

Looking for Leadership in Likely Places

I was asked to speak at another CCP conference some seven years ago. I remember noting that I was one of two racial minorities in the entire conference. Things are thankfully different today. The speakers' rostrum includes the voices of at least two immigrant leaders whom I know and admire and I note that the audience is also slightly more colourful today.

The Maytree Foundation is a private charitable foundation. We are joined at the hip with the corporate arm of our company – Avana Capital – as my chairman often jokes, we work hard at making money in the morning and equally hard at giving it away in the afternoon. It is no wonder that the business paradigm occupies a primary place in our thinking as donors. The values and approaches of one derive from the other. At the heart of both is the quest for a return on investment. In the case of philanthropy the return we look for is social and public good.

As a private foundation, we occupy a different and unique place in the funding spectrum along with governments, United Ways, and community foundations. Our assets are private only in as much as they have been allowed a certain protection by our tax policy. We see them therefore very much as assets held privately, but held in public trust. Unlike the United Way we are not directly responsible to a community of donors or taxpayers. However, we do like to think of ourselves as a private foundation working in the public interest in that context. We take our accountability to the public good seriously. Our special place in the arena of philanthropy allows us to work with greater flexibility in achieving our objectives. Our appetite for risk and failure is also higher. Of course, we also work with a much smaller pool of capital, and therefore must set ourselves a different bar to meet – that of developing strategic solutions through strategic philanthropy. So we see our assets as the risk capital of society allowing us to engage in new thinking, new solutions and new approaches and be imaginative in the process.

Our traditional way of engaging in philanthropy finds a paradigm in the business world. As venture philanthropists, we find and fund leading ideas, leaders and leading organizations that have a dream, and the legs to realize them. We have the capacity and ability to stay the course with these major investments that we make, because we know that in the interest of future returns the work needs to mature carefully and sometimes slowly.

We have staked out a majority shareholder position in the settlement of immigrants and refugees because we believe that every successive stream of immigrants will enrich us ultimately. We also believe that the poverty experienced by immigrant and refugee communities is in a sense artificial - because the community has the latent assets and can leverage these into relative prosperity for itself and for the rest of Canada and will do sooner or later - the community is therefore the proverbial low hanging fruit.

As someone very wise said, context is everything, and the context around us changes daily. However, there is one force that is changing our society at a pace and rate that is unprecedented. And that force is immigration. Within our lifetimes, Canada will look, sound and feel very different from what it was ten years ago and what it will be ten years from now.

First, Canada has the second highest proportion of immigrant population in the world after Australia. In the US, immigrants are one of every ten people, in Canada it is almost one in five or 18.5% of our total population. This is the highest proportion in Canada since 1931.¹

Canada's population increase is dependent on immigration. We would be in deep trouble without the ability to maintain a constant flux of immigrants. According to the OECD, the dependency ratio (i.e. the ratio of working vs. non-working members of society) will decline rapidly in Canada unless shored up by population growth. However, we also know that by 2026 our domestic death rate will increase our birth rate, unless shored up by immigration. Already today, 70% of the net growth in the labour market is provided by immigrants. By 2011, this figure will rise to 100%. As a nation of taxpayers, we need to be grateful that we are nation of immigrants.

Some provinces and cities are clearly benefiting the most. In fact, 94% of immigrants arriving in the 1990s went to urban centres in Canada, with 73% living in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver. Immigrants want to live in large urban centers, much like other Canadians.

And the face of Canada is changing. In 2001, almost four million people in Canada identified themselves as visible minorities; that's 13.4% of the population. And this segment of the population is growing six times faster than the total population. Much of this is due to immigration and a shift in source countries. In the 1990s, 73% of immigrants were visible minorities, coming from China, India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Taiwan.

Again, it is Canada's large cities that reflect this trend. Visible minorities make up 43% of the City of Toronto. Other satellite cities like Richmond BC, and Markham, Ontario reach visible majority percentages of 59% and 56% respectively. All this is changing the way we think, act, changing the way houses are built, how people worship, what sports we play.

The nature of who immigrates has also changed. And the reality is here very different from the perception. Our concept of immigration continues to be rooted in the past - that immigrants are the supplicants; "the hungry, the poor the huddled masses." This is simply no longer the case. The immigrant of today is more educated, wealthier, younger. Over 40% of immigrants arriving in the 1990s had at least one university degree. Compare this to the Canadian average of 22%.

Yet, because our image of this immigrant has not changed, we continue to accept the supplicant model – pay your dues: drive a taxi, deliver pizzas. For some this makes sense – that the first generation of immigrants pays for the success of the second. This is after all the mythology of immigrants. We defer our own dreams so that our children may realize theirs. Powerful as this argument is, it fails to take into account two powerful forces of this century: first the changing patterns of world migration and second, the competition for the skilled immigrants by other countries.

I therefore come to a simple conclusion: it is time to rethink this construct. Immigration is not altruism. It is not benign charity; it is simple self-interest. Immigrants are here because we need them. To make better lives for ourselves, we need to make better lives for them. We know that

¹ The following statistics on immigrants are taken from Statistics Canada, 2001 Census analysis series, *Canada's Ethnocultural Portrait: The Changing Mosaic and Education in Canada: Raising the Standard*.

they are equal in law, but we also know that they are not equal, at least not yet, in social attitudes.

Therefore the title of my presentation: Leadership and looking for it in likely places? There are compelling reasons that we should start looking for leadership in likely places:

- a) First, we live in a pluralist society. We express this pluralism in many real and tangible ways. I am not talking here about formal arrangements such as our constitution, but through daily social norms. It is perfectly normal to see young kids in shorts sitting along young girls in hijab in our neighbourhoods, at the ATM, in the local Loblaws. At some point, the mundane reality of everyday life must seep into our national consciousness at the leadership level as well. We call this the "time and space" factor, which can be inordinately lengthy because it is subject to human bias and fear of the unknown.
- b) Second, we live in an increasingly globalized environment. The problems that we face today – environment, poverty, and health – are complex. The leadership we need to address these problems requires creativity and the skill to reach across boundaries – geographic, religious, ethnic and philosophical – to bring together broad and increasingly diverse constituencies. We need a diversity of approaches, a diversity of perspectives and ideas to help us reach solutions that are sustainable. We only need to take a look at the world of medicine and the growing importance and demand for diversity: integrative medicine, chiropractic, ayurvedic, and acupuncture.
- c) Third there are sound business reasons. Dr. Jeffrey Gandz from the Richard Ivey School of Business published a powerful study called "A Business Case for Diversity" in 1998. He suggests that "the rapid globalization of business and the rapidly changing demographic characteristics of the population suggest that the pursuit of diversity in the workplace should be the concern of everyone, now!" And this was in 1998. Margaret Wheatley gives us another reason. She says, "diversity lies at the heart of an organization's ability to innovate and adapt." Successful business organizations have tapped into the need for new and different consumer products, new markets and new ways of marketing. Sun Life, Loblaws, Rogers Cable, these are corporations that have understood the business case for diversity.
- d) Finally and I believe most importantly, because we believe in Canada as one nation with many people. We are a country that is geographically diverse. It would be easy for us to describe ourselves along lines that divide us rather than those that join us: as Quebecers, as Westerners, as Native Indians or as immigrants. But we are first and foremost Canadians. Among other things, a cohesive country can only be one where people can see themselves reflected at all levels of society. I feel a little bit more Canadian every time I see Adrienne Clarkson officiating as our Governor General, when I hear of Rohinton Mistry being nominated for prizes, or when I read of the marvelous gift that Michael Lee-Chin recently gave to the ROM. The Sikh community in Canada experienced an unique swelling of pride when the first Mountie was able to wear, and wear proudly, his turban with his glorious red uniform. And this was commemorated with a glorious poster and much celebration.

This is part of the human condition - we need to see our faces reflected in the faces of those who lead us. Yes, we must act out of a sense of justice and fairness, but also a fair sense of self-interest in building a Canada we all want.

You, the third sector has the capacity to take the leadership and establish itself as the benchmark to be measured against. You are uniquely positioned to change social attitudes because of the diversity of the sector and because of your reach into institutions and the public. Your value base probably suggests such action to you. I suspect that most of you don't need to be convinced as to the why, but need more tips as to the how.

The Maytree Foundation has always believed in the power of leadership to change the landscape. We invest our resources in two different ways, by investing in those who work and volunteer in the newcomer sector, and secondly in amplifying the voice of newcomer leaders who have the potential to make change. We are somewhat impatient about the length of time that it takes for new voices to emerge and to be heard. So we have taken on the task of compressing the time and space so that we can benefit from it today and not have to wait till tomorrow.

We are also doing this because we are tired and impatient with the politics of representation. I have forgotten the number of times that I have been asked to sit on a board, to speak at a conference so that I can quite proverbially fill a quota. The few times that I have fallen into this trap have been signified by dismal failure. This is all the more tragic because diversity and interest and passion are everywhere. The secret lies in looking for leadership in likely places. As I have pointed out, in the changing face of Canada, all you have to do is look and be open to what you see.

In framing our engagement with leadership, we have proceeded from a few positions:

- We believe that leaders are both born and developed, and can come from every sort of background. There is no direct correlation between leadership ability and education or economic status. Natural leaders can and do occur in any population.
- We believe that leadership can be enhanced, accelerated and nurtured; it is not simply an innate quality.
- We believe that communities that are successful over the long haul tend to be ones that build upon the natural diversity of leadership styles and talents of citizens. The Kellogg Foundation uses an apt metaphor for a vital, adaptive and leaderful community and that is a suspension bridge, which derives its strength from the tensions and connections among its components.
- And we believe that the third sector is an incredible dynamic place for leadership development.

The Maytree Foundation's *Leaders for Change* initiative has been running for four years, and now has an alumni of 56 immigrant leaders. It is quite simply put a bootcamp for social activists. It is fairly structured and demands a great deal of the participants and of the foundation. We

bring them together, help them engage in conversations about their own issues, but also about issues of other communities. We provide them with opportunities in skills building – on issues as diverse as coalition building, inclusive decision-making or conflict resolution. We help them engage with other leaders, and thus broaden their perspectives. In any given year, they have the opportunity of interacting with an urban aboriginal leader, a former mayor, a director of a school board, or the leader of social change movement. We tap into their passion, but insist on a healthy dose of discipline by providing them with the academic or community research on any particular issue, with the convergent and divergent opinions, and with healthy argument and discussion.

But, it is not just all talk. Each leader must deliver to us, as a member of a team, a social change project. Through this process, individuals build their leadership skills by working on a concrete goal that they want to achieve together. In this process, the gain they ability to reflect about their own leadership styles and learn from their experience. For instance, many of our leaders in the program come in with tremendous individual intelligence and passion. However, the collective intelligence combined with taking action within a limited timeframe poses challenges; two of our participants this year have learned valuable lessons about the limitations of acting unilaterally. (Now there is another leader south of the border who could probably use the same lesson!) We have found that no amount of intellectual learning can substitute or replace direct, on the ground learning.

We place healthy emphasis on relationship building. Throughout the duration of the program and through the alumni network, Maytree provides opportunities for newcomer leaders to be exposed to other partnerships, coalitions, networks, associations and other learning opportunities. The assumption is that people in relationships with one another have a stronger capacity to make changes that catalyzes and sustains social and economic well-being than do individuals and organizations acting alone – another learning from the Kellogg Foundation.

And now to impact, which we know is hard to measure, difficult to prove and almost impossible to lay claim to.

First, people are ready to stand up and say, “Yes, I am a leader”. They have embraced the concept and accept responsibility to make change happen. They are no longer satisfied with abdicating responsibility to a leader with a certain position or status, but now see themselves as central to the solution seeking. For example, one of our leaders, a woman, has stood for election to the Loya Jirga in Afghanistan as part of an international council dedicated to rebuilding post 9-11 Afghanistan. Another has progressed from collecting pizza money at school, to becoming the School Council Chair.

Second, there is the Oprah Winfrey effect of increased self-knowledge. We know that they are better able to focus on personal and collective strengths instead of perceived deficiencies and barriers. There is also a certain trial by fire within the Maytree programs where leaders have an opportunity to have intense conversations about the dimensions of race, religion, culture and ethnicity in leadership. They confront stereotypes and preconceptions in a way that is very risky and challenging, but this is expertly facilitated so that they push ahead and strategize around their structural barriers to participation.

Third, Maytree leaders are actively building communities all over the GTA. They are doing it in different ways, and with different levels of success. For example, one leader is spearheading a movement to reconcile the youth of Ethiopian and Eritrean communities in Toronto. Another has developed a white paper on the economic effect of diversity in Toronto. They often come with a single issue, but are able to understand the complex linkages of one issue with another, and are therefore better able to understand the need to work together over a number of issues and populations to reach social justice. And in doing so they have become more analytical as to root causes and systemic solutions, and therefore have become more politicized.

Related to this impact is the growing awareness of the role of social policy as the greatest equalizer. Some of the participants this year have shifted their interest from the provision of services to effecting change in setting income policies for low income Canadians.

A really important indicator is the success individual leaders have in their careers. Some move from frontline to management, others experience a life change and move to entirely new countries if not sectors. Some graduates have moved into program areas that were more closely related to them in terms of social issues that motivated them as leaders. Some graduates became intrigued by policy leadership and went on to pursue formal educational opportunities in public administration or public policy in order to effect change at the policy table. Finally, two of our leaders have taken on leadership in the international field with NGOs and international rebuilding efforts.

And finally, leaders become more sophisticated about recognizing their role in influencing policy. Some of the participants this year, who have been employed in organizations that provide employment services to newcomers, have made a commitment through their project work to effecting change in setting income policies for low income Canadians. Two of the participants in particular have decided to pursue this area long-term because of the impact that this learning experience has had on them personally. So now our group of leaders is out there, working in the community, taking on positional leadership, sitting on boards, commissions and agencies, even considering a run for political office.

I do not want to pretend that we know all about leadership. We are pretty new on the block in terms of understanding how to nurture emerging leadership of newcomers. But we think we're on the right track, and we know that we have to continue to take risks in implementing innovative and useful leadership learning components into our programs.

And finally a hard truth – change is difficult. But real change can be accelerated when those already in positions of leadership understand the context and environment, and the importance of change. Sometimes this means being willing to share leadership, share power and sometimes even step aside so that new voices can be heard. These new voices must have a role in shaping our broader vision and direction. And for leadership to be meaningful in this new context, it must be inclusive. Those who understand this reality, and who are ready to step to the side and create the necessary space, are true leaders and it is their example that needs to be followed.

Thank you very much.