



Alumni on the move

A FEW MINUTES WITH MAURIE KOOP

By Karen Christensen

After 30 years as one of Australia's leading management consultants, first with Pappas Carter Evans and Koop and then with The Boston Consulting Group (BCG), Maurie Koop (MBA '73) is ready to pass the baton – along with his considerable expertise – to BCG's next generation of consultants. He recently put his golf clubs down long enough to chat with Karen Christensen for a few minutes.

Karen Christensen: Describe your current role at BCG.

Maurie Koop: After many years as a senior executive, I now mentor BCG partners and staff in Australia, South East Asia, and Korea. It's a great opportunity to pass on my experience and stay involved with a highly intelligent, energetic group of people.

KC: Do you consider yourself retired?

MK: In addition to my role at BCG, I sit on a couple of public company boards, I play golf, and I travel quite a bit. If that constitutes retirement, then yes, I'm retired!

KC: What brought you to Canada and the University of Toronto?

MK: At age 23, after completing my undergraduate studies and working for three years, I left Australia to travel the world. I worked in Southeast Asia, Germany, London. I even picked oranges in Israel. That's where I met a couple of Canadians, who advised me to give Canada a shot. I spent a total of four years in Toronto, working for two years and then starting my MBA.

KC: Is there a role for consultants in tackling the current epidemic of corporate distrust?

MK: Consultants are in a position not unlike that of a company's shareholders: essentially, they work with internally-supplied data which they have to trust. Some top-level consulting companies, such as BCG, advise boards and CEOs, and they can – and should – speak up if they feel that someone is stretching the limits of truth. But they will always be doing so as an 'advisor', not as an 'auditor'.

KC: Can scandal-inducing behavior be stopped?

MK: There will always be people who figure out how to get around regulations. You can keep 'chasing each other around the tree', creating tighter regulations, but at the end of the day, you must have a system that is multifaceted: you can't just rely on the legal aspects of regulation. To some extent, I think the press hasn't undertaken enough informed analysis and questioning of corporate strategy. They have been conned, particularly by high-profile 'superstar CEOs' who can do no wrong. It's not fair to blame the press for everything, but high flyers – especially in North America – have reached an almost God-like status, where they



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aren't questioned. Boards deserve some criticism as well – they allowed many CEOs to get to a stage where they were

unquestionable – which constitutes a dangerous corporate dictatorship.

KC: Would independent board members help?

MK: It's a double-edged sword. Independence should promote objectivity, but the more independent a board becomes, the further it is from the management team – and the less it knows about the business. I think having an independent chair is important. This is a 'first line of defence' for shareholders against some of the more flagrant abuses we have witnessed. Regulation alone won't solve this, and neither will the press or any 'best practices' around independent boards. But I do believe that a combination of these things could do it.

KC: What do you do for fun?

MK: I play golf two or three times per week. I'm trying hard to keep my handicap of four. My wife also plays, and we enjoy taking golf holidays. We just came back from a three-week trip to South Africa.

KC: Of all your accomplishments, what are you most proud of?

MK: Soon after I left U of T, I joined McKinsey in Australia. Five years later, myself and three others started our own strategy consulting firm – Pappas Carter Evans and Koop – which went on to become McKinsey's major rival. In 1990, we were bought out by BCG, and within five years, we were bigger than McKinsey, and were regarded in the same light. Zoom forward 30 years, and it's equally satisfying to have built a firm with 120 consultants in Australia and New Zealand, and to have been part of their development. **RM**

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