

Keynote Address: Reflections on Civic Leadership

Gord Nixon

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Good afternoon. It's a real pleasure to be part of this day.

I'd like to start by reminding people how lucky we are to live in this country. From Vancouver in the west, bounded by ocean and mountain, to St. John's in the east, North America's oldest city, Canada is one spectacular country. Different parts of our country have different economic and social challenges, but we know, at its core, that our city-regions share the same desire. And that's to grow and prosper, to foster civic leadership and engaged communities... communities with futures to look forward to, and to contribute to Canada as a just and caring society.

I'm conscious of the fact that I'm talking about civic leadership to a group of very passionate, civic minded people, people who are already actively engaged in making our communities better.

Fortunately, the power of small groups of engaged individuals and even the power of one can make a huge difference. David Pecaut's City Summit Alliance, now called CivicAction, is a stellar example of collaboration and civic leadership. So is Luminato a remarkable example of what can be created through civic leadership.

Because of David's passion and the inability to take no for an answer, CivicAction is addressing full on our city region's social and economic challenges, and Luminato has become one of Toronto's cultural stars.

Just this month a public space between Metro Hall and Roy Thomson Hall was named Pecaut Square in recognition of David's civic leadership. When I heard this, it brought to mind the open letter David wrote to everyone in Toronto shortly before his death.

He wrote, “The potential of Toronto lies not so much within its architectural or economic or social possibilities as in what it could represent to the world as a place where amazing things get done”

David surprised a lot of people by showing that amazing things can get done through collaboration and finding common ground beneath the many issues and opportunities this city faces.

I agreed from the start to go on the City Summit Alliance and saw first hand the importance of different constituents coming together from business leaders to labour leaders, elected officials and academics and everyone in between. What I quickly came to realize was, notwithstanding our different perspectives, backgrounds and self interests, how much we actually agreed on.

Unlike politicians whose primary purpose is to disagree and defeat their opposition, civic collaborations enable people to find common ground.

David’s huge contribution, as well as those of longstanding city builders like Jane Jacobs, Juan Carranza, Frances Lankin and the Maytree Team have drawn more citizens into taking an active role in building a better Toronto city region.

For me, a large part of civic leadership is about finding ways to surprise people with the realization that engagement actually produces results.

Robert Putman wrote a book called Bowling Alone back in 2000. The book is a commentary on the disintegration of communities – what Putnam called the loss of social capital. He bemoaned the trend of people turning inward, away from their communities and to their TVs and computers.

This book made a strong plea for the importance of community. Community is, after all, where our neighbours live, our children grow up and our pasts echo. It’s our sense of place, our sense of home, and where we belong.

Civic leadership is the means with which we can re-awaken in people the importance of community and attract more civic leaders from all walks of life. If we have thousands of

such people plying their oars, we will change the direction of this very large ocean liner called the Greater Toronto Area, and we will show that our city is capable of anything.

Think of what has transformed in Toronto. When I compare Toronto today to the city I first moved to in 1979 it is a true testament to city building. Having moved from Montreal (the economic and cultural capital of Canada) to what we referred to, at the time, as “Hogtown” it is remarkable to see how our city has evolved. Business, the arts, nightlife, restaurants, the diversity of our citizens and neighbourhoods and the incredible variety of events and activities that take place each day -- is a testament to what can be accomplished.

Having said that, we still have lots of challenges.

The catalysts for civic engagement are all around us and with success and growth comes other challenges. One just has to ride the subway, visit certain neighbourhoods, drive our congested roads to experience the social and physical problems we have to solve.

These are the things that prompt us to question but encourage us to invest in finding solutions to make our city even better.

And the potential in our cities is limitless. We all sensed during the recent global financial crisis -- and the recovery period that followed -- that Canada is unique, capable, self-sufficient and strong.

The world looked at our fiscal resilience and regulatory framework with renewed respect. Conversations began about Toronto as something more -- perhaps a major financial centre, perhaps a major cultural centre, perhaps an emblem to the world that diversity works.

This kind of vision for our city region requires a lot to become reality. The process of city building is not simple, or finite. It's complex, and endless and multi-dimensional, and highly dependent on innovative thinkers. It requires individuals who live here, work here, build their businesses here and engage in the issues of the day.

It needs citizens who are passionate, not only about our city-region today but what it could be tomorrow. It also requires people to think outside the box and put their personal agenda's aside to look at the bigger picture.

What was so successful at the early stages of the City Summit Alliance was that we tackled areas from commercialization, to transit, to immigration and social housing. Not only are they all inter-related but they got different groups working together to find solutions.

And we are fortunate to have as many committed citizens as we do and leaders like David Pecaut to coral us and foster collaboration.

We grapple every year with city budgets, but our challenge goes well beyond city budgets. We need to figure out how and where our citizens will work, what skills they will need to meet demand in a changing marketplace, and how they will compete for them. We need to know what our economic base will be ten years, twenty years out, and we need a good plan for reinventing our economic structure to ensure we benefit, not lose, from changes in our environment.

David Wolfe, RBC Chair in Public and Economic Policy, makes an interesting point in this regard. He and other researchers question the assumption that there is one large, homogenous, global economy to which we all are vulnerable. Their research shows that there is not in fact one global economy. There isn't even a "national" economy. Professor Wolfe talks instead about a long, interconnected web of local economies, including neighborhood economies. The real economic exchanges today are among communities, not nations. Strengthening those local economies needs... civic leadership... in every local economy, neighborhood and city-region in our country.

In many ways a local election has a bigger impact on the lives of most people than a national election and civic engagement plays an incredibly influential role in municipal politics.

Unfortunately, politics often gets in the way of good policy which is why grassroots civic engagement is so critical. It can shape the political agenda.

Professor Wolfe talks about how important that all levels of government know what each other is doing with respect to programs and policies. And in our own city region alone, civic leaders must patiently untangle different agendas and clashing priorities while

coaxing ideas back to life that had simply collapsed from the sheer exhaustion of trying to be heard.

Every large complex organization must deal with this. RBC has 80,000 employees in 50 different countries and serving 18 million clients. Our people are continually looking for new ways to collaborate and find common ground and new products in the service of clients.

But RBC's collaborative challenge is vastly overshadowed by a city like Toronto.... a region whose population now exceeds that of several provinces.... a city known as the most diverse city in the world...a city that is looking to leverage its diversity to enrich its culture and provide an example to the world.

This entails addressing challenges such as immigrant underemployment, inclusiveness in labor markets, and the right kind of investments in education and training to secure the talent we'll need in the future.... and these issues all layer on top of traditional and equally urgent issues of affordable housing and transportation.

Clearly, our city halls are drinking from fire hoses. A deluge of issues are coursing through our town squares across Canada, and in their wake, creating the need for more collaboration on policy and program requirements and more tradeoffs in the pursuit of common ground. This situation is creating the perfect environment for the civic leader, someone who can make the connection between an issue and its resolution.

They are people with jobs and families and mortgages who are worry about important personal issues like saving for retirement and putting their kids through school and finding the right after school programs. But they set aside several hours – or more – aside each week – to work with people from different walks of life and with different perspectives to make a real difference to our city.

These people are our civic leaders and the creators of new civic associations determined to improve the city's social and economic future, and engage everyone they meet in helping to make their city a better place to work and live one's life.

All of us want to get this right. I say this from the perspective of the CEO of Canada's largest bank, certainly, but also from the perspective of a resident, a community member, a taxpayer and a participant in many of the cultural and charitable activities in Toronto. A new model can be advanced through the multi-stakeholder approach that groups like Civic Action adopt – which includes active engagement with businesses like RBC.

I'm a big believer in business engaging in the tough issues and big opportunities that our cities face. And one of the most critical partners for business today is the communities in which they operate.

Community is an arena where I feel business can unlock new successes and new value for Toronto. By actively contributing to the development of their communities... by being a visible citizen, businesses end up adding to their own success.

Let me give you an example from my own experience. A while back, we were approached by a corporate client, Daniels Corporation, who together with the Toronto Community Housing Corporation, were planning the revitalization of Regent Park. We were asked to consider opening a branch there.

Now Regent Park has a long history of problems. The average income is about half of other Torontonians, its residents are largely immigrants, and social housing dominates the community. There is a disproportionately high number of youth 18 years and under, along with high unemployment.

For the last ten years, RBC has been active in this community, with partnerships with Pathways to Education, Kiwanis Boys and Girls Club, and most recently, our not-yet officially-announced donation to the Regent Park Arts and Culture Centre – yet to be built so stay tuned.

Throughout all of this time, the only financial services available to Regent Park residents were cheque cashing stores. We looked at the numbers and saw that a branch would not meet our minimum return goals. But a decision based solely on the numbers didn't sit well with us.

To say no was really a vote against the vision of revitalized community. Last year, we opened a branch on the corner of Dundas and Parliament, and, as it turns out, for all the right reasons. In addition, 50 per cent of employees were hired from the Regent Park community and according to our Regional President, Jennifer Tory, we are ahead of plan.

As one of the largest companies in Canada, RBC does write a lot of cheques for good causes and sponsors numerous activities.

This year RBC donated approximately \$7 million to charities in the GTA and the bank combined with our employees raised over \$9.6 million for the 2010 Toronto United Way Campaign.

But when we create grassroots partnerships for the benefit of the community, it's about far more than the writing of a cheque or getting our brand attached to a program. It's about participating in the community and helping to make it better. It's about citizenship.

Another "tough issue/big opportunity" that businesses can play an important role in is our youth, and again there are many outstanding organizations eager to partner to create better futures for our young people.

Thornccliffe Park is a good example. For those of you who don't know this neighbourhood, it's Toronto's number one destination for new immigrants from South Asia and it houses 30,000 people in 34 apartments.

RBC has been partnering with the Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office over the past three years to support their After School Program, which gives youth a safe environment to learn and build their self esteem.

From this partnership, we then launched our RBC Play Hockey Program in the neighbourhood last November – this has been a very well received initiative to encourage the game of hockey from the community level up.

Every business should and can make a difference in people's lives and in their neighbourhoods. A lot of great work has been accomplished but so much more still needs to get done. There are so many changes taking place; whether communities flourish or

flounder is as much in the hands of the businesses that operate there as it is in the hands of governments and citizens.

And while everyone intuitively understands that a prosperous business sector is key to higher employment levels and economic success, they are less attuned to the notion that business can also play a role in other aspects of success, like diversity, inclusion and community. Businesses are citizens.

We are not “Bowling Alone”. We are a team. And we can choose to work together as a team to make our cities the very best they can be, or we can be a team whose failure to engage with each other ends up proving Mr. Putnam’s point.

Real engagement is founded on dialogue and broad-based inclusion. It connects the values and priorities of the public and the pressing issues of our day. It gives leaders an understanding of community needs and is at the heart of community building.

Most importantly, public engagement teaches us that democratic discourse and the quality of government we get are tightly connected.

Closed systems don’t work in business and they don’t work for cities. We need forums where we can learn about and debate a host of policy options and solutions to arrive at decisions that are equitable, informed and have broad support. The same way RBC needs a dialogue with its customers to be successful in business, our cities need open and transparent dialogue with its many diverse citizens to ensure they feel they are a legitimate contributor to and part of their community.

The process of city building in Canada is a tough issue and great opportunity. We live in our cities – big and small, we work here, go to school here and build our businesses here.

Youth employment, high priority neighborhoods, poverty, funding for the arts, transportation needs and bottlenecks – these need our attention as business leaders. There is no provincial or federal department or agency that can replicate the partnerships forged within an engaged community. I encourage groups like Toronto’s Civic Action and my fellow business leaders to continue to work together.

I would conclude by emphasizing that while it is important that we consistently reflect, look to improve and act to make our cities all they can be, we must also appreciate what we have created.

I travel a great amount and I can tell you that there are few places in the world with the vitality, diversification, sophistication, culture and strength as cities like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver to name some of the big ones – but equally in places like Halifax, Calgary and Waterloo. We are working together to ensure our cities are the foundation for strong and vibrant economies.

The objective of civic engagement and entrepreneurship is to find ways to solve our problems, create citizens, and improve – not just our cities, but our quality of life – and we have a remarkable base from which to move forward.

Thank you very much.