

Tom Little's

BIG IDEAS

for Non-Profits

In This Edition

January 18-22, 2021

Tribute to a Great Canadian Athlete

Acknowledging Kathleen Heddle, 3 time Olympic rowing champion, who died recently

A Few Statements Can Tell You Everything

Every non-profit needs a few statements to explain its existence and what makes it unique

Small is Beautiful in the Time of COVID

A philosophical cornerstone becomes a way of keeping people safe

The Value of Having Values

It's important to have them, but there's a catch

Our BIG Ideas newsletter is finally back. Because we value transparency, we will explain the delay. It turns out that our newsletter had a BIG Idea of its own: travel internationally over the holidays. But, by closely scrutinizing its Twitter postings, meant to deceive, we finally found it in a tropical paradise only a top-rung newsletter like BIG Ideas could afford. Unmasked, it offered up various explanations for going – preplanned vacation, family emergency, selling property, condo maintenance, blah blah! It even insisted it followed all the protocols. To its credit, BIG Ideas has finally shown remorse, admitting it wasn't necessarily one of the biggest of its BIG Ideas after all. Quarantine over, here it is, back, in all its glory.

Tribute to a Great Canadian Athlete

Her name is Kathleen Heddle. She died recently at age 55 of breast, lymph node, melanoma and brain cancer. She is one of Canada's most accomplished Olympians. Yet she is unknown to many. Here is a letter I am writing to her, in memoriam, on behalf of all Canadians.



Dear Kathleen Heddle;

We who watched, don't want you to think that your rowing accomplishments went unrecognized, or unappreciated, by your fellow Canadians.

In 1992, you were best in women's Olympic pairs and eights! In 1996, best in Olympic pairs again! Three Olympic gold medals. You and your rowing partner, Marnie McBean, are the only Canadian athletes to ever win three Summer golds. The only ones!

I have only a vague concept of what you had to do to get there. How many early mornings on the water, how many squats, how many lifts, how many runs, how many injuries, Kathleen Heddle, did it take?

It's not like you were going to get rich. Olympic gold in men's hockey gets you millions a year. Olympic gold in women's rowing? Put it on shelf of your apartment with your other medals, then start looking for a job that pays.

We who watched, well remember both pairs finals, Barcelona in '92 then Atlanta four years later. You may have had butterflies, Kathleen Heddle. You may have worried about the water conditions, the boat, the seat, the oars, the wind. But we who watched had confidence, because you looked like you had confidence. The way you sat in the boat, composed, made it seem you were just out for a bit of a row, "Ho hum, I'll win a gold then get on with my day".

At the sound of the buzzer, underway, how easy you made it look, stroke after stroke - pull, return, pull, return, pull, return. Thirty-five strokes a minute, a punishing pace no competitor could match, then higher still, close to the 2000 metre finish, to prove a point. If the race had suddenly been made longer, it was clear you would have won by more. Even the way you celebrated after crossing the finish line, leaning forward to catch a bit of breath, before stretching back horizontal in the boat, smiling, was exemplary.

We who watched know Marnie McBean got the attention, because she was mic-comfortable, but we were aware that those "in the know" considered you to be the most talented rower on the entire Canadian team and by extension, because of the team's elevated status at that time, in the world.

To be honest, Kathleen Heddle, we don't know how you did it. Yes, you were favourites going in, your success in other competitions well-documented. But the Olympics are a different, elevated stage. We understand how hard it is, especially in Canada, where we don't excel in every sport, to not just be the favourite, but to prove that rating was deserved, by delivering when the pressure is really on. How many Canadian Olympians, who fell short of achieving their dreams, were you standing on, were you honouring, when you achieved yours?

In recent years, betrayed by rogue cells of the same body that had served you so well, you continued to win gold, on a different, even bigger stage. "How is it", you asked rhetorically, "that amongst some of the worst days ever, you can also experience some of the best?" We who watched don't know the answer to that question, any more than you did. But we appreciate its significance and its irony.

In summing up, Kathleen Heddle, you may have heard, many times, since those glory days, how much your feats are admired. But we who watched are compelled to say, once more, on behalf of all Canadians, in memory, that you exemplified what is best in sport. We hope that your family takes comfort in the certainty that, across Canada, there are girls (and boys) that have achieved something extra in life, because of the example you set.

The sun is up. The mist is lifting. Your legacy, a legacy you may have never sought, is secure. It's a beautiful morning to be on the water. Row on, Kathleen Heddle, row on!

This Week's TomBit

The Power of a Few Statements

The Story

It only takes a few statements to define a non-profit organization. Sometimes those few statements also make it inspirational.

I was reminded of this, while reflecting on an organization that contacted me recently. This organization is dedicated to children (and youth) living in one of Canada's inner-cities.

It is driven by a single admonition of its founder: "No child who does not want to be alone, should ever have to be."

This admonition leads smoothly and easily to the organization's mission, which is to provide inner-city children and youth with a safe place to be.

Recognizing that other benefits could be offered, the organization then stakes out more expansive ground, explaining that while in such a safe space, children would be provided the opportunity to play, learn and become, thereby meeting their needs for socialization, recreation, personal development and crisis intervention, when necessary.

Finally, in its statements, the organization establishes two non-negotiable requirements of its clientele: self-help and self-referral. The children and youth must give something in return. They must come of their own accord and must engage in what is offered.

These statements are brought to life in the form of a drop-in facility that is open from 8 a.m. to midnight during the week and twenty-four hours on weekends. About eighty children attend each week, of their own volition, participating in the programs they have decided on.

The Skinny

Simply by reading these few statements you have a very clear idea of why this organization exists and what it considers to be important. As well, because of their clarity and their merit, they motivate not only its employees and its Board of Directors, but also citizens of that city, inspiring them to be part of it and support it.

The BIG Idea

My BIG Idea for this week is to critique your organization's key statements: do they clearly explain what it does and why? Do they motivate? Do they motivate others to join you?

Emails.... We Get Emails

Philosophy as a Way of Dealing with Risk

This isn't about one email in particular, since you send lots our way each week, but I wanted to comment on COVID and congregate living.

We know the horror story that long term care facilities, with their crowded living conditions, have become during the pandemic.

But here is something interesting.

It may seem like serendipity, but many non-profits in Ontario that provide residential supports to their clientele, a clientele that often includes seniors, have avoided the worst of COVID-19.

This is because the idea of what residential living should constitute has evolved over the last fifty years: from institutional living often in a remote location, for hundreds or thousands of people; to community "core" residences for thirty or forty; to group homes for four or five; and now to apartments, condos and host family living for one or two.

When I was an executive director, years ago, the facilities of the organization I worked for included a residential complex that housed thirty people in three ten-person pods. When built, it was considered state of the art. Today it doesn't even exist. Which is good, because it would have been a breeding ground for COVID. Over time, ideas changed and no longer sanctioned something of that scale. By the very act of getting rid of that facility, well after I had moved on, the organization set itself up to better deal with the pandemic years later, without even knowing it.

The most recent changes in how people are assisted residentially have been made by organizations driven by a philosophical premise centred on the importance of choice and independence, of living as others live, on their own or with a few others. In the time of COVID, by good fortune, those changes in philosophy mean they are also safer.

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 2017.

The Value of Organizational Values

The Story

Is there value for charities and other non-profits in having values? The answer, as with so many things in life, is: “Yes, but”

My recently-enhanced knowledge of values and their role in organizational life, comes thanks to work my colleague Nancy Collins and I just completed with Deafblind Ontario Services.

DBOS is a highly specialized organization that: *“...helps individuals who are deafblind increase their independence and improve their quality of life through specialized services. Our community based residences are designed to support the unique needs of individuals who are deafblind, as well as encourage the development of life and vocational skills along with recreational opportunities.”*

We were asked to facilitate the updating of DBOS’ organizational values. This task would be accomplished at a meeting of employees recruited from across the province. In preparation, I read several articles on values that DBOS had researched and added to that with my own investigation. That information was enlightening.

The basic premise around values is that you can establish a small number of them that will apply to everyone within the organization and that if adhered to will make your organization better - both in terms of what it achieves and as a place to work.

As an example, think of WestJet. WestJet promotes its *“passionate, caring attitude”*. It states that this attitude: *“... is the foundation of our corporate culture. We like to think that our business cares for our WestJetters, who then take care of our guests, who in turn support our business. This cycle aligns the interests of WestJetters with the business and emphasizes an appreciation for our guests.”* So one value, a *“passionate, caring attitude”*, drives the whole organization.

The proof is in the pudding. When presented with the name WestJet, what immediately comes to mind? I would say it is committed employees who go out of their way for their customers. Presumably this results in a better travel experience and therefore a customer who comes back to WestJet. Why does this stand out in the airline industry? Because most airlines seem to be the enemy of the customer: Witness the increasingly smaller seats, reduced legroom and charges for baggage that have become commonplace for most carriers. In that sea of apparent indifference to customers, a company like WestJet stands out.

The Skinny

WestJet makes it sound easy, but it's not. In his article *Make Your Values Mean Something* and published in the Harvard Business Review, Patrick Lencioni explained that: *"Most values statements are bland, toothless, or just plain dishonest. And far from being harmless, as some executives assume, they're often highly destructive. Empty values statements create cynical and dispirited employees, alienate customers, and undermine managerial credibility."*

So if you are going to embrace values, you need to live by them. This means choosing carefully and then ensuring they are respected and advanced in the day to day operation of the organization.

Observes Lencioni: *"Your core values need to be integrated into every employee-related process: Hiring methods, performance management systems, criteria for promotions and rewards, and even dismissal policies. From the first interview to the last day of work, employees should be constantly reminded that core values form the basis for every decision the company makes. After a company has embedded its values into its systems, it should promote those values at every turn."*

But here is the hooker: *"...coming up with strong values - and sticking to them - requires real guts. Indeed, an organization considering a values initiative must first come to terms with the fact that, when properly practiced, values inflict pain. They make some employees feel like outcasts. They limit an organization's strategic and operational freedom and constrain the behavior of its people. They leave executives open to heavy criticism for even minor violations. And they demand constant vigilance."*

Using WestJet as an example, there would be no place for you at WestJet if you didn't have a passionate, caring attitude. As a WestJet manager, you would have to ensure that your plans and day to day operations reflected the value of caring for your employees and your customers. You would have to terminate those that weren't caring. And you would have to continuously demonstrate that you were a caring person yourself. Hence the need for *"real guts"*.

The BIG Idea

My BIG Idea for this week is to embrace the idea of having values, since doing so will make your organization better, but only if you are ready to adhere to a few rules:

- Keep the number of values down so they can be understood and used
- Choose those that you are sure will make your organization better
- Embed them in everything the organization does
- Accept that if you are introducing a value which hasn't been part of the value system of the organization in the past, some employees will not be able to manifest that characteristic, and will have to leave, willingly or not, hence the pain that Lencioni references in his article. As my hockey coach of many years ago, Tom Watt, used to say: No pain, no gain.
- Accept that every employee, and especially those in senior management, must become the personal manifestation of the organization's values, because if everyone isn't onside and demonstrating them every day, those values will quickly become "empty" and "destructive".

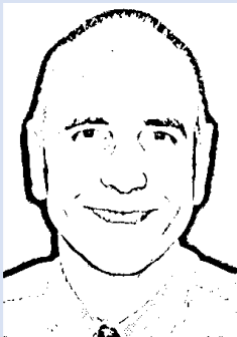
Current CMCS Clients

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 and Durham Youth Services.

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.

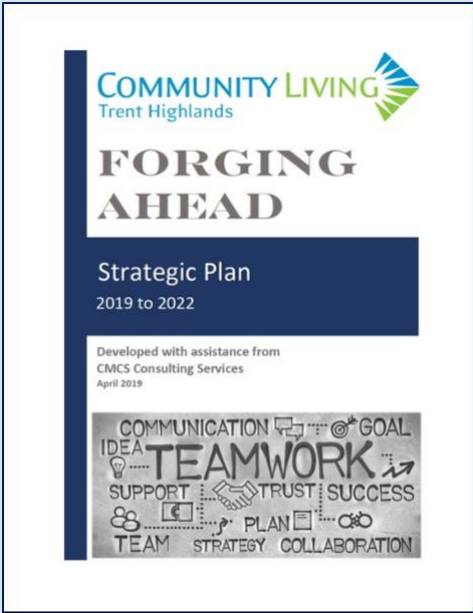
You don't just get ideas either. The book contains all kinds of resources for implementing them. For example, *BIG Ideas* includes samples of strategic and Board yearly action plans, and of evaluation formats Boards can use to rate their own work.

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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