to The Taxpayer, the flagship publication of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation.

Quesnel's policy commentaries have appeared all over Canada, including the Globe and Mail, the National Post, the Financial Post, the Vancouver Sun, the Ottawa Citizen, the Montreal Gazette, the Calgary Herald, Winnipeg Free Press, among many other major papers. Over the years, he has been featured as a guest commentator on many radio and television news programs.