

John Campbell (MBA '87)

In spite of his responsibility for the success of projects worth an estimated \$17 billion, 60 staff members and involvement with a 12-member Board of Directors, John Campbell still thinks he has the best job in Canada.

Interview by Karen Hegmann

As president and CEO of Waterfront Toronto, could you describe the range and scope of your responsibilities?



I provide direction for the corporation in implementing government policy. Our goal is the revitalization of Toronto's waterfront, so it's really about how we operationalize and take this objective and move it forward. Revitalization is about crafting a new kind of city that is focused on public policy; it's about stopping urban sprawl and promoting transit and sustainability.

Our role is to promote the projects and activities that drive revitalization with the Board's help, and then secure funding from the government to help implement them. I head up the team that does

that. We've got some great attributes in Toronto, and we want to make sure the quality of place and life are enhanced so we can be a global leader.

The Corporation was formally established by three levels of government in 2001 as the Toronto Waterfront Revitalization Corporation (TWRC). The name was later changed to Waterfront Toronto. What was behind this decision?

We wanted to make sure that the brand focused on the projects and issues happening on the waterfront, as opposed to those of the corporation. We were reluctant to give it the word 'revitalization' because that's the key differentiator between our model and others around the world: if you look at other models, they focus more on promoting real estate, but our model is more about public policy, trends, affordable housing, public transit and sustainability. It also involves real estate, but it's about doing it in a way that drives the right kind of city. It's not about us, it's about what's happening out there and creating a new vision for the waterfront. It's a big picture issue, so we wanted to make it more inclusive.

A key component of Waterfront Toronto's mission involves redefining how the city, province and country are perceived by the world. Please discuss this.

What we're doing is making sure that Toronto is world class

and leading the way in a lot of areas, such as sustainability. My role is to drive that as a core value of our corporation. We're also focused on design excellence as another core attribute, so we've brought in some of the world's best landscape architects and designers. Our design-review panel ensures that what we build involves excellent design, and we've had two very large international design competitions, so we've really got the world focused on what we're doing.

I really don't think there's a better job in Canada. We're building a new face for Toronto and are sending a signal to the world that we have it right, not only from a societal point of view, but from a quality of place and life aspect that 'this is the kind of community that attracts the best and brightest people.' We're trying to create the kind of community that people really want to live in. One of the challenges is to figure out how to keep the public supporting us. We have two big precincts underway. Each is the size of Canary Wharf in England and Battery Park City in New York, and each is a \$2.5 billion project. We have to show the public right away that we're out there doing things. We have high aspirations. It's more than just about fixing the sewers and roads, we're building a city for the future. We're trying to raise the bar and reach for the stars.

Your role demands an ability to see and think about the 'big picture'. How do you approach short-term goals while still being able to follow a long term vision?

I think our long-term goals are out there and that's really clear, but you can't adjust your sails at once. You have to get out there and kind of tack a bit to keep course. I think to a large degree the short-term goals are designed in a way that leads us towards a long-term objective. I wouldn't say it's linear, but all the short term goals are steps towards achieving the long-term vision, so there's no incongruity. It's all part of the big package. In the private sector the goals are high and steep but it's a straight line, whereas in the public sector, it's much more difficult: it's like playing 3D chess, because you've got so many issues to deal with.

On the issue of sustainability, you say you want it to "define us and to be the key measure against which we are judged." To date, what has proven to be your biggest challenge on this front?

A big part of the issue is that we're not an island, we're part of a network of services. Whenever we do something that's

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sustainable, we have to plug it into the rest of the system. So it becomes an issue of how to get everyone else to join in and look at things a little bit differently. Whenever you're in a leadership position and you're trying to do that, you're going against the grain of the established protocols. It makes it challenging at times, because people are comfortable with the tried and proven.

What's the best part of your job?

It's on those days when we move things closer and see milestones being met. This past June, for instance, we launched construction on the revitalization of the West Don Lands, which will transform an under-used industrial area into a vibrant new sustainable community for Torontonians. Once you see actual construction going on, it's very exciting. The job can be quite frustrating in the sense that there are so many stakeholders involved. Our partners include three levels of government and a Board, so it's not easy to get stuff done. When you see something being built, it gives you a real sense of pride.

What is the most important lesson you learned from the MBA [EMBA 3] program?

I think it was the broadening of horizons. I came in as a civil engineer, so the process was absolutely enlightening. My peers had such a variety of experiences and the professors were excellent. It was the opening of the doors to the other sides – to things like Finance and Accounting; it was quite an eye opener.

What do you do to relax?

I like to travel. I just got back from a motorcycle trip around Arizona and New Mexico on a Harley. We were down with 50 people and toured Arizona and New Mexico – 3,500 km in 10 days.

What do you consider to be your greatest accomplishment?

Taking on a job like this gives one the chance to contribute to the province and the city. There is a chance to leave a legacy, and people here are very inspired by that. It's very different than adding shareholder value; it's about what you leave behind – what you are building for your grandchildren. That's what gets us really excited here.

For the latest on Waterfront Toronto's activities, visit www.waterfront-toronto.ca

Junia Freitas (MBA '96)

Director, Corporate Strategy, Celestica

Lives and works in: Toronto



BEST THING ABOUT MY JOB: My work has a profound impact on the future of the company, its customers and more than 40,000 employees around the world.

MY BIGGEST CHALLENGE: Getting people to align, agree and move forward.

MOST IMPORTANT SKILL(S) FOR MY JOB:

Ability to create the context for strategic thinking, which requires listening, talking straight, confronting and transforming divergent thoughts into effective dialogue; making choices, acting on the choices with velocity; and being constantly on the lookout for what's changing so we can adapt quickly.

THE MOST INNOVATIVE THING I'VE EVER DONE IS: Took a 40-day career break in Spain to rethink my life. Those 40 days changed everything.

HOW I RELAX: Basking in the sun (yes... with sunscreen), reading a book, if possible near the water. Favorite relaxing spot in Canada: our cottage on Georgian Bay.

MOST IMPORTANT THING MY MBA TAUGHT ME: To question everything, then act.

WHO I CONSIDER TO BE A GREAT THINKER: My boss, Mike Andrade [Senior Vice President, Strategic Business Development, Celestica], for his ability to hold and see two opposing thoughts at the same time; for his ability to think of what might be but is not yet; for his ability to process huge amounts of apparently unrelated information through some very simple (but not simplistic) filters, and finally to create a brilliant synthesis.

Ben Bjarnason (MBA '06)

Sr. Sarbanes-Oxley Manager/ HSBC plc

Works and lives in: London, UK



BEST THING ABOUT MY JOB: Each day is different and unpredictable. My job requires a wide knowledge of the bank, so a lot of my time is spent learning and talking with people, which keeps things new and interesting.

MY BIGGEST CHALLENGE: I'm considered the resident SOX expert, so I have to spend a lot of time gathering facts and communicating complex ideas to senior