

Outcomes Challenge Rankin MacSween

Thank you Paul for that flattering introduction. I'd like you to do my eulogy; then I wouldn't have to live up to it afterwards.

I feel very honoured to be with you and equally honoured to have been asked to speak here today. It's delightful to be with old friends and so exciting to meet new friends, as I have the past few days.

In a way, coming here to Guelph is a little bit like coming home. A long time ago I had a girlfriend and, to say the least, she was an interesting woman. We dated and then by the second date she said to me, "So what do you think of me so far?" There are three Cape Bretoners that came with me and one of them, Catherine Ann, has been here before and she's in the CED business so I wasn't so worried about her; but Shawn and Norma are kind of new to this, so for the past two days I kept wanting to ask them, "So how do you like these people so far?" These are my people and I think they like you, so far!



I keep reminding myself that, a long time ago, there'd be these moments in our work where one really thought we could change the world and I loved those moments. And I love the people who are still in that place. And for me, they're people whom I refer to as being "crazy".

And sometimes at home if we're looking to hire somebody, if we want them to take on a file or company, I'll say, "Find me somebody that's crazy."

Now I want you to take this in the best possible way: I think you're "crazy".

It seems another thing that's happening here is that I'm really touched by the leadership: the leadership of Tamarack and Caledon and McConnell. I think that is so exciting and it gives me such hope.

And if you'll indulge me a bit, there are a few things I'd like to say.

The first time I met Paul Born was in a boardroom at the McConnell Family Foundation in Montreal. I got to know him during the meeting. Then, I remember, we shared a cab. And I remember that this guy had so much energy he filled up the whole cab. So the cab driver was sort of out on the hood and I was just hanging on. Later, flying home, I thought, "This guy is going to crash real quick or boy, we are going to hear about him for a long time." And Paul, I want you to know that I'm so proud of what you're doing. I think this partnership between yourself and Alan was quite a marriage and I'm incredibly excited about how you've taken this and where it's going to go, so thank you very much.

I'm supposed to talk about impacts and outcomes --- so I need to talk to you about what I know -- and what I know a little bit about is Cape Breton. Matter of fact, that's about all I know. Now it's not that it's the most interesting story; it's not that it's the most important story; it's just the only story I know. I'm sure that there are better stories, but it's the only one I've got.

The first thing you should know is that Cape Breton is an interesting place. It does have this reputation of being incredibly dependent- which it is. As a matter of fact, there was a story going around for a while a number of years ago about Allan MacEachen. Remember him? When Allan was deputy prime minister, he was incredibly powerful; he was sort of the laird. (The majority of people in Cape Breton are Celtic, so there are many traditions that are very much part of the island. One of those traditions, in the highlands of Scotland, was there was always a "laird" and the laird was always in charge.) So MacEachen was always referred to as the laird. And MacEachen was always dispersing money.

So the story goes that three people died -- one from Ontario, one from Halifax, and one from Cape Breton. They got up to heaven and St Peter met them, and said, "Gentlemen, I'm here to tell you there's been a change. Like everywhere else, costs are going up. So there's now a fee to get in. It's \$100,000 but if you don't want to pay you can go back." The guy from Ontario says, "Look it's heaven, it's \$100,000 and I've got it. So I'm going in." And he writes St Peter a cheque for \$100,000 and in he went. The guy from Halifax says, "That's a lot of money, I don't think I'm going to pay that." St Peter says, "No problem, you can go back," and back he goes. The Cape Bretoner steps up and St Peter says, "So what do you want to do?" And he says, "Listen, could you give me a couple of days? If I go back home I can see Allan MacEachen and I might be able to get a grant."

Cape Breton is a beautiful place; it's a gorgeous island.

There was this fellow traveling in Europe. He was in France and he was going by, he noticed this big gold phone booth outside a church. And a sign said, "Talk to God for \$20,000". And then he came over to North America and he was down in Boston. He was going past another church when he saw another one of those phone booths and it said, "Call heaven. Talk directly to God for \$20,000". And then he went to Cape Breton and he went by a church, same thing, gold phone booth, and the sign said, "Call heaven, talk directly to God for 25 cents." He couldn't believe it. There was an old fellow walking by and he stopped him and said, "Look at this." And the old guy says, "Yeah, it's a phone booth to talk to God." "Yeah," he says, "but I was in Europe, it was \$20,000; I was in Boston and it was \$20,000; I come here and it's 25 cents." And the old guy says, "Oh yeah, but it's a local call."

There's another part of Cape Breton -- the challenging part of Cape Breton. It's a place of incredible challenges. In some ways, Cape Breton is like Job in the Old Testament. And for those of you that have forgotten that story, here's a summary: Satan and God meet to talk from time to time, sort of like that cyber café thing, I think. And God says to Satan: "What do you think of my man Job? He's a good man. He's very faithful to me." Now Job was a prosperous man. He had thousands of cattle, hundreds of sheep, horses and dozens of children. And hundreds of servants. And life was good, and he was faithful. So Satan says, "Well that's true, but why wouldn't he be faithful? Life is good. But I bet if life wasn't as good he wouldn't be as

faithful.” So God says, “Ok, we’ll see.” So the cattle die, the sheep run away, the horses perish, some disease strikes his children and his house burns. So there’s Job and he’s handling it all and he’s still faithful. And then Satan goes back to God. God says, “Look, he’s doing ok.” And Satan says: “But he’s still got his health.” So they took away his health. And he was filled with disease, had cysts and boils all over his body, he’s in constant pain and he’s sitting on the ashes of what was his house. And everyone’s coming by to visit, trying to understand what had happened. They conclude he must have done something really wrong. He must be an awful sinner. And that must be what this is all about because how else could you explain it?

And it seems to me that Cape Breton is a little bit like that. We’re sitting on the ash piles called the tar ponds, the worst toxic site in Canada. And everybody comes by and is trying to understand what the hell happened and why it’s not getting better. So the assumption is that there’s got to be something wrong with the people. We must have done something terrible. We must have committed a hell of a sin or something. There’s got to be some reasonable explanation for this.

It seems to me that part of what happened was that there were many attempts- lot of things tried to make Cape Breton better. Many positive outcomes were proposed.

Back in the 1960s, there were private companies running the steel plant and the coalmines, which were the big industries. They announced that if they got modernized it would be wonderful and there would be prosperity for a long time. So they got a pile of public money to modernize. And twelve months later they left town.

So the promise was broken. The proposed outcome was a lie.

Then the public sector had to move in and decided that the best thing to do was to close the coal mines but would operate them until they could get other things going. So they started to bring in new ventures. They brought in company after company and they’d give them money – there was Claritone, there was even one called Hustler, believe it or not. And they came and they’d be there for a little while and then they would leave. And then we wouldn’t have the promised outcome. They would sort of break your heart.

Then the world had an oil shortage. It was decided the best thing to do was not to close the coalmines after all, but rather to open more coal mines. So we opened more coalmines and the outcome was to be prosperity for all, based on mining coal again. Coal was to be king. But that never really happened; we just kept losing money on the coalmines, and losing and losing...

Finally the coalmines closed a couple of years ago. And the promised outcome didn’t happen.

What occurred over time breaks your heart – the broken promises.

The other thing that happens is that, after a while, the culture of the community starts to change. And it becomes a culture that’s not about the long term. It becomes a culture that’s about survival; it becomes a culture that’s about the short term- it becomes a culture that’s preoccupied with how you survive until Friday.

And it seems to me that's what it's like to be poor. You can only think about the short term; you can only think about how do we get to Friday.

I work with this organization called New Dawn. We've been around for 27 years and our claim to fame is that we've survived. And every day, I'm reminded of the stories of World War II, kind of fighting each day for a hill. Every day you're trying to take one more inch and it's brutal. You know that, you know what it's like - just trying to survive.

It's interesting. I think that culture is not only around New Dawn; it's inside New Dawn too – that culture of survival.

So New Dawn was never very good at proclaiming a vision. It was never very good at proclaiming the outcomes to which it aspired. It had outcomes but it never really proclaimed them in advance. We've never had the courage to do that, terrified that we might break our heart again.

Despite this, New Dawn has been of some small significance. We had a twenty-fifth anniversary a little while ago; some of you came. And one of the things we did as part of that anniversary was try to measure the impact of the organization in 25 years. And we estimated the economic impact had been \$125 million on the community. That's not bad!

But at the same time, it's relatively insignificant because the economy of Cape Breton has shrunk to about a \$1billion. That is, if you add it all up in terms of economic activity, it's about a billion dollars. Now to be normal, to be like everyone else, we need an investment of another billion dollars. How in the world are we going to do that?

Also, to be normal, to be just to be like everyone else, we need 15,000 new jobs - tomorrow! Just to be normal. How in the name of God are we going to do that?

Every day, in our community, we lose five people. They move out. And those five people tend to be people who are somewhere between the ages of 18 to 35 and they're the best trained and the best educated.

So we stand at the edge of an abyss.

What are we to do?

Well, it seems to me that's what we've been talking about here: about what to do.

It's a mysterious kind of process. What are we going to do? We've got to be comprehensive, but what the hell does that mean? We've got to be strategic, but what does that mean exactly? And what exactly are we going to do?

And it seems to me, within New Dawn, we're struggling with that. Because if we're going to be part of a solution, if we're going to be part of recreating Cape Breton, then it seems to me we've got to recreate New Dawn. And how are we going to do that?

That's what we struggle with here, that's what we talk about here – how to do that.

What's interesting to me is that although it's mysterious to us, what's involved here is a great truth. And like all great truths, it's been around for a long time and it's been said pretty clearly. Throughout history it has been said. You'll find it in the Old Testament and you'll find it in the New Testament. Gandhi said it. Mother Teresa said it. Paulo Friere said it. It's all there. But the way I like it said the best, what was most helpful for me in terms of how it was said, was a long time ago at home in Nova Scotia.

In the 1930s there was this fellow from Cape Breton, a Catholic priest and his name was Father Jimmy Tompkins. Father Jimmy, together with his double first cousin, Moses Coady, founded something called the Antigonish Movement. It was a movement led by folks who would fit really well in this room. We'd be glad to have them. They'd understand what we were talking about.

Jimmy Tompkins was the vice president of St. F.X. University and he got into a conflict with the bishop of the day, Bishop MacDonald. And what Bishop MacDonald did as a consequence was to banish him to a little fishing village called Canso. And Canso is at the end of the earth; it's this beautiful little village at the end of the earth.

And Jimmy Tompkins went to the fishing village and what he saw there was a people who were desperate. They were fishermen; fishing families. There was lots of fish but the price was so low the families were living in shacks. The children were sick, everybody was cold. Like Job!

And the people that were buying the fish, every so often they'd roll back the price again and there'd be this great outcry. And the community would come together and they'd meet in the little hall and they'd complain; but what could they do?

And then a month later, the prices were rolled back again and the people would come together again and they'd complain, but what could they do?

And Jimmy Tompkins started to go with them to the meetings and hear what they had to say. And he heard them complain and bemoan and wail and gnash their teeth. Then halfway through one meeting Jimmy Tompkins stood up – he was this fiery, short man with a squeaky voice.

And he says: “My good people of Canso. Listen to yourselves. You complain. You complain as your children are dying, your women are sick and your men are being drowned at sea. And all we can do is complain. Now do you want to change that?” And they said: “Yes”. And he said: “Well, let me explain how we could change that. The first thing you've got to understand is that the context that we're working in is eternity. Do you understand what eternity is?”

There wasn't a word.

And he says, “Eternity is the long run. It's not the short run. We've got to be in this for eternity. Do you understand that?” And they all said: “Yes”.

And he said, "Once you understand that, the next thing that's important to understand is that the first step, the first thing we have to do, to have a vision. Do you understand what a vision is?"

Nobody said a word.

And he said, "A vision is when we imagine what the Promised Land should look like for us, should look like in eternity. That's what we've got to do. It's a collection and an integration of that which we imagine, that which we hope for. And we have to speak that and we have to articulate that."

And he said, "Once we've got the vision, then the next thing you've got to understand is we've got to have faith. Do you understand what faith is?"

There wasn't a word.

And he says, "Faith is the commitment to the vision. And once you commit yourself to that vision, do you know what you need next?"

Nobody said a word.

And he said, "You need hope. Do you know what hope is? Hope is that courage to sustain the commitment to the vision, even in disappointment. And there are going to be disappointments; there are always disappointments and some of them are going to be big. So there's no point in proceeding unless we're going to learn to have hope."

And he said, "If we understand that we're in the business for eternity, if we understand that together we have to articulate a vision, if we understand that we have to have faith to that vision and if we understand that that has to be built on a foundation of hope, then my good people of Canso we can find the courage to act. We can find the courage to move to an outcome."

The story of what happened then is the story about people coming together, forming cooperative buying groups, forming cooperative marketing groups, and selling the fish.

And the improvement in that small community was relatively quick and relatively dramatic.

So here's what I want to tell you. I want to make this commitment to you.

My commitment to you is that we're going to go home to Cape Breton, those of us from New Dawn, with the understanding that we're not in the business of surviving to Friday; rather we're in the business of eternity.

And my commitment to you is that when we go home with that understanding, we are going to work harder than we ever worked before and we're going to work smarter than we've ever worked before to try to engage Cape Breton in a conversation about a vision.

My commitment to you is that we are going to work really hard when we go home to engage the community in developing faith in that vision and we're going to work really smart and really hard to engage our community in building a foundation of hope that will underlie that vision.

And upon my soul to God, we will declare outcomes and there will be change.

Now here's what I need from you. I need an understanding from you that you are prepared to try to be with us, and to develop an appreciation for why this is so hard for us to do.

I also need a commitment from you that you will be patient. Because I'm really not saying we're going to do this, I'm telling you that we're going to learn how to do it and we're going to make a lot of mistakes along the way.

And I need a commitment from you that you will support us in whatever way you can.

And my promise to you is that we will, certainly from Cape Breton, turn ourselves inside out to do the same for you.

There was a bishop that Father Jimmy knew – he was a Lutheran bishop. And I think he was the bishop that inspired Father Jimmy.

And one time that bishop said, "Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we must be saved by love."

Bless you all. Thank you very much.