

NEWS

From class president to Manulife president

When Paul Rooney was elected grade six class president he learned his first tough lesson in leadership: his classmates expected him to single-handedly raise the funds for the year-end class trip. Instead he rallied his classmates to accomplish the goal together - not only raising the money, but raising class spirits in the process.

Now President and Chief Executive Officer of Manulife Financial's Canadian Division, Paul still takes his grade six leadership lesson to heart. This month Paul and I chatted about his early lessons in leadership and his take on community change and charitable giving. Here's a snapshot of our talk:

Jan: How would you define the term 'leader'?

Paul: To be honest, it's an overused term and not one you should bestow upon yourself. It's like the word 'trustworthy.' You don't decide or tell people you're trustworthy; they decide for themselves based on your words, actions and ability to keep promises.

I think a leader sets the direction and rallies people to collaborate and contribute. It's about leading people, not work. When people know you believe in them, they contribute in ways they didn't even realize they could.

Jan: Do any famous leaders or examples come to mind?

Paul: One of my favourite leadership quotes is from General Colin Powell, who said "You know you're a good leader when people follow you, if only out of curiosity." General Powell talks about how to inspire people to achieve even more than they imagine possible. Of course, he did this with troops, but he's now applying his leadership skills to helping underprivileged kids growing up in dangerous circumstances - kids dealing with the dangers of drugs, guns and gangs.

I like this quote because it says that leaders are just regular people who set the direction and clear the way for others to get the job done. Leaders have an innate belief that they

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UNITED WAY



can make things better.

Jan: Is this what you did as grade six president?

Paul: I'll never forget those grade six lessons. But I didn't do anything magical. I just worked hard and asked others to join in and help. That's what I learned in my home. My parents expected me to work hard and be genuine. That's still my approach.

Jan: Was your family involved in the community?

Paul: I grew up in Sault St. Marie. My dad worked at Algoma Steel and sat on the Board of the local hospital. I saw my parents making the community a priority. They encouraged me to take leadership roles, whether that was class president or captain of the football team.

Whether you're president of your grade six class or president of a large company, you have to have an openness and willingness to

give of yourself. People get behind ideas and people they believe in.

I was struck recently by a story told to me by one of our employees in Montreal. She was taking leadership in her community on a cause that mattered to her and her co-workers. She was so excited with the cause and so committed to making a difference that we decided on the spot to double Manulife's donation. I got behind her because she made me believe in her cause and her ability to make great things happen. Now that's a leader.

Jan: You've certainly taken a leadership role with United Way. Manulife has been our Leadership sponsor for two years now.

Paul: Our Canadian Division supports communities across Canada, especially through our participation in the annual United Way campaign. During the campaign, we match employee, retiree and advisor donations to the United Way. We've surpassed the one million mark just from employees, advisors and retirees of the Canadian Division alone not even counting the matching.

United Way really fits with our decentralized model that emphasizes giving back to the communities where we do business. It's really about choosing the area of focus, identifying partners and determining how we can get our people involved. So it's not just about giving money. It's about finding ways to collaborate with our local communities.

Jan: How do you prioritize, with so many important causes and community needs?

Paul: I'm a real believer in collaboration. In the Canadian Division, we focus on partnerships with charitable organizations across Canada that complement our goal of helping Canadians live longer and healthier lives. That focus on health and health education means we're focusing on making a difference.

We also want to make sure our corporate giving decisions align with employees' and

advisors' interests. They know the unique fabric of their local communities. That's why we're decentralizing these decisions more than we did in the past.

Jan: Manulife is clearly a big player in our local community. What advice would you offer smaller organizations that may not have the resources to give big like you do?

Paul: At Manulife, we're certainly in a privileged position to be able to give back. We insist that our executives participate on charitable Boards, for example. But the spirit of giving runs deep for us, and our people want to volunteer and contribute. They're rewarded for it and personally value it.

If you're in a smaller organization, you may not have the cash to give, but you can support your employees' volunteer efforts. Their energy and expertise is as important - if not more so - than money.

Jan: Any final words about community leadership?

Paul: I look back to my parents' high expectations. If I wanted to play sports, I had to keep my grades high. I had to work hard and prove myself to them so I could earn the opportunity to do what I loved. I appreciate what they taught me because as leaders, we have to constantly prove that we're worthy of the confidence and trust of others.

I think the people who do great things in the world are the ones who take risks and are constantly curious and eager to learn. That's not about the size of your company or donation. That's about figuring out how you can contribute and being willing to give of yourself. We need to foster this spirit of giving within our workplaces and within our homes.

I'm still that grade six kid from the Sault and I'm still using the same approach: be yourself, work hard, share your ideas and passion, and ask others to join you.

Note: I'm taking reservations for this column. If you'd like to meet me for breakfast and a discussion, please drop me a note at jvarner@uwaykw.org.

Columnist offers up a unique challenge for our readers

As part of the Business Times' ongoing harangue of its readership with issues civic (or at least its patience in this regard), we're launching another contest. Last year's call for haikus about annoying urban behaviour was less than successful. (We didn't receive any poems at all). Undaunted, we will again venture into two-way traffic, and hopefully give this issue of BT a detour from perusal to bottom of the bird cage.

Our contest this year is "City Tracings", a term borrowed from the parkour movement and recent cinema. More about that later, but first a plug for the prizes.

Last year we offered to publish the haikus - perhaps that was less-prize-more-threat.

Let's take a new route this year, and incidentally see how carefully my most capable editor, Jan Dean, reads what I send her each month. This year's prize is a free lunch with the jury (Jan and myself) at a local delicatessen of your choice, courtesy of BT. Nougat, David's Gourmet, City Café Bakery, Vincenzo's; something along those lines. Okay, Jan?

Runners-up receive a free t-shirt from Festival of Neighbourhoods. Humour and creativity of response will win the day. To keep a lid on things, we'll limit responses to a 500 word e-mail. Punctuation and conjunctions optional. Deadline is May 1.

Ok, nuff fine print. Back to "City Tracings". What's that about anyway? Welllll ... I was watching the latest Bond film the other day, Quantum of Solace, and got to thinking about the chase scene through Siena's Palio (the annual neighbourhood horse race held in the Italian city's main square). Here's Bond keeping his quarry in sight through tunnels, Palio crowds, apartments, across rooftops, balconies, the roof of a moving bus, and eventually to the top of the Duomo or the Torre del Mangia and down through its restoration scaffolding and suchlike. Very exciting stuff, very crash-

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CITY FILE



bang-boom, less than realistic, obviously composed with one eye on the Bond franchise's video game sales.

In fact the chase has many elements of a phenomenon in urban exploration, the parkour. Dabbling in Wikipedia gives us the following: "Parkour is an activity with the aim of moving from one point to another as efficiently and quickly as possible, using principally the abilities of the human body. It is meant to help one overcome obstacles, which can be anything in the surrounding environment—from branches and rocks to rails and concrete walls.

Parkour practitioners are referred to as traceurs, or traceuses for females. Founded by David Belle, parkour focuses on practicing efficient movements to develop one's body

and mind to be able to overcome obstacles in an emergency.

The philosophy and background of the activity have quite a history, emerging from the work of a widely traveled Frenchman, Georges Hébert, at the turn of the 20th Century.

His admiration for the capability and fitness of indigenous peoples the world over, and his involvement in a dramatic rescue of 700 people from a volcano eruption in Saint Pierre, Martinique, in 1902, led to his conviction that athletic prowess should be combined with courage and altruism.

The Wikipedia entry for "Parkour" details the evolution of parcours (the obstacle courses of military training) through to fitness trails, and its adoption for emergency training by the French and David Belle. "Born in a firefighter's family, David was influenced by stories of heroism. At age 17, David left school to seek his love of freedom, action, and to develop his strength and dexterity to be useful in life".

The distortion of the parkour in Bond films and elsewhere aside, what fascinates is this idea of Belle's about moving our bodies through the city with confidence, training using the streetscape as gymnasium, and seeing this activity through an altruistic lens: making oneself fit in readiness to help others.

As an example of this - our firefighters' intense training develops their physical prowess and mental agility directly for the service of citizens. It is this combination that makes them ripe for heroism. Their view of the city must be drastically different from our selfish scrabbling from A to B; everything scrutinized as obstacles to be overcome, as fire plan, nothing straightforward at all. I suspect their view of the physical city is very akin to the skateboarder's. A landscape for unconventional action.

I'm seeing joggers in a new light! Are they training to assist or are they fleeing? What is

pursuing them? And the rest of us? Will an increasingly passive relationship to our city and its life, if left unchecked, mean that our only emergency duty is to reach the OnStar button before paralysis sets in? Will we be able to physically fend for ourselves and others or is this to be lost? Are skateboarders and firefighters the only citizens who can move through our streetscapes with confidence and creativity?

Obviously not and thus our contest! Provide Jan and me with a fun and fictional Parkour - à la Bond. You'll need a protagonist (jogger, Harlem Globetrotter, Mayor, hair stylist), an emergency (runaway stroller, urgent need to pee, prom dress delivery, escape from poverty), and a creative point form description of the subsequent chase that includes some of our region's landmarks (Preston Springs Hotel, former Krispy Kreme site, Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics, the Schneiders sign).

How does it turn out? How will we reach our goal of engaged, fit, and capable citizens whose training sees life's zenith as helping one another rather than helping ourselves? Ready? Go!!!

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by May 1st