

Tom Little's

BIG IDEAS

for Non-Profits

In This Edition

January 25-29, 2021

Lessons That Olympic Rower Kathleen Heddle Teaches Non-Profits

A BIG Ideas reader asks what Kathleen Heddle and her achievements mean for non-profit organizations. Tom does his best to answer.

Increased Interest in Board Policy Manuals

Tom is not sure why, but in recent months interest has increased in Board Policy Manuals.

LEAD - A New Idea for Engaging Front Line Staff

Our Blast from the Past provides ideas for enhancing the job duties of first line staff and for building supervisory capacity at the same time.

Emails... We Get Emails



Lessons That Olympic Rower Kathleen Heddle Teaches Non-Profits

BIG Ideas reader Phil Carter writes to say he enjoyed the tribute to Canadian Olympian Kathleen Heddle contained in last week's newsletter. He then asks whether there were lessons from her story that people engaged in the non-profit realm could take advantage of.

"In most of your off(topic) scripts you insert a Big Idea, sometimes tied to your area of specific expertise and sometimes merely tied to humanity ... which is, quite frankly, the bonding agent that determines how well any organization performs. (The) Key question is what message you want to leave with your audience."

That's an interesting question, so thanks to Reader Phil for posing it. Normally I would have structured the article on Kathleen Heddle in three parts: The Story, the Skinny and The BIG Idea. But there was something about our Olympian's journey that suggested it should stand on its own – just a tribute, no additional dimensions. This was out of respect to Kathleen Heddle, what she achieved, the health challenges she faced later and her courage dealing with them.

However, to further honour her legacy, there are lots of BIG Ideas that we can extract, in response to Reader Phil's question.

Aspiration

Kathleen Heddle aspired to be the best rower in the world. She knew she could reach that goal by winning at the Olympics. For non-profits, the first steps to being great are aspiring to be great and knowing what great looks like – i.e. the characteristics of an organization and its achievements that define greatness.

Effort

Kathleen Heddle spent years reaching the point of being a world-class rower. You can't be that good without putting in the time. If you want your non-profit to excel, you have to work at it, over a period of years. Don't think, either, that this is just about the organization's employees. It applies at the Board level too.

Teamwork

Kathleen Heddle was one part of a team. Her partner in the boat was Marnie McBean. Behind both were the other rowers, support staff and the larger Canadian Olympic team. Your non-profit won't be good just because of one person (even as good as you are). As with Heddle, you need everyone pulling in the same direction to make things happen. That comes from powerful vision, mission and values statements and a quality operating and governing environment where people work together and support each other. The operative word on everyone's lips, when talking about the organization, needs to be "we". If it's "they", you have more to do.

Altruism

Kathleen Heddle rowed for herself. She rowed for her team. But like all Olympic athletes, she rowed for all Canadians. Non-profits are mostly about people doing things for others. And while some people earn their living in the process, at the heart of the non-profit movement is altruism. Being part of a non-profit means valuing its contribution to the larger community, along with accepting some of the consequences, such as lower pay for employees and no pay at all for Board members.

Confidence

Heddle and McBean admitted to each other that they were nervous before races. But if you watched them on the water you would never know. Being part of a great non-profit means working towards your organizational goal and believing that you have the right combination of resources and strategy to succeed.

Resilience

No athlete, Kathleen Heddle included, achieves big goals without overcoming big obstacles. Whatever Kathleen Heddle faced as a rower, she faced much more dealing with four types of cancer. You can't live for six years after your diagnosis without resilience. The same applies to non-profits. In the time of COVID, for example, resilience is critical, resilience that comes from a belief in your cause, in the strategy you are using to get to the other side, and the willingness to work long hours if needed.

Courage

Other times, it all comes down to courage. For Kathleen Heddle, that would be courage to risk failure in order to succeed, failure on the world stage where everyone could see. Later, it was courage to face up to cancer, four times over. Non-profits need courage too. A toxic work environment, possible fraud and mission drift are three among many situations that demand a courageous response.

Canadian Eh!

Canadians are known for their humility. A by-product is that we don't bang the drum nearly enough for what is best in Canada. We can include Kathleen Heddle on that list of people whose achievements should have been acknowledged more. The lesson for non-profits is that there are many organizations in your midst that, like Kathleen Heddle in rowing, are doing great things, but without a lot of fanfare. If you want innovation, you have to go looking. But once you do, you can trade off those ideas to make your organization better. Almost always for free!

Think that looking south of the border is the best way to find good ideas? Forget it! Which boat posed the biggest threat to Kathleen Heddle's in 1992 in Barcelona – USA! Which boat did she and her rowing partner destroy in 1992? All of them, including USA! Point made. There's lots of innovation happening right here at home.



1992 – <https://vimeo.com/39379792>



1996 - <https://vimeo.com/40471623>

If you need reminding of how dominant Heddle was in Olympic pairs rowing, watch one or both of these videos from the 1992 and 1996 Summer Games, posted to Vimeo by her rowing partner, Marnie McBean. Perhaps, like me, you will still be nervous until they cross the finish line

This Week's TomBit



Increased Interest in Board Policy Manuals

For whatever reason, we are receiving more requests for help in developing or reshaping Board Policy Manuals.

This may be the result of one-off events like COVID-19, or of a conclusion that the work of the Board would be enhanced by directives that provide guidance on specific aspects of Board operation. It would also be the logical next step for Boards that are embracing the Policy Board model of governance.

The key decision that Boards need to make is the number or extent of the policies it wants in the manual. It can create policies by exception, or it can create a full suite of them, in an attempt to cover any situation likely to be encountered by the Board. As I have mentioned previously in BIG Ideas, one Board I worked viewed itself as a “Common Sense” Board, so established a rule that it only created a policy after concluding that common sense was not enough. Most however, I would say, have wanted a wide range of policies for guidance.

In terms of content, we suggest that the core of any board manual centre on a Board’s three functions: Leadership, Oversight and Managing Itself.

Once decisions have been made on content, and the manual has been created, there are two other issues to address: using the policies and updating them. The manual must be in front of the Board at all times: it must be part of the orientation of new Board members and must be at the table for all Board meetings. Updating needs to be scheduled. Consider the approach of some organizations that review a certain number of policies at every meeting the Board.

Blast From the Past

Blast from the Past is a selection of previous BIG Ideas articles that you may not have read, or if you did, may have forgotten how helpful and insightful (i.e., brilliantly written) they were. This article is from 2016.



LEAD - A New Idea for Engaging Front Line Staff

The Story

When my colleague Nancy Collins and I work with non-profit organizations, the issue of how to engage front line staff beyond the day-to-day fulfilment of their duties often comes up as something that management would like to address. This applies especially to long time employees and to organizations that have limited upward mobility.

While assisting Executive Director Stella Barker of the Norfolk Association for Community Living in strategic planning, we were advised of a unique approach NACL came up with regarding engagement. It created LEAD, which stands for Leadership Exploration and Development.

The Skinny

LEAD was the result of a brainstorming session involving Lori Hooyenga-Howe and Deanna Davidson, the two service managers on the senior management team. They found themselves short of supervisory staff due to maternity leaves and other longer term absences. The immediate problem they wanted to resolve was having people to fill these vacant supervisor spots. But the more expansive concept was developing and engaging front line staff in a range of ways, only one of which would involve stepping into a management role.

Even though they lacked an overall framework for LEAD, they knew it would at least be about training and committee work in addition to advancing to a supervisory role. So they solicited interest from front line staff in being involved in a new initiative. Thinking they might tweak a bit of interest, instead the response was overwhelming. Twenty-five staff members put their names forward. This placed them in a dilemma, which they resolved by establishing criteria for involvement including: demonstrated capacity to follow instructions, a minimum of two years with NACL and some involvement in NACL beyond the

basics of the job. This exercise pared the group down to eight. The others were advised of how the decision was made and were encouraged to reapply as spots came available. As time has gone on, opportunities on the LEAD group that have opened up have been filled with previous applicants.

Since its beginning in September 2014, LEAD members have received leadership training, basic supervisory training, and training on specific topics such as managing in uncertain times. They have been made aware of the expectations of those involved with LEAD: dedication, providing ideas on how NACL can improve, working in conjunction with the core competencies required of supervisory positions and flexibility beyond the parameters of a unionized environment.

One important skill they have worked on is giving and receiving feedback. To do so, NACL took a leaf out of the Toastmaster training manual and started LEAD meetings with a Toastmaster-style minute from each participant. Then they went around the table and critiqued each other's effort.

Participants are given other opportunities to develop their skills. They make presentations at general staff meetings on issues they identify. They are required to organize and run the meetings of the LEAD group.

The results are impressive. While no formal evaluation has been conducted, since it started in 2014, LEAD has seen one person promoted to supervisor and two have worked as supervisors on a temporary basis. Having tasted the supervisory role, these two have decided that being a supervisor isn't for them, but they are prepared to contribute in other ways.

NACL's supervisors like the fact there are people ready to step in on a temporary basis, since that makes their work lives easier. (A small note - if you are promoted to supervisor, you can't be a member of LEAD).

NACL feels LEAD helps in a more fundamental way. At the meetings, participants get Lori and Deanna's undivided attention. They are privy to information they might not receive otherwise. They form a new relationship with management that is built on trust.

The BIG Idea

Finding ways to prepare staff for advancement, and to make their current work situations more interesting and stimulating, is a constant challenge for non-profits. So my BIG Idea for this week is to take a concept like LEAD and adapt it to your own situation. An engaged employee group makes your organization better.

2020 Update

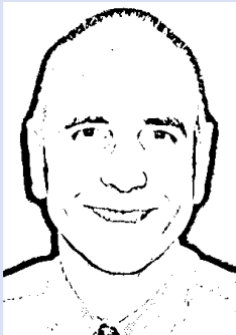
A lot of time has passed since I wrote this article. Norfolk Association for Community Living may have more to share if you ask nicely.

Current CMCS Clients

We are pleased to be working with York Region Centre for Community Safety, Community Living Thunder Bay, Canopy Support Services (formerly Tri-County Community Support Services), Community Living Port Colborne-Wainfleet, Community Visions and Networking (Quinte), Chatham-Kent Family Health Team, Community Living St. Catharines, Durham Youth Services and Community Living for South Simcoe.

Recent clientele includes Literacy Network Northeast, Durham Youth Services, Community Living Trent Highlands and Mill Creek Care Centre.

About Tom Little and Nancy Collins



Tom Little and Nancy Collins are the principals of CMCS.

In addition to consulting for many years, Tom has been Executive Director of a large human service organization, experience he brings to the table when working with his non-profit clients. In his younger days he was lucky enough to be part of three Canadian champion hockey teams while attending the University of Toronto.

Nancy's background includes a degree from Wilfrid Laurier and working at a downtown Toronto law firm. In her spare time, at least when there is no pandemic, she plays goal in women's hockey and catcher in summer slo-pitch. A life-long Leafs fan, she no longer apologizes for her unwavering commitment, given their resurrection in recent years. Now if they could just win a playoff round!



Testimonials

On behalf the Board of Directors, we would like to thank you very much for facilitating the work of creating a new strategic plan for our network. It was a pleasure to work with you and everything flowed smoothly. It is great to have this project complete! I hope we will get the opportunity to work together again in the future. **Rita Delaurier, Executive Director, Literacy Network Northeast**

Thank you so much (for your Board training)! Looking forward to the notes and your presentation was very well received! Lots of growth happening with the board and you helped steer more of that in the right direction. Really enjoy working with you and will keep you in mind for my other boards. **Natasha Cosulich Vemb, Board of Directors, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Clarington**

Thank you again to you and Nancy for all the work, dedication and effort put into this Operations Review. We made the right choice in hiring you to do this project and on behalf of the board of directors, I express our deep gratitude. **Roz Werner-Arce, Board Chair, Durham Youth Services**

Our Strategic Plan is moving along better than I could have imagined. I chair the group of around 20 Board and staff who have been meeting monthly for the past 6 months and plan to continue through the fall. Great enthusiasm from all involved and much is being accomplished already, particularly on renewed focus on our Mission and Vision. Thanks again for getting us off on the right foot! **Frank Moore, Board Chair, Community Living Central Huron**

Free Resources From CMCS

We offer a range of free resources to help non-profits be better. For your copy, contact us at info@cmcsconsulting.ca

- Board Duties
- Policy Board Model
- Board Meeting Minutes
- Board Decision-Making Checklist
- Board Evaluation Form
- Dealing with Risk
- List of Possible Board Policies
- Board Recruitment (Stop the BIG LIE)
- Management Principles
- Member and Director Qualifications
- The Importance of Planning
- Canada's Great Non-Profit Websites
- Transitioning to the New Not-for-Profit Corporations Act

Tom's Book For Boards of Directors



One hundred and ninety-pages. Thirty-six *BIG Ideas*. Thirteen of them are *The BIGGEST of the BIG*, ideas Tom's experience says are critical to any non-profit. Then come twenty-three *BIG Ideas*, more ways to enhance the governance of your organization.

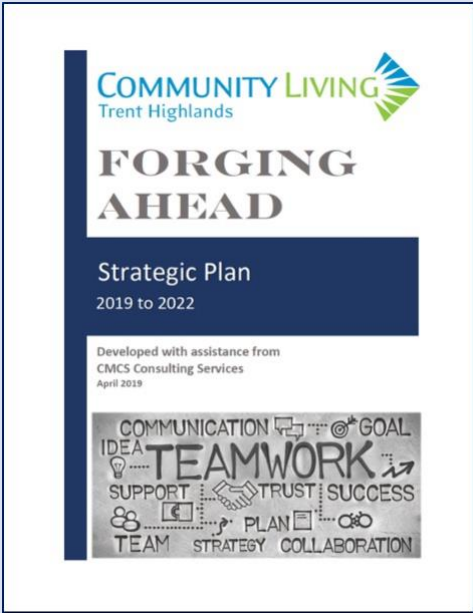
You don't just get ideas either. The book contains all kinds of resources for implementing them. For example, *BIG Ideas* includes samples of strategic and Board yearly action plans, and of evaluation formats Boards can use to rate their own work.

Tom Little's BIG Ideas is formatted as a work book, so it can be used on a continuous basis by the Directors. It is easy to read and has a fun quality your Board members will appreciate.

Just \$40 plus HST and shipping. For your copy, contact us at info@cmcsconsulting.ca.

More About CMCS

At CMCS, our specialty is strategic planning.



Since the start of 2018, the following 15 organizations have completed their strategic plans with help from CMCS:

- Kenora Association for Community Living
- Community Living Dryden-Sioux Lookout
- Community Living Trent Highlands
- Elmira District Community Living
- Literacy Northwest
- E3 Community Services
- Durham Region Child Care Forum
- Tollendale Village
- Centennial College School of Transportation
- York Region Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee
- Autism Home Base Durham
- Canoe FM Community Radio
- Toronto Island Residential Community Trust
- York Region Centre for Community Safety
- Literacy Network Northeast

We provide Board training that comes with a bonus: A Board action plan developed by participants based on the discussion.

Tom wrote his book for non-profit Boards, which you can buy and use as an ongoing resource. We are great facilitators and can help develop agendas for Board and management retreats.

Much of our past work has been in the human service sector, especially disability. But we have assisted in other sectors such as community colleges, local workforce authorities, family health teams, Big Brothers Big Sisters, United Ways and violence against women. We have even assisted a community radio station.

We have built our reputation on producing quality products that have great content and are appealing to look at.

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