

**Santa:** Broadcasting from the University of British Columbia, this is *Blue and Goldcast*. I'm Santa Ono, the President and Vice-Chancellor of UBC. On this season of the *Blue and Goldcast*, I'm speaking with the people who are leading some of the most innovative and creative work coming out of our campuses. Today I'm speaking with UBC's 19th and current Chancellor, the Honorable Steven Point. Steven Point has served the community as a lawyer, Provincial Court judge, and as the 28th Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia.

He's advocated for indigenous communities throughout his career, and he's received the order of BC, the National Aboriginal Achievement Award for his work. He is a member of the Skowkale First Nation and in 2020, he became the first indigenous person to be appointed Chancellor of UBC. Chancellor Steven Point is an exceptional leader and a pillar of community support. I'm delighted to welcome him to the show. Chancellor Point to start with, can you tell us a bit about your background leading up to your appointment as Chancellor?

**Steven:** Just a little bit, I'm a grandfather of about 14 grandchildren and about 5 great-grandchildren. We have four children ourselves, Gwen and I. This year we're celebrating 50 years of marriage. That's my greatest accomplishment right there. I've got a degree in law from the University of British Columbia, graduated in 1985. I'm the past Chief Commissioner of the BC Treaty Process. I've been an adjudicator with immigration. I've been a lawyer at my own practice in Chilliwack for three years. I've been a judge for nine years on the Provincial Court bench and the past Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia.

**Santa:** You taught at UBC as well, didn't you?

**Steven:** Yes, I was the acting director of the Native Law Program at the Faculty of Law for about a year then I was invited to be the director for the program. During that time, about a year and a half, two years, I was teaching a course that I developed for the first-year law students called perspectives. It was a course on indigenous values.

**Santa:** That's quite a career. In many ways, your pioneering person. One of the early graduates of the University of British Columbia School of Law that's now called the Allard School of Law. I want to ask you about what it felt like. You're Lieutenant Governor and First Indigenous Chancellor, when you move into institutions that by constructs have been unjust, do you feel a particular weight in undoing that? Did you feel you were swimming like salmon upstream?

**Steven:** When I left high school, I was one native student that graduated. I was the only one that graduated in Grade 12 in an aboriginal Indian country. I made it to Grade 12, everyone else was gone. Everyone else had dropped out. When I got to university, I was the only Sto:lo person other than one other person that I know Jo-Ann Archibald that had made it to university. She carried on with her education I left after a year and a half. Every time I've gone into a new position, I felt the pressure to acknowledge the injustice that's been done because of the colonial history.

I felt the pressure to try to bring about change, if possible. One thing that I realized though, after many, many years is this, it's like the university you and I are part of right now, all of us bring something to this table, to the stew that's in front of us, and we change the stew by just being there and just being who you are. It changes the

flavor, the texture, the outcome everything. Every time I've walked into a room where there are people there that don't think the way I do, eventually they ask me what's on my mind, and I tell them and that changes the stew, it changes the institution.

I could try to change it, I could put different holes in the ground and put different posts up, or maybe even bring in more people but the mere fact that you're present, Santa, the mere fact that I'm there, changes the institution by virtue of who we are. The University of British Columbia is never going to be the same because of your contribution, my contribution and that's it. That's all we have to do. We have to just show up].

**Santa:** I want to ask you, how you felt? How did you feel to be the first Indigenous Lieutenant Governor? How does it feel to be the first Indigenous Chancellor?

**Steven:** It's a little bit scary actually. I remember the morning a phone call came in from the Prime Minister's Office and Gwen and I had just come off of a month-long holiday eight o'clock in the morning and she says to me, "It's the Prime Minister." [laughs] I got up and I sat on the edge of the bed and I looked at her and I said, "What's his name?" "Oh, Steven Harper." [laughs] I get on the line to him and he asks me, "Would you be the next lieutenant governor?" I knew this question was coming because I'd been interviewed by the Minister of Indian Affairs, Chuck Strahl about a month or so beforehand.

Why would I represent the very institution that's taken so much away from my people? Why would I represent the very person whose name they used to arrest our people put us in jail? Why would we represent the institution, holds our land and our resources, contrary to Canadian law itself? I said, "I don't think I should do this. This is not something that's going to be helpful to our people." She said to me in a very wise way, she says, "It might be good for our people if you did."

It turned out that it was. It turned out it was like having our parking validated all these years. I remember going to Terrace and we went into the Starbucks that was at the Safeway there. There were two native girls working in there. I'd been to Terrace many times because my mother lived there for 35 years. I'd never seen native people working in any Stars. I took the point I says, "How long have you been working here?" She said, "About a year and a half." Something changed in the province. Do you know what it was? The people that wanted to hire indigenous people no longer felt they would be criticized for doing so. That's the change.

I couldn't help but realize that by just stepping into the position doing nothing else as Barack Obama has done, he changed the world by just accepting the position. He changed the United States and it was a bonus for us that he was such a wonderful person inside his heart. Him and Michelle are just beautiful people. He changed everything, by just stepping into the role.

**Santa:** Steven, let me ask you, you are the first indigenous person in each of these roles, there are people who don't want you there, who don't want you to succeed. To your point, just the fact that you're there is a threat to the status quo, and people who are privileged by the status quo don't want you there. Did you feel that and how'd you get over that? Were you like Barack Obama, where at first because when you're

a lieutenant governor of a province, you represent all British Columbians, not just indigenous British Columbians?

Did you have to wrestle inside yourself with your responsibility for all British Columbians but also, what you represent as being the first indigenous lieutenant governor?

**Steven:** That's one of the questions they asked me when I became a judge. Are you going to be able to judge for everybody? [laughs] The assumption being that I'm going to be biased against [laughs] white people. Well, they never ask white judges that. [laughs] The assumption is that you're a judge, you're going to be unbiased but for some reason, they felt necessary to ask me that question. [laughs] Like Barack Obama, of course, I want my work as a lawyer, as a judge to be precedent over the fact that I'm indigenous. That I'm good enough to be there, to do the job. It just happens that I'm a native First Nations. I can understand his reticence to jump into the racial issue because he's the president.

He's the president of the largest, most powerful country in the world. He shouldn't have to play that card. It's not that he had to admit that he was Black, but rather that he would have to use his institution as the president to get involved in a conversation that should never be taking place. You and I know that there're people there that resent the fact that people of color are coming into these jobs. I don't worry about that. There's lots of demons out there, bad people, monsters. I don't feed them. [laughs] I like to feed the good ones. I ignore the bad ones. It's like positive reinforcement.

If we add firewood to the wrong fire, it's just going to burn harder. The best that you and I can do is just to ignore it. They're always going to be here, the naysayers, the people that are wanting to be in control, wanting things to stay the same as it always has been but things don't stay the same, they change. As they say in Tibet, the Buddhists, we have to embrace the change and pray to God that it's the right change, that it's a good change. That this is improvement to what we were doing before. Otherwise, we become irrelevant. Otherwise, institutions like ourselves, like the university become pointless but it is a good change.

I think a lot of people who sit back and look at what's happening at the University of British Columbia, understand this is a positive thing for both Canadians and for indigenous people, and that's the way I look at it.

**Santa:** Talking about UBC and the fact that it's over 100 years old, and we're relatively recent, although you've been a student here, you graduated from here and taught here but in your role as chancellor, it's relatively recent. You talked about the fact that just being Chancellor is changing the place. What would you like to see have changed because you were Chancellor?

**Steven:** I think that the indigenous people here who've been here for thousands of years, should not and cannot be ignored any longer. Now that we're giving land acknowledgments, this is a great thing. We have to begin to look at the contribution that the indigenous people have made to Canada, to this country. The contribution that they've made by fact it was their land, their country before. That Canada wouldn't be here but for the fact that they've taken the land from the Indians.

There are valuable lessons that can be learned in medicine, child-bearing, and law. I'm hoping that institutions like this can begin to value indigenous knowledge and incorporate that into what we're doing here at the university. We have a place, indigenous people have a place in Canada. We've been marginalized to the edges both physically, economically, and socially. It's time to bring us out from the shadows and begin to focus that light academically on indigenous knowledge.

How do we do that? We have to capture that knowledge because so much of it is already lost, so much of it has already slipped away but we can begin to capture some of that by bringing in experts. Our philosophy is quite different from western perspective. We have our own philosophy and that's the course I was teaching. I had 52 students when I started teaching the perspectives course, and they never missed a class. They came to every class, talked about their oral tradition.

Two of the students came to me and they said, "Sir, can we do our paper orally for you?" I said, "Of course, you can." They handed me a disk with their presentation. Beautiful. They understood exactly what I was trying to teach them. Young people today are hungry I think, for something different. A better understanding, a broader, deeper knowledge, who we are in Canada because we're not the Tim Hortons coffee place or the hockey or the RCMP, all of these are elements of our culture, I suppose, but we go far deeper than that. It's time to shed some light on that, to learn more about who and what our indigenous people are.

**Santa:** Thank you for that. I wish I was one of those 52 students. Maybe one of the things we might be able to do moving forward, I know that we've talked about doing things on a national scale with other Chancellors and I'm looking forward to that, but I would have loved to have been part of that course and maybe one of the things we might be able to do together is to think about that course and how we can share it with more than 52 people.

If you're interested in anything like that, anything I can do to help share that story and to really accelerate the integration of indigenous knowledge into the work of the university, we're at your disposal, Chancellor.

We're very fortunate that you agreed to be chancellor of the university. I just wanted to turn the mic back to you for any closing comments that you might want the listener to hear.

**Steven:** Well, some people ask me for my advice and I tell them to be yourself, whoever that may be. Your job in life is to discover that, though. To discover who you are. This is your job, and if at the end of it you can write down in a paragraph who you are, you will have accomplished your task in this life but as long as you're confused about that, your life is going to have less meaning to you, less appreciation. Your job here, the purpose, is to become a full human being. Body, mind, and spirit and to discover who you are. That's it.

**Santa:** Steven Point, thanks so much for being on *Blue and Goldcast* today. Steven Point is UBC's 19th Chancellor. That does it for this episode. You can find links to our guests' work, as well as previous editions of this show at [blueandgoldcast.com](http://blueandgoldcast.com). You can also find us on your favorite podcast app like Apple Podcasts, SoundCloud, or

Spotify. You can tweet at me @UBCPrez. That's prez with a Z. I'm Santa Ono.  
Thanks for listening.