



2011 Award of Distinction Award Recipient Speech

Delivered By: John Weir

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Thank you all for coming and sharing this honour with me today.

And especially to my family, friends and colleagues from the office, I really appreciate your support and for being there for me all the time. And to the folks at the office, thanks so much for nominating me. I have learned a lot about helping run a “public affairs” company from all of you.

I’d also like to thank our partners at Ensign Canada. Jaime, Robin, Jacquie, Sara, Will, Lisa, Paul and all the other folks...thank you for your generosity, loyalty to our cause and ultimate sense of fairness in all that we do together. We have learned a lot from each other and I am honoured to work ... and sometimes play ... with all of you in such a winning and rewarding partnership.

To the Members of the Board of the Public Affairs Association of Canada, a special thank you for putting your confidence in me to make the selection you did. Heaven knows you probably had lots of talented people from which to choose so I guess I put my quarter in the right slot.

I feel very fortunate and humbled to be your choice this year.

PAAC seems to have come of age in the past short while. That is not to say that the organization did not play an important role in many ways over the years but in the medium term past, the organization has truly gelled on the advocacy front.

The recent challenges given to us by the Accountability Act and the Conflict of Interest provisions have obviously led to a lot of confusion both outside of government in our business and within government itself.

PAAC has come together in a strong way to expose this confusion and seek clarification for the benefit of both sides and, although the water is still quite grey, the issues that require fixing are clear and the Association deserves a lot of the credit for this evolution. I know that John



Capobianco and Steve Andrews have represented the organization tremendously well and effectively both in Ottawa and at Queen's Park.

We shall see now that the election is over and a majority government is in place that may have more flexibility than a minority.

PAAC will have to be well positioned early on to get these changes made as soon as possible so they will not be an issue during the latter half of a new government's term.

So again, to the PAAC Board, there are many very talented, credible and "brand" names that have received this reward before and more, I am sure, could have been nominated for this year's award so I count myself very lucky to be added to the list.

I've spent over 30 years in this line of business and I can honestly say I've never had a dull day.

When I graduated from university, I told my wife Margot, "I'll never end up sitting behind a desk wearing a suit and tie working at the same thing all my life...how boring would that be?"

A few weeks later, I was sitting behind a desk wearing a suit and tie working for a backbench MP and I kinda did that sort of work for the better part of my life. Thankfully each and every day brought a challenge that wasn't quite the same as the last one so at least part of my prophecy came true.

The evolution of public affairs has come a long way over the years. People in our business used to call it "lobbying" when that was not a dirty word. Then it was Government Relations and now it is Public Affairs.

The first time I heard the term "public affairs", I thought to myself...isn't that what the politicians do, but I figured it out. Both the politicians and we practice public affairs. We just do it in different ways.

My colleague, Robin Sears, and last year's recipient of this award, did such an eloquent job of addressing you and giving you his views of the lay of the land of today's public affairs practitioner.

I, on the other hand, have never done a lot of public speaking or speaking to the media. That's because I haven't trusted myself not to tell people the unvarnished truth.



Now in life, that is usually a badge of honour and integrity. In our world, it can just get you into deep trouble so I have tried to avoid giving myself too many opportunities to tell people the unvarnished truth in a public way.

On the other hand, telling people the truth person to person can be very helpful to your own soul and usually helpful to the listener.

Sometimes it even works.

I remember a dinner I attended with a certain novice Minister where he was seeking start up advice from skilled and learned people. One of the participants was Bill Davis who at one point in the evening told my novice Minister, “you never get in trouble for a speech you never gave”... a little ironic coming from a guy who can’t get the hellos done in less than half an hour.

Anyway, my novice Minister should have gotten that advice just a little bit before he hit the airwaves with his famous “we need to create a crisis” line. Talk about saying the unvarnished truth to the wrong people. I love him dearly.

I’ve worked in just about every capacity there is in government, from junior assistant to Principal Secretary to two Premiers, and what I still don’t know about government, politics and public affairs could fill a large room.

I have learned a few things though.

Most will be familiar to you but are worth continuing to remind ourselves about as often as possible.

- Be honest. Telling people in our business less than the truth can put us on the skids for life.
- Be reliable. Cutting and running or changing sides in the middle of anything leaves you in no man’s land as neither your new benefactor or your old charge will have much confidence in your ability to stick with it through thick and thin.
- Be consistent. Once you’ve made up your mind, stick with it. Changing horses leaves the impression you’re a waffler and that unenvious title is hard to shake.
- Don’t tell people what they want to hear but what you really think as tactfully as possible. “Yes men” are boring.



- Remain calm in a storm.... at least for as long as possible. Flying off the handle or getting mad lets those you lead have the freedom of doing the same thing and then everything goes to hell in hand basket.
- Be kind to your friends and treat your enemies with respect...but beat them.
- Remember that the person working for you today could be your boss tomorrow. I've lived this one on both sides and I can tell you from firsthand experience that treating people with honour and respect always works no matter where you end up sitting on the totem pole.
- Love what you do or get out. What's the point of hating what you do but doing it anyway. It is just a recipe for misery.
- Have personal meaning to the cause you are pursuing. This always helps you live through the tough parts because anything worth doing will always come with major challenges.
- Lead, follow or get out of the way. Never get stuck just going along for the ride. It is unsatisfying and leaves you in never never land.
- And, probably most important at least to me, is keep your family and friends as close as you can through the adventure. Heaven knows how tough the business can be whether in or out of government or opposition. And if you don't have your family and friends close by, you will simply be devoured by the systems at play. Never a healthy outcome for you or your family and friends.

I have been fortunate to have worked for many fine politicians who actually put public service ahead of personal gain. And my business life has been no different bearing in mind, we do have families to feed and payroll to meet.

Each politician has taught me valuable life lessons that have helped guide my thinking as I took on greater challenges and responsibilities.

And each lesson has been woven into how I practice public affairs.

Premier Grant Devine was truly an inspiration to me in so many ways. No matter how tough things got, and they got very bad at times, he was an eternal optimist. He was famously quoted as saying in tough situations, "don't say whoa in a mudhole" or "give er snooze bruce". He said these things to motivate people around him to keep going no matter how tough things were and it worked.

I'll never forget how loyal he was to those around him. Once I put out a press release freezing rental rates for community grazing lands for farmers and it was going to save those farmers about \$30 million a year.



The only problem was that, being in a new environment such as I was, it wasn't good enough to just have the Premier's approval, I had to have the entire Premier's office and Cabinet office approval....a little step that I had overlooked.

I also did not know that Cabinet had yet to approve this little ditty.

Yes, "the centre" is ever present.

So the day after the press release went out, we got a glowing front page story in the *Leader Post* touting the Premier as the farmer's friend in times of need. I proudly marched into Grant's office to show him the story and he congratulated me and told me of my slight oversight in process. It was a Cabinet day so he said he would soon have it fixed up and took the approval into Cabinet to get it rubber stamped.

After that little matter was cleared up as I sweated bullets in the anti-room, he came out and said, "you know John, if you aren't working hard, you never make mistakes". This was his way and a reminder to me to be loyal and try to fix problems not sit on my duff waiting for others to do the work for me.

It also told me to mind my p's and q's around process, which I sort of did off and on from that day forward.

After our loss in 1991, I came back to Ontario to work for John Snobelen, Ontario's newly minted Minister of Education.

Now John is a unique soul. He is one of the smartest guys I have ever met and has a work ethic second to none but what really amazed me was his capacity not to just embrace change but to champion it and make it happen in his own way.

When all hell was breaking out during our early years and with the many changes we were making in both the elementary/secondary and post secondary systems, we had a great deal of turmoil, strikes and acrimony.

But none of this seemed to bother John as he was motivated by a much higher calling: making systematic and long-term changes that were going to benefit kids and students. Now this was something I completely bought into and worked my butt off to support along with a great team of politicos in our office and a couple of champions in the revered Premier's office of the day.



And we stuck to our guns and got the changes made that lifted the bar in many ways for the entire education system: students, teachers, administrators and parents.

So I learned a great deal from John about how to embark upon change, communicate it and eventually get it done. It taught me that fundamental change can be accomplished if you are willing to take some bruises along the way but you absolutely have to stick with it over the long term.

And then I moved on to Mike Harris. I worked for him in a variety of capacities before becoming Principal Secretary.

Mike is dumb like a fox. He constantly amazed me when he was getting briefed by a phalynx of public servants and politicians. He was master of the well-placed question that almost always stumped the presenter, demonstrating that he had a knowledge of the file from a different and much more on-the-ground practical perspective.

And he was stubborn, dogged and belligerent when he needed to be and then would turn around and give you a wink of the eye or a pat on the back.

John Snobelen used to say that “a great Leader was one who asked people to do the impossible and then do it again”. That was Mike in spades and, while many things were accomplished, Mike has been quoted often as saying he wished he had done more, done it faster and made structural changes that were impossible to reverse.

So I learned a great deal from Mike about the power and exercise of leadership. I learned some things not to do but much more about what to do.

My lessons continued when I joined Enterprise Canada under the leadership then of Hugh Mackenzie and now Barbara Fox, Michelle Mackenzie and Jason Lieater.

Now Hugh is truly a gifted, generous and gregarious soul who built our business as a Conservative under Liberal and NDP governments proving that it is not our political credentials but rather our knowledge of the system and how governments work or don't work that makes the difference in our success.

He, and the team at Enterprise, taught me more about how government works from the outside in than I had ever imagined was possible. I thought I knew it all but I definitely didn't.



My biggest lesson was in presenting cases to governments that helped them achieve their goals while helping the client make gains at the same time. This required compromise, patience, and a great deal of education of both government and clients: something that heretofore I was not very good at because my role had usually been to get as much done as fast as possible.

And while that was my biggest practical lesson, the most important thing I learned from Hugh and co was the strength of teamwork, loyalty to our colleagues and generosity of time and spirit which kept, and continues to keep, morale in our shop uniquely strong. Hugh, Barbara and Michelle have always been so supportive of my naive ways of doing things and patient to keep mentoring me along the way.

The first time I met with a client, I asked Hugh and Barbara to join me so I could get their support if needed. After I heard the client's story and proposed solution, I immediately said, "well this isn't too complicated. You just need to call so and so, tell them I told you to call them and I'm sure you'll get the solution you want".

After the meeting, Hugh and Barbara pulled me aside and said, "now that wasn't so hard was it? You just have one little thing to learn and that is we don't normally give clients the solution at the first meeting. We normally try to get paid for that".

Another good lesson for a novice like me.

I know that most of you in this room have had similar experiences in your careers and have learned from them to become the public affairs professionals you are today.

I've done a ton of training with junior staff over my life. Some of it has been formal and much of it has been simply done by being there with them as they struggle with problems and solutions.

There were a few simple things I used to tell people as we grew together. And I think they apply to our public affairs life and professional practices.

Things like;

- You should be just as prepared to carry someone's bags in an airport as you are giving them wise advice on how to divvy up billions of dollars of taxpayer's money. There just aren't enough of us to have people unwilling to multi-task and lend a hand where one needs lending.



- Returning your phone calls and e mails each and every day will earn you more good will than waiting to return the call till you have something substantive to say and it tells people you care enough to acknowledge their concerns.
- Telling someone no is much better than telling them nothing. A vacuum of information leads people to waste their time and yours. They are much better off knowing the answer so they can get on with their lives and plan for alternatives.
- If you are in the business, you are there to make or facilitate public policy decisions, not to become a millionaire...although in hindsight I have seen a fortunate few who have done both.
- Not asking questions is a cardinal sin. You simply don't know what you don't know and there is no shame in that. In fact it is a virtue to admit it sooner rather than later.
- The measure of your success will lie more in what you accomplish than in who you claim to know. If you actually do know them, they will have already helped you accomplish your goals.
- The relationships you do make over time are to be revered and honoured not used as a means to an end.
- Paying it forward actually does work as long as you don't expect an outcome that will benefit you.
- Keeping the importance of community, stability and family as a balance in doing your job will keep you sane over the long run.
- And finally being in public service whether in government or in our business is truly about doing things for the public good not for ourselves. And not to be naive, if you can accomplish both from time to time, it's a bonus.

Conclusion

I know we all need to get back to work so I'll wrap up by saying to my friends and colleagues that you have always given me the strength to keep trying as hard as I could to make a difference.

Without folks like the ones sitting here today, I might have drifted off into working 9 – 5 and never having had the many experiences throughout my life that allowed me to grow, learn, and live so many exciting moments.



And to my family and especially Margot, thanks for having the patience to allow me to do what I have been able to do.

You have always had my back and I have felt safe with you all there.

Safe to live a crazy life.

Safe to experiment.

Safe to have jobs that had a transition period of 24 hours if things went off the rails

And safe to live in an environment where expressing yourself was expected not shunned.

Our lives as practitioners of public affairs can be a tough one but can also be very rewarding and exciting if we allow ourselves to practice it with honour, professionalism and dignity along with a dose of good old fashioned work ethic and a tinch of humour.

Thank you again for this recognition and honour.

I am deeply touched.

